

# Exhibiting Race and Prejudice

*Displaying social issues and the politics of activism in two  
Norwegian museums*

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## SUMMARY

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This thesis examines how two Norwegian museums respond to divisive discourses and social issues in the Norwegian society. The last few years has seen an upsurge in polarising discourses in Norwegian news, politics, and social media following an increased flow of immigrants and refugees into Norway. Far-right, as well as Neo-Nazi movements are on the rise in all of the Nordic countries, and everyday racism and prejudice is a growing problem. With this situation as a backdrop, the aim of the thesis has been to shed light on how these issues can be responded to by Norwegian museums through the use of two case-studies: the exhibition *Typical* at the Intercultural Museum, and *FOLK: from racial types to DNA sequences* at the Norwegian Museum of Science and Technology, both located in Oslo. Through the use of interviews with museum staff and visual analyses of the exhibitions, I have intended to analyse how the exhibitions communicate certain statements meant to influence visitors in relation to specific topics, as well as how aims and concerns when working with issues like these are expressed by the museum staff. Through the use of theoretical frameworks such as activist museum practice and governmentality, I argue that, through historicizing and contextualising social issues such as racism and prejudice, the exhibitions can function as contemplative spaces where visitors are provided with tools in order to become more self-reflective, as well as being able to participate in public debates. At the same time, the exhibitions are a part of a larger focus on the societal role of museums, where museums are instrumental in that they are attempting to influence visitors in certain directions in line with governmental guidelines. As such, the aim has been to examine how the museums respond to social issues, as well as the political, structural and social forces which both enable and limits such responses.



## PREFACE

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Oslo, May 2018

*Sofie Scheen Jahnsen*





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# 1. INTRODUCTION

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The aim of this thesis is to examine the societal role of Norwegian museums. More specifically, I wish to analyse how Norwegian museums are responding to contemporary divisive issues in Norway following a growing multicultural society.

With the introduction of the ‘new’ and ‘critical museology’, the last 20 years have seen an increased awareness of and development towards a new museum paradigm that is geared toward social inclusiveness and that can take part in the positive, empowering, and inclusive development of the society (Hauptman and Svanberg 2013:148; Williams 2010:21). Changes in museum practice has, for example, led to an inclusion of different, such as ethnic, gendered, class and doctrinal, voices and perspectives in museum exhibitions (Cameron 2003:15). These changes support the suggestion, presented by Duncan Cameron already in 1971, that the museum should be understood as a forum, a place for confrontation, experimentation and debate, rather than as a temple, an institution that embraces a timeless and universal function, presenting a structured sample of reality as an objective model (Cameron 1971; Cameron 2003:36). As Carol Duncan notes, museums are “complex entities”, not “neutral sheltering places for objects” (Duncan 1995:1). Museological writings published these last few years remain optimistic about the museums’ capacity to interact meaningfully with, and positively influence, contemporary audiences (Williams 2010:20). This means a museum that works with social and cultural contemporary questions, that can develop or break norms, that can rewrite history and dare to work with difficult and political issues (Hauptman and Svanberg 2013:148; Nightingale and Sandell 2012:1).

In Norway, the question of the role of the museum is accentuated in a time where cultural and social contemporary questions about identity, nation, diversity, tradition and sexuality are hot topics and to a large degree politically polarizing (Hauptman and Svanberg 2013:148). An increased flow of immigrants and refugees has resulted in a more divisive discourse within Norwegian politics the last few years, and far-right, as well as Neo-Nazi movements are on the rise in all of the Nordic countries. A survey conducted by Statistics Norway in 2017 states that 27 % of respondents agrees to the statement “most immigrants are a source of insecurity in society” (Statistics Norway 2017), while a survey by the Norwegian Centre Against Racism showed that out of the respondents with one or both parents born outside Norway, 25,6 % experienced racism, discrimination or unfair treatment regularly at

their high schools (Antirasistisk senter 2017:4). Also, a critical and sometimes hateful discourse toward the increasingly multicultural society is becoming more apparent within Norwegian politics, news and social media. As such, exhibitions that dare to challenge this discourse are becoming more important than ever. These issues are being explored by museums several places in the country, however, the focus of this thesis will be on two Oslo-based museums. As the number of immigrants and Norwegian-born with immigrant parents is largest in Oslo, counting 33 % of the total population (Statistics Norway 2018), many of the questions surrounding a more diverse society are more pressing here.

### **Research questions**

Using the current situation mentioned above as a backdrop, the research question will be as follows: *In what way are Norwegian museums responding to divisive issues and discourses which have become more apparent within the Norwegian society the last few years?*

This will be answered through an analysis of two exhibitions, namely *Typical* at the Intercultural Museum, and *FOLK: from racial types to DNA sequences* at the Norwegian Museum of Science and Technology. Here, two sub-questions will be applied in order to answer the main research question:

- In what way are aims and concerns, when working with these issues, met at the two museums?
- What broader political, structural and social forces do the museum staff negotiate when working with these issues, and how?

### **Case studies, methodology and theoretical framework**

The two exhibitions mentioned above will be used as case studies in this thesis. *Typical*, at the Intercultural Museum, explores the concept of prejudice. The exhibition presents questions such as; what is prejudice, and where does it come from? What consequences can result from prejudice, and how can we stop them? Through the use of humour, conceptual art, and interactivity, visitors are encouraged to share and reflect upon their own prejudices. *FOLK: from racial types to DNA sequences* at the Norwegian Museum of Science and Technology explores how racial sciences from the Enlightenment until the present have identified and valued biological similarities and differences between humans, and how this research has been shaped alongside changing social ideas on race, identity, and belonging. *FOLK* explores the interactions between science, society and culture, and how scientific practices have had profound impact on whole societies and the lives of individuals.

Interviews with curators and other museum staff at the two museums, as well as analyses of the two exhibitions, will be used to shed light on aims and concerns, as well as the broader political, structural and social forces that are negotiated at the two museums. In addition, two people at the Arts Council Norway have been interviewed. This has been done in order to examine the views of the societal role of museums at a more governmental level, and how their views affect the rest of the museum sector.

Several terms and concepts will be used as theoretical frameworks. The first is Richard Sandell's *activist museum practice*. This term can be used to describe a set of actions within the museum that is designed to bring about social change and highlight injustices – despite prevailing social norms – and support alternative ways of thinking (Sandell 2011, 2012). Closely connected to this is the term *social agency of museums*. This can be described as the ability that museums have to influence and affect society. Museums can for example function as agents for social and political change by acting as forums for debate and being “a safe place for unsafe ideas” (Casey 2001:233; Sandell 2007:xi). The different possible meanings and theoretical understandings of these terms and ideas will be discussed further in chapter 2 (theoretical framework).

In order to analyse how political, structural and social forces enhance and limit activities at the museums, Michel Foucault's concept of *governmentality* will be used as a basis for further discussions. When applied to museums, the concept has been used to show that they can be “recast as exercises of governmentality in which disciplinary discourses, the order of things, or specific intellectuals redirect the consciousness and behaviour of museum visitors to advance various governmental goals” (Luke 2002:3). This means that, in the organisation of the exhibition space and displays, curators can direct people in what to see, think, and value, and as such, alter people's attitudes in relation to certain political values (Bennett 1995; Luke 2002:3). Governmentality will be used as a tool in order to examine certain political guidelines directed at museum practice, and to what extent the museum staff feel influenced by these guidelines in their exhibition choices.

### **Structure of thesis**

This thesis will consist of six main chapters. This first chapter includes this introduction as well as the historical development and current status of the societal role of museums, both at a general level, and at a more focused Norwegian level. The theoretical and methodological frameworks will be presented in chapter 2. Their relation to the overall theme of the thesis will be elaborated, and reflections on their usage will be discussed. Chapter 3 will be used to

present the two case studies. The history of the two museums will be given, which then will be followed by a short presentation of the two exhibitions. Why these two case studies were chosen will also be explained here. Chapter 4 will contain the analysis, where both texts, design elements, and displays in the exhibitions will undergo a more detailed analysis. Excerpts from the interviews will be used to highlight aims and concerns expressed by the museum staff. The discussion will be presented in chapter 5. The main points from the analysis will be discussed further, in an attempt to answer the research questions presented earlier. Finally, chapter 6 will contain some concluding remarks as well as suggestions for future research.

## **BACKGROUND AND STATE OF THE ART**

### **The societal role of museums**

Museums have a long and complex history, throughout which, at each period of their existence, they have embodied and shaped their visitors' perceptions of what is valuable, important and true. As such, the concept of the societal role of museums is not new, in fact it is as old as museums themselves (Ferguson 2010:36; Hylland 2017:81). Some of the first public museums that emerged during the 19<sup>th</sup> century contained useful collections aimed at improving society, collections that could provide the basis for a general knowledge about the country and its resources. They were viewed as having an important role in delivering positive social change through education. They were often put to service in the frame of the nation, but should also be universal in their collections, combining nature, archaeological artefacts, and art (Hylland 2017:82; Sandell 1998:409). Tony Bennett (1995) argues that the legislative and administrative reforms that transformed the nineteenth-century museums from semi-private institutions restricted to the ruling and professional classes, to public organs of the state dedicated to the education and instruction of the general public, led museums to be regarded as "major vehicles for the fulfilment of the state's new educative and moral role in relation to the population as a whole" (1995:109).

These early museums developed alongside science, technology and historical disciplines, industrialisation, urbanisation, new ideas regarding progress, order, time and space, and so on (Ferguson 2010:36). As new institutions, they provided evidence that it was possible to present objective, immutable facts and truths about the natural world. As such, by



collecting and displaying ‘real’ objects, museums were able to achieve an apparent ‘authenticity’, and to create apparently authentic representations of the world. This ability, underpinned by their alleged innate neutrality, has enabled museums to develop as instruments of power, as sites of power-knowledge (Ferguson 2010:36). Even though it has been revealed that the rational ordering of things within the museum does not necessarily mirror the real order of things, the belief that museums deal in the “real stuff of history” persist among many museum visitors (Bennett 1995:126). According to Timothy Luke (2002) “what is accepted as knowledge, and the power to which many accede, are both easily articulated and constantly affirmed in the exhibitions museums produce for their audiences. Therefore, the continuous struggles to define power and knowledge at museums can often be intense” (Luke 2002:xiii). This has become evident during the past 30 years, when museums have faced waves of powerful external forces which have made changes to their societal role inevitable. The political agendas and power structures of museums have been critiqued, and groups whose histories and identities have been ignored or denigrated by museums have demanded representation in displays and programmes. Underlying these demands have been the principles of human rights which have inspired the struggle for justice across the planet since the Second World War (O’Neill and Silverman 2012:xx). Because of this, changes to the societal role of museums have become more evident the last 20 years. More museums are articulating their capacity to promote cross-cultural understanding, to tackle prejudice and intolerance and to foster respect for difference. This is reflected in both the mission statements of museums and in more broadly-framed policy documents that articulate generic claims regarding the value of museums (Sandell 2007:2). One example is the UK Museums Association’s vision ‘Museums Change Lives’ which was launched in 2013 and emphasises the view that all museums can be ambitious about their role in society and support social change (MA 2013).

### **The societal role of museums in Norway**

The development of the societal role of museums in Norway has been much the same as elsewhere. The first public museums functioned as patriotic universal museums with the aim of educating the public, and for the later open-air museums, such as the Norwegian Folk Museum, an important societal role was to function as arenas for representing identity and national narratives. Many museums had an ambition to exhibit the nationally and regionally distinctive and unique. In this way, they had a unique and important role in preserving a community’s cultural heritage, as well as giving visitors a sense of their place in the world

(Hylland 2017:82). The international critique of museum practices that started in the 1980s and highlighted the claim that museums should exhibit oppressed and silenced groups in society, and thereby act as agents for social change, also made its mark in Norwegian museums from the 1990s and early 2000s (Kalsås 2015:33). These changes were accompanied by two important political documents which were published during the 1990s and introduced new paradigms that the museum sector is still characterized by; a report published in 1996 titled *Museum: Diversity, Memory, Meeting Place* (NOU 1996:7, my translation), and a white paper published in 1999 titled *Sources to Knowledge and Experience* (St.meld. nr. 22 1999-2000, my translation). With the first document, cultural diversity and visitor dialogue were properly introduced as parameters for Norwegian museum practice. The second document built on this and emphasised the museum's responsibility for societal relevance and debate, professional networking, and digital dissemination (Hylland 2017:83).

Following these documents, the museum sector in Norway underwent a massive reorganisation from 2001 to 2010, which included a great reduction of the total number of museum units. From over 350 museum institutions, the national network of museums was reduced to about 65 administrative units. The reduction happened mainly through different forms of consolidations of museums. According to Ole Marius Hylland (2017:79), the current understanding of the societal roles of museums, and the many descriptions of museums as societal institutions, must be understood with this reform as a background. The white paper that followed this reform in 2009 titled *The Museum of the Future* (St.meld. nr. 49 2008-2009, my translation), emphasises how the museums' societal role was a part of the aim of the reform: "the primary aim of the museum reform was to create stronger professional museum institutions that can actively work with the many challenges of the societal role of museums" (St.meld. nr. 49 2008-2009:11, my translation). Further, it states that it is an "overarching aim that the museums mirror the society which they are a part of. The museums are important forerunners in a modern democratic society and shall have an active societal role" and should "therefore reflect a diversity of perspectives and realities" (St.meld. nr. 49 2008-2009:123, my translation, cited in Holmesland 2013).

The political documents are quite explicit in what the museums should change from, and why. The documents describe the museums as systems of selection. With the power to define who and what is included as valuable and worthy of protection or excluded as marginal and worthless, the museums appear as hegemonic, with the power to canonise certain cultural values and forms of expression at the expense of others. The challenge of the museums, as stated in the political documents, is that they have to change focus; from hegemony and

exclusion to democracy and inclusion, from similarity, continuity and conformity to difference, change and complexity (Holmesland 2013).

The concepts of the societal role and societal institutions have gradually been internalised by the museum sector. Many museums proclaim their societal role on their websites and in their statutes, and several museum projects have had the societal role as an overarching theme (Hylland 2017:80). One of these was the project BRUDD (Eng. break, fracture), which started in 2003 and used the white paper *Sources to Knowledge and Experience* (St.meld. nr. 22 1999-2000) as a starting point. The aim was to ask critical questions about the role of the museums as mediators of ‘the truth’, and maintenance of a cultural self-understanding. The project invited museums to tell stories about the difficult, the tabooed, the marginalised, the invisible, and the controversial (ABM-utvikling 2006:5). The project resulted in exhibitions with themes ranging from homosexuality within the animal kingdom, to stories from leprosy patients, to bullying, to the unknown stories of deaf people, and so on (ABM-utvikling 2006). This project was one of the first projects to deal with difficult and controversial issues to be organised in Norway and lasted until 2014. In 2015 the Arts Council Norway launched a subsidy programme titled *The Societal Role of Museums*, which awarded financial support to projects dealing with themes such as democracy and human rights. The programme supported a total of 18 projects, one of which was the exhibition *Typical* used as a case study in this thesis. In 2016 ICOM Norway published a collection of articles dealing with different aspects of the societal role of museums (ICOM 2016), and in 2017 they co-hosted, together with ICOM Germany and ICOM Nord, a conference with the theme ‘Difficult Issues’. And just recently, the Arts Council Norway launched a new subsidy programme for the period 2018-2020 with the title *Societal Role, Power and Responsibility*. The programme places high demands on methodology, where critical dissemination and involvement should become embedded within museum practice (Arts Council Norway 2018). This shows that the rhetoric emphasis on the societal role of museums has increased significantly in Norway the last 20 years (Hylland 2017:80), and is by no means decreasing. However, despite the ongoing emphasis on the societal role of museums, many museum professionals find it difficult to work with some aspects of this role, especially those dealing with difficult and controversial issues. As such, this field is still in need of further research, something to which this thesis can contribute.

## 2. THEORY AND METHOD

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### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### **Activist museum practice**

In order to examine in what way Norwegian museums respond to contemporary divisive discourses and issues, *activist museum practice* will be applied as a theoretical framework. This also involves the use of theories not directly linked to museums, such as political theory. One of the scholars who have been working most with the term ‘activism’ within museum studies is Richard Sandell (e.g. Nightingale and Sandell 2012; Sandell 1998, 2007, 2011, 2017; Sandell and Dodd 2010). According to him the term activism can be understood

in the broadest sense, to refer to a set of actions designed to bring about social change, often in relation to an issue which is characterized by moral, social or political contestation. Activist practice, then, may take many forms but must inevitably entail the adoption of a particular moral standpoint in relation to issues that frequently hold the capacity to generate fiercely opposing views (Sandell and Dodd 2010:14).

Sandell is interested in examining how museums, by constructing and presenting narratives, have the power to reinforce, challenge and potentially reconfigure prevailing normative ideas about right and wrong, good and bad, fairness and injustice (Sandell 2017). Christopher Whitehead et al. (2015) however, argue that museums who lean towards a social activist approach, for example by making statements about the benefits of migration and diversity to civic society and culture, run the risk of undermining the actual contemporary social realities that follow an increase in migration and diversity, such as prejudice, racism, and the cultural isolation and segregation of some groups (Whitehead, et al. 2015:32). They argue that while it is important for these museums to take implicit political and moral positions, both in mission statements and in displays, this should not come at the cost of removing from view other, contrasting, positions (2015:46). This argument can be seen in light of the theories presented by the political theorist Chantal Mouffe (2016). She argues that one of the problems of democratic politics today is “trying to defuse the potential antagonism that exists in human relations” (Mouffe 2016). She blames the success of right-wing populist parties partly on the fact that social-democratic parties have in many countries identified themselves more or less exclusively with the middle-classes, and that the dominant discourse proclaims that “there is

no alternative to the current neo-liberal form of globalization and that we have to accept its diktats” (2016). She argues for a democratic society that does not eradicate conflict, but where opposing views are seen as a “struggle between adversaries” as opposed to a “struggle between enemies”, and that recognising antagonisms is important in order to create an adequate response to the discourse presented by right-wing parties (2016).

This does not mean that the voice of extremist or far-right movements should be expressed in museums, but that silencing ideas because they are uncongenial to liberal ideas of social justice and tolerance, is to create a fictional representation of coherent, peaceful social relations (Whitehead, et al. 2015:46). Whitehead et al. proposes that instead of silencing antagonisms they should be recognised, and that by historicizing them they can allow for “both an immediate relevance (a here-and-now-ness) and a sense of distance sufficient to allow engagement with difficult issues on the part of groups who are differently affected by them in the present” (2015:47). In a globalized society where opposing world views cannot be willed away, museums can have an important function in the politics of negotiating cultural differences by identifying and contextualising “antagonisms, identity constructs, different moral and ideological positions and the tensions between different political orders” (Whitehead, et al. 2015:49). Whitehead et al. argue that in order to achieve this, museums should acknowledge their potential to construct social values and should be clear about their positions, while recognising oppositional voices and making debates and antagonisms a part of the museum’s representation (2015:55). Fiona Cameron also stresses that museums “need to let go of the fear of fostering divisiveness and engendering criticism and to really understand foundational beliefs and divergent opinions around topics.” This involves “letting go of the need to find a consensus in a pluralistic society, taking risks and perhaps receiving disapproval from certain sectors” (2003:40). This entails that the museum can present competing viewpoints and sources in order to add value to people’s understanding of issues and their judgement on topics. This way, by creating greater awareness and facilitating discussion museums can act as sites for ‘social activism’ (Cameron 2003:41).

Elements of the activist approach can also be found in what some scholars call the *social agency* of museums, entailing what museums *do* in society as a kind of media form, and often in terms of how they can function as agents for social and political change (e.g. Casey 2001; Svanberg 2010). Dawn Casey argues that museums should provide forums for debate, by offering reflective spaces where visitors can consider issues in context against their historic background. As such they can function as “a safe place for unsafe ideas” (2001:233). However, what is experienced as ‘safe’ and ‘unsafe’ are not objective notions, and what may

be seen as ‘unsafe’ to one individual might not be to another. Also, one might question how ‘unsafe’ the ideas presented at a museum actually can be. I will apply this notion in light of the discussion above, that antagonisms and divergent viewpoints might be recognised in museums in order to create a space where visitors feel empowered to discuss difficult issues. ‘A safe place’ can in this sense be seen as a space that fosters respect for other points of view, a place of democratic expression that seriously engage with and present opinions (Cameron 2003:41).

A critical view can also be placed on some of the terms and concepts presented in the literature advocating an activist approach. Terms such as ‘activism’ and ‘tolerance’ are presented in the literature as unquestioned goods, when they in fact are culturally, politically and historically contingent, and when not used critically, can in fact reproduce unequal and discriminatory subject positions. Wendy Brown (2006) for example shows, through her analysis of the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles<sup>1</sup>, how museums, when failing to critically apply a concept such as ‘tolerance’, can actually reproduce the stereotypes they are trying to abolish, and end up seen as championing tolerance of some groups, while being, themselves, quite intolerant of others. The same applies to the term ‘activism’. This is a highly charged term, which conjures different meanings for different people. Sandell also recognises this, and admits that for some museum professionals 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” (2017:9). Also, even though there exist museums who openly acknowledge an activist role – in the vernacular sense of the term, it can be argued that *all* museums in fact are ‘activist’ in that they cannot not be political. As argued by David Fleming, there is no such thing as an unmediated display, as all basic tasks associated with running a museum are loaded with meaning and human bias (Atkinson 2012). I have nevertheless chosen to use the term ‘activist museum practice’ as I agree with Sandell on that it, as a concept, can be helpful for understanding and analysing the processes at play in contemporary museum practice and to highlight that the negotiations and adoption of moral standpoints that goes on ‘behind the scenes’ (cf. Macdonald 2002) of exhibition-making is done by purposive agents who’s personal values, beliefs and agendas intersect with broader

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<sup>1</sup> Wendy Brown (2006) criticizes the Museum of Tolerance for under-communicating specific political positions under the cover of tolerance, and for presenting their opposites as intolerant, violent, and barbaric. She also criticises how they reproduce stereotypes through their essentialization of difference and their didacticism (2006:106-148).

structural and social forces in shaping the exhibitions. As such, it is an encouragement to look behind the anonymity of the authoritative institution of museums, and to analyse the hows and whys of exhibition-making (Sandell 2017:9).

### **Power and governmentality**

In order to analyse the power structures that both allows for, and limits, an activist approach in museums, the concept of *governmentality* will be applied. According to Tony Bennett, during the nineteenth-century, institutions such as museums were viewed as instruments capable of improving peoples' inner life, and a necessity for the mental and moral health of the citizens (Bennett 1995:18). With the development of the public museum, which opened up the buildings for more than just the ruling and elite classes, the museum was thought of as something useful for governing, as a vehicle for the exercise of new forms of power. Culture was targeted as an object of government, and museums were being assigned the governmental task of civilizing the population as a whole (Bennett 1995:19).

This way of thinking about museums is influenced by Michel Foucault's concept of *governmentality* (Foucault 1991 (1978)). Foucault defined the term 'government' as meaning 'the conduct of conduct', that is to say, a form of activity aiming to shape, guide or affect the conduct of some person or persons (Gordon 1991:2). Governmentality might be explained as "a way or system of thinking about the nature of the practice of government (who can govern; what governing is; what or who is governed)" (Gordon 1991:3). Foucault was interested in government as an activity or practice, in knowing what that activity consisted of, and how it might be carried out (Gordon 1991:3). When applied to museums, the concept has been used to show that they can be "recast as exercises of governmentality" by directing people in how to act, see, think, and value, and how seeing certain objects and encountering certain interpretations of history, "can alter people's attitudes in relation to certain political values associated with particular things" (Luke 2002:3). This way, museums can help people to become "more easily the ideal person valued by their nations" (Luke 2002:3). The notion of the 'societal role' of museums has been emphasised in governmental documents used as guidelines for museums in Norway during the last 20 years. I have chosen to apply the concept of governmentality in order to examine how much these documents govern the decisions made in museum. As mentioned above, this will help to shed light on the power structures embedded in museum practice, and how this might affect their choices when exhibiting contemporary social issues.

## **METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK**

In order to analyse how the two museums are responding to social issues, as well as how aims and concerns are met at the two museums, I have done interviews with museum staff as well as visual analyses of the exhibitions. These will be elaborated further here, with the method of interviewing presented first, and the methods used for exhibition analysis presented in the last sub-chapter.

### **Qualitative approach**

In order to examine the motivations, goals, and factors that shape and constrain the choices behind the exhibitions (Tucker 2014:348), semi-structured in-depth interviews with museum staff has been one of the methodological approaches when working with this thesis. Semi-structured interviewing is a flexible interview process that does not need to follow a strict set of prepared questions. The semi-structured interview will often include an interview guide containing questions or topics to be covered, but questions not included in the guide might be asked as the interviewer picks up on things said by the interviewees (Bryman 2012:471). As such, a semi-structured research interview will appear as a conversation where knowledge is constructed in the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009:2). The use of in-depth interviews allowed me to go deeper into the material and understand the thought processes behind the exhibition choices. As such, it gave room for reflection and made it possible to acquire a nuanced and multifaceted material which offered good possibilities for interpretation and analysis (Fägerborg 2011:85, 89).

### **The participants**

A total of six in-depth interviews were done with museum staff. At both museums, the participants had been involved in the production of the exhibitions. At the Intercultural Museum, the participants consisted of Project Director Gazi Özcan, Contents Editor Anders Bettum, and Exhibition Architect Annelise Bothner-By. At the Norwegian Museum of Science and Technology I interviewed both Curators; Jon Kyllingstad and Ageliki Lefkaditou, as well as Programme Manager Gro Ellefsen. My choice of participants was influenced primarily by a wish to interview those most involved in the project, but also by an attempt to get a variety of perspectives on the questions asked. As such, an attempt was made to interview people with slightly different positions at the museums. In addition to these six, Åshild Andrea Brekke and Hans Philip Einarsen, both from the museums section at the Arts



Council Norway were interviewed. These were both involved in the subsidy programme *The Societal Role of Museums*, which, amongst others, funded the exhibition *Typical*. In the original project draft of this thesis, the participants from the Arts Council were included because of their involvement in the funding of *Typical*. The *FOLK*-exhibition was added as a case study at a later stage, however, the participants from the Arts Council were still included as I was interested in obtaining information about the views of the societal role of museums from a governmental level.

### **The interviews**

The project was submitted to and approved by NSD (Norwegian Centre for Research Data) before the interviews were conducted. The participants were informed of this by an information sheet sent to them prior to the interview. This information sheet followed the principle of informed consent (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009:70), informing about the overall purpose of the project, confidentiality and voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw from the study at any time. An interview guide was also sent to all participants before the interview, as it was seen as more important to let the participants prepare themselves, than to get spontaneous views on the topics. Seven of the interviews were done face-to-face, while one was done via Skype. All interviews were recorded using a mobile phone, which all of the participants agreed to before the interview. In addition, a few of the participants were sent a couple of extra questions a few weeks after the initial interview by e-mail.

The interviews are quoted without the use of pseudonyms. Prior to the interviews the participants were all asked if they were willing to be quoted under full names, which they all agreed to. The decision not to use pseudonyms rested on the fact that no sensitive information was asked of the participants which would require anonymization, and the fact that the participants would be easily traceable anyway – as the museums and exhibitions would be named – and therefore pseudonyms would appear as unnecessary and artificial. All participants were told that all quotes to be used in the thesis would be sent back for quote check, which might have made it easier for some to agree to not being anonymized. Nevertheless, the use of full names brings with it a risk that participants might not tell the ‘full story’, or emphasise, downplay, or elude certain topics (Fägerborg 2011:90). As such, some disputes or issues might not have been revealed. However, I experienced during the interviews that all participants spoke quite freely, and never got the sense that anyone deliberately eluded any themes.

### **Reflections on my own role**

As in all research, the researcher's role in a qualitative analysis will be decisive for which themes that are chosen and how the material is analysed. My analysis of the material will be based on my own interpretations, and the theoretical contexts I use to discuss the material might not correspond with the participants' own way of categorising reality (Pripp 2011:82). As such, it is essential that I am self-reflexive toward my own interpretations and categorisations, and the consequences of these. I had, for example, a three-month internship at the Norwegian Museum of Science and Technology where my main assignments were connected to the production of the *FOLK*-exhibition. Because of this, I had much more background knowledge of this exhibition, and also knew the informants at the time of the interviews. The possibility that this affected my questions or style of interviewing, or that the participants at the Norwegian Museum of Science and Technology adapted their answers based on my prior knowledge and our relationships, must be taken into account.

### **Lost in translation**

All interviews except one were done in Norwegian. As such, all quotes originally in Norwegian have been translated by the author, except for the quotes from the interview with Ageliki Lefkaditou, which was done in English. Best efforts have been made to make the translations as accurate as possible. However, in order to keep the original meaning of quotes, sentence structure has sometimes been slightly changed. Therefore, as it is mentioned here, the phrase 'my translation' will not be used when referring to the interviews in the analysis and discussion.

### **Exhibition analysis**

In my analysis of the two exhibitions *Typical* and *FOLK* I have used frameworks for both textual as well as visual analysis. For the textual analysis I have applied Louise Ravelli's (2006) tools for analysing how museums communicate through text. In her book, communication encompasses all practices within an institution which make meaning, but with a "primary focus on language, especially written text, and a secondary focus on the way in which these frameworks can be extended to some of the broader senses of communication" (2006:1). As such, I have used some of these frameworks in order to analyse how the two exhibitions generate meaning. I have focused on both texts in the museum – introductory texts, labels etc. – but also on the 'museum as texts' – the way in which the exhibitions,

through for example different elements of design, “can facilitate particular forms of visitor interaction, can prioritise some meanings in the exhibition over others, and can construct a picture of what the subject matter ‘is’” (2006:121). The ‘museum as texts’ approach sees the exhibitions as *multi-modal* texts where meaning is generated through a variety of semiotic resources, such as language, design, colour, lighting etc.

In my analysis of texts in the museum, I have mainly used the tools of *genre*, *roles* and *appraisal*. *Genre* is used to decide the text types in an exhibition, which again can be used to tell the overall purpose of that text – to instruct, to tell a story, to convey knowledge, or to influence visitors in a certain way (2006:19). I have applied the concept of genre to both study single exhibition texts, but also in order to analyse how several texts working together can create an overall purpose for the whole exhibition at a macro-level. *Roles* has been used to analyse the way the museums interact and communicate with their visitors. Textual elements used in museum texts convey and construct a certain kind of interaction with their readers, positioning the museum for example as authoritative, equal, or distant towards its visitors (2006:73). *Appraisal* is a resource used for incorporating opinion in a text, and is often used to encode a point of view (2006:92). Textual elements used in appraisal, such as affect, judgement or appreciation, have been used to show how certain texts in the exhibitions enhance a particular attitude toward something.

When analysing the ‘museum as texts’ the term *intersemiosis* has been applied. Intersemiosis is the interaction of different semiotic modes which together create an overall ‘experience’ for visitors (2006:151). This means that different semiotic systems, such as text, the arrangement of objects, the use of colour and light, and the layout of the exhibition space, can, when seen together, generate specific meanings. Ravelli’s framework has been applied to both *Typical* and *FOLK*. However, as the *FOLK*-exhibition also exhibit a vast variety of objects (as opposed to *Typical* which consist mainly of texts) a visual analysis framework has also been necessary here. As such, I have applied Stephanie Moser’s (2010) framework for analysing displays. This framework involves looking at different details of a display in order to examine how they can act as active agents in the production of knowledge (2010:22). As such, I have applied the framework in an attempt to analyse how details such as design, colour and light, the shape and placing of displays, the juxtaposing of objects, and certain display types, generate meaning both when viewed by themselves, but also when seen as a coherent whole. When using both frameworks, the primary focus has been on how certain details function in regards to the overall themes of the exhibitions and how they allow for a certain creation of meaning.

### 3. CASE STUDIES

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The case studies chosen for this thesis consist, as mentioned, of two exhibitions at two Oslo-based museums, namely *Typical* at the Intercultural Museum and *FOLK – from racial types to DNA sequences* at the Norwegian Museum of Science and Technology. The exhibitions were chosen as they both exhibit themes which, in different ways, can be seen to respond to some of the divisive issues and discourses which have been prevalent in the Norwegian society the last few years. At the same time, the museums represent two quite different institutions in the museum landscape of Oslo, which makes for an interesting comparison of both the exhibitions and the museums. This chapter will consist of a presentation of the museums and their history, as well as short descriptions of the two exhibitions. More in-depth analyses of the exhibitions will be conducted in the next chapter.

#### INTERCULTURAL MUSEUM

Intercultural Museum (from now ICM) was established by Bente Guro Møller in 1990. The museum is located in the neighbourhood of Grønland in Oslo, in a building that housed a police station from 1902 until 1978, and later a variety of organisations such as sports clubs, a mosque, a war veteran society, and several different projects, before ICM moved in in 1994. From 1999, after a massive refurbishment, the old prison cells could finally be used as exhibition spaces (Einarsen 2006). As a result of the museum reform that took place between 2001 and 2010, ICM was consolidated with Oslo City Museum and the Theatre Museum in 2006, and has since then been a part of the umbrella institution Oslo Museum (Bettum 2016). The reform also involved the establishment of professional museum networks in order to enhance the exchange of knowledge and skills across museums, and ICM was given the task of co-ordinating the activities of the network for diversity (Oslo Museum 2018). The museum aims at collecting, preserving and conveying new minorities' stories of immigration and settlement in Norway. The museum works after the principle "not about me, if not with me" (my translation), which means that groups or individuals that are thematised in the exhibitions should have a real influence on form and content (Bettum 2016). In addition to the exhibition space, the museum also holds an art gallery (Galleri IKM), which is reserved for artists that focus on globality and diversity, or that have an immigrant background themselves. As such, the museum is not easily placed in established museum categories; it is a combination of

different museum genres including an art museum, an ethnographic museum and a historical museum (Varutti 2011:19).

Getting the status as a museum was, however, not such an easy task for ICM. It was a challenge to convince the museum sector that an institution without a collection can also be a museum. ICM has no physical collection – it collects histories. However, it was finally accepted by the Norwegian Museums Association, and gradually the museum gained more and more acknowledgment (Hans Philip Einarsen, pers. comm. 2017). In 2003 and 2015 the museum was nominated for the European Museum Award, and in 2006 it was awarded ‘Museum of the Year’ by the Norwegian Museums Association (Bettum 2016).

### ***Typical***

*Typical* is the new main exhibition at ICM, located in the main exhibition space on the first floor. Before entering the exhibition, visitors are met with an introductory panel that introduces the theme by jumping straight to contemporary issues in Norway, such as an increasingly divisive rhetoric in the public debate, in the media, and online, following a growing multicultural society. The text is followed by a series of questions, such as “what is prejudice?”, “where does it come from?”, and “is it possible to change them?”. One can enter the exhibition through two separate doorways, one with the word ‘untypical’ written on the floor, the other with the word ‘typical’. Both doorways lead to the same open space where visitors are free to wander in different directions. No clear predetermined path is visible. The general design of the exhibition is very rough. The floor is painted mostly grey, but this is not consistent: there are areas which are a more yellow colour, and here and there are geometrical figures painted pink, blue and yellow. There are several quotes spread all over the exhibition floor. These are excerpts from interviews with youths from different communities in Oslo, where they speak of their own and others prejudices.

I entered the space through the doorway marked ‘untypical’ and felt that it was most natural to turn left to where two long tables were standing in a row. These are also rough looking, with metal bars lining the table tops and metal bars used for hanging several text panels a few centimetres over the visitor’s head. The texts explain the origin of the word ‘prejudice’, and how prejudice emerge through categorisation and socialisation. Theorists such as Mary Douglas and George Lakoff are introduced, and the museum presents its own definition of prejudice; namely the ‘categorisation of people which is unjustified and negative’. There are also texts discussing glorification, “positive” prejudice and what prejudice is not. The tables also include two activities which can be seen as examples of the

concepts presented in the texts put into practice. The first table has a box where visitors are asked to sort small toy frogs into categories, to illustrate how categorisation is present in many children's games. The second activity encourages visitors to 'pigeonhole' themselves by choosing six labels from a limited selection and placing these on a card with a human shape. This card can then be hung from a metal bar overhead.

On the opposite side of the room, four of the old prison cells have been converted into small rooms that are accessible through four doors labelled 'HUMILIATION', 'PRIDE', 'HATE', and 'FEAR'. These rooms contain examples of how the feelings presented on the doors can turn harmful when connected to a feeling of prejudice. Texts discuss themes such as discrimination and social exclusion, the difference between self-worth and smugness, hateful statements, and xenophobia. Interactive elements are included in some of the rooms, as in 'humiliation' where visitors can share a story about a time they felt stupid because they were standing outside of the majority, by writing their story on small paper sheets and hanging these on the wall. Also, the room 'hate' is almost empty but for a red sitting room chair where visitors can sit and listen to hate statements made about profiled women from a Norwegian TV-station. There are also a few more cells which are left open for visitors to walk more freely in and out of. One cell contains text panels which discuss the connection between prejudice and genocide. Both the opinions of those that believe that there is a connection between prejudice and genocide, and those who do not, are presented. Text panels are used to discuss the factors that lead to genocide, and the museum presents its own conclusion about the connection. One cell is also set aside for panels containing paragraphs from different Norwegian laws that deal with discrimination.

The rest of the exhibition space contains several works of the artist Thierry Geoffroy, also known as Colonel. Three cells contain video installations where the artist walks around Oslo city centre and ask people seemingly innocent and naïve questions. Through the use of humour, he tries to make people admit to being prejudiced. A separate room with the neon sign 'The Anatomy of Prejudice' is also part of the work by Geoffroy. This room contains the 'Jungle of Prejudice' where visitors are encouraged to participate in the creation of the artwork by finding an example of a personal prejudice on their own cell phones, to print this by using the machine titled 'The Extractor' and 'share it as a leaf in the Jungle of Prejudice', i.e. hang it on wires suspended from the roof. The room is lined with large neon signs reading "self-criticism makes me grow", "strong people don't fear others", and "who is the other in you".

In the forthcoming analysis I will look more closely at three elements in this exhibition, namely the introductory text panel, the cell room titled ‘fear’ and the ‘Jungle of Prejudice’. These have been chosen as they represent the different types of media used in the exhibition. They also provide good examples of how the museum responds to contemporary social issues and attempts to influence their visitors, as well as reflecting aims and concerns discussed by the museum staff.



Figure 1: Entrance to *Typical* and doors to the ‘cell rooms’ (photos by Martine Scheen Jahnsen).





Figure 2: Table in *Typical* with the activity ‘pigeonhole yourself’, and detail of the activity. The labels read ‘happy’, ‘blond’, ‘short’, ‘Norwegian’, ‘nerd’, and ‘artist’ (photos by Martine Scheen Jahnsen).

## NORWEGIAN MUSEUM OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

The Norwegian Museum of Science and Technology (from now NMoST) started as a technology exhibition at the 1914 Jubilee Exhibition in Kristiania, marking the centennial anniversary of the Norwegian constitution (Larsen 2014:551). In the decades before, technologisation of the society had been growing, abroad as well as in Norway. This was something to be proud of during the anniversary celebrations. Engineering as a field was gaining credibility and had gained the status of science at many educational institutions. Through displays such as exhibitions, technology was now also brought into the field of culture (Larsen 2014:551). Even though the collection of artefacts began already in 1914, factors such as the First World War, and a general lack of funding from both private and governmental actors, put the dream of a separate building for housing collections and exhibitions on hold. In 1932 the museum was given temporary locales in the basement of the Viking Ship Museum at Bygdøy. Here, they were able to exhibit the collection, albeit in the basement, under the far more prestigious Viking ships (Andersen and Hamran 2014:29;



Larsen 2014:551). First in 1959 the museum was able to move into its own building at Helsefy in Oslo, 55 years after the museum was established. However, it was not until the museum moved into its contemporary location at Kjelsås in 1986 that the museum received the size and format that the founders had imagined (Andersen and Hamran 2014:29).

The same year, *Teknoteket* – a science centre now housed in the basement of the museum – was opened as part of the museum. Teknoteket, which was fully integrated with the museum and changed its name to *Vitensenteret* (The Science Centre) in 2003, inhabits the most hands-on activities, and is arguably the part of the museum that attracts most visitors today (Andersen and Hamran 2014:391). In 2001, the National Medical Museum was also established as a part of NMoST, and manages artefacts related to health and medical history in Norway. The integration of both Vitensenteret and the National Medical Museum was in line with museum policy guidelines at the time. The museum reform launched in 2001 involved, as mentioned, the establishment of professional museum networks. NMoST was given the task of co-ordinating the activities of two networks; the network for technology and industrial history, and the network for medical history (Andersen and Hamran 2014:394).

Giving technology a place in the Norwegian museum landscape was, however, a challenge from the outset. According to Andersen and Hamran, it was not easy for the founders of the museum to convince the surroundings that technology was museum-worthy, and the institution has throughout its history been struggling to find its place among Norwegian museums. Even though the museum has had a strong position in the public's consciousness, the institution still exists on the outskirts of the museum community, as the *difference museum* (2014:33). According to Andersen and Hamran this has also been the case within academia, with Norwegian museological writings largely uninterested in the technical museums (2014:30, 33). Nevertheless, the museum has had several award-winning exhibitions<sup>2</sup>, and was, amongst others, awarded 'Museum of the Year' in 2011 by the Norwegian Museums Association.

### ***FOLK – from racial types to DNA sequences***

*FOLK* is a new temporary exhibition produced by the National Medical Museum at the NMoST. It is located in an exhibition space on the first floor of the museum and is one of the exhibitions first encountered by visitors to the museum. The first thing that meets the visitor before entering the exhibition is a dark blue wall where the letters F O L K are written in large

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<sup>2</sup> Award winning exhibitions include Climate X, Mind Gap, and The Thing.

red letters. The letters encircle a platform where a wooden chair and an old wooden camera erected on a tripod are standing. A text panel explains that these objects were used in Kristiania (Oslo) at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to take photos of criminals, following the French criminologist Alphonse Bertillon's standardized system of measurements used to identify individuals. The colours used here are also repeated throughout the exhibition, with dark blue and grey being the most dominant colours, and red used for certain details. At the entrance to the exhibition a text panel introduces the theme of the exhibition: the history of racial science and the interaction between science, society, and culture, both in the past and the present.

Once you enter the exhibition space an immediate eyecatcher is a double row of several illuminated glass slides. A label explains that they stem from a lecture given on human evolution and racial research at the Kristiania working men's institute during the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The slides contain black-and-white photographs of people, as well as drawings of skeletons and monkeys, maps, and charts of different kinds. From here you can walk straight forward into the largest space of the exhibition or turn to the right and follow the curved wall of the 'new curiosity cabinet'. The cabinet is a round structure with display cases inserted into the wall of the structure. The cases are of different sizes and located at different heights, sometimes making the visitors bend down, or crane their necks in order to peer into the cases. The objects on display consist of both old and new artefacts, all functioning as examples of how people have been stereotyped, romanticised and valued in the past and the present, as explained by a text panel. When walking along the cabinet, visitors also pass a number of cast skulls placed on small round platforms mounted on the wall. A text panel explains that these are phrenological skulls used to classify skull shapes, and stem from the 1830s. Inside the cabinet, visitors encounter a small cinema space, showing two short versions of documentaries made by two Sami filmmakers, and a compilation of two films, one from 1934 and one from 2015, both with the theme of eugenics.

Just outside the cinema is another eyecatcher, namely three skulls placed in three different display cases. The skulls are, according to three short texts, from the Viking Age and were found in Norway between 1842 and 1927. They were all used to classify different racial types, such as the 'Viking' type or the 'Nordic' type. These classifications are elaborated further on the wall to the right, where visitors encounter three long rows of quite large photographs showing black-and-white portraits of young men. A text explains that the photos are all from a large-scale survey of recruits done in Norway in 1920-21. This was part of a large survey funded by the Norwegian government to examine the nation's racial

composition, and thus be able to locate different ‘races’, such as the ‘Alpine’, ‘Lappish’, and ‘Nordic’ race. Following this text are two more examples from this survey, namely the study of the ‘Lappish’ racial type at Tysfjord, and the study of the ‘Nordic’ racial type at Setesdal. Two text panels explain how these surveys were done by the anthropologists Alette and Kristian Schreiner in 1914 and 1921, and how the surveys were affected by the Schreiner’s perception of the Sami as racially primitive and the assumed Nordic type of Setesdal as psychologically superior. The texts are accompanied by large portraits taken by Schreiner at the two locations, as well as two small screens showing interviews with living relatives of the people in the photos, and others still affected by these surveys today.

Following a curved corner, the visitors arrive at the far back wall which is devoted to examples of racial science done between the 1920s and 1950s. Objects used for physical-anthropological measurements are on display, as well as books about racial hygiene, racial science and nation-building, and the superiority of the ‘Nordic’ race. Several posters functioning as visual representations of these ideas are on display, for example eugenic propaganda posters, a propaganda poster from the Norwegian Nazi-party Nasjonal Samling, a Nazi poster seeking to enlist Norwegian men to the SS, and a journal of the Nazi farmers’ movement in Norway. This section also includes examples of anti-racist movements from the post-war period, such as a pamphlet produced by UNESCO in 1952 in an attempt to combat racism, photos of different demonstrations, such as anti-apartheid in South Africa and the civil rights movement in the USA, a Soviet anti-racist propaganda poster, and a front page of the UNESCO Courier showing the first expert statement on race in 1950. Several touchscreens allow the visitors to read more about these and related topics.

Following yet another curved corner, the last wall is devoted entirely to four large wall-mounted flat screens. Small stools are placed in front of each screen, and there are headphones for visitors. The videos shown consist of interviews with scientists working with genetics and DNA research today, as well as an animated film explaining genetic research and human variation. Small labels tell the visitors that the themes of the videos are “possibilities and challenges when examining human DNA”, a project trying to trace the genomic history of the Vikings, whether genetics can help us classify humans, and a discussion on human diversity, race and racism today.

The last thing in the exhibition is another large round structure in the middle of the main area, titled ‘the archive’. The structure consists of four sections of rounded open shelves, filled with different objects. As the shelves are open, it is possible to stand inside the structure and still see everything outside. The objects on display are all examples of science studying

human diversity and consist of objects dating from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century up until today. In the middle of the structure there is a large round table where visitors can sit on stools and leaf through newer books with topics about racism, Nazism, racial science, DNA research etc.

In the forthcoming analysis I will look more closely at the following three elements from the exhibition: the introductory text panel, the ‘curiosity cabinet’, and ‘the archive’. These have been chosen as they, in the same manner as the elements chosen for *Typical*, provide a good representation of the main elements displayed in the exhibition, and function as examples of how the exhibition respond to contemporary social issues, as well as reflecting the aims and concerns discussed by the museum staff.



Figure 3: Entrance to *FOLK* (photo by Håkon Bergseth/Norwegian Museum of Science and Technology).



Figure 4: Nazi and eugenics propaganda posters, and anti-racist movements in *FOLK* (photo by Håkon Bergseth/Norwegian Museum of Science and Technology).



Figure 5: 'The archive' in *FOLK* (photo by Håkon Bergseth/Norwegian Museum of Science and Technology).



Figure 6: Black-and-white photographs from the surveys conducted by Kristian and Alette Schreiner (photo by Håkon Bergseth/Norwegian Museum of Science and Technology).

## 4. ANALYSIS

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This chapter will consist of an in-depth analysis of certain elements from both exhibitions. As stated in the last chapter, the elements have been chosen as they function as good illustrations of how the exhibitions communicate certain responses to contemporary issues in the Norwegian society. Together with the visual analyses, excerpts from the interviews are also presented here, in order to examine how aims and concerns discussed by the museum staff are reflected in the exhibitions.

### *TYPICAL*

According to the application sent by ICM to the Arts Council Norway when applying for funds to the exhibition, the aim of the exhibition *Typical* is stated as follows:

The main purpose of the exhibition is to create an awareness of the discrimination that exists all around in the Norwegian society, and at the same time assign accountability to the individual. We wish to move the audience with a mixture of tragedy and comedy, provocation and stimuli, with the hope to provoke a reflection around one's own prejudices (Arts Council Norway 2015b, my translation).

Two years later, the exhibition opened. The following analysis will examine how these aims are expressed in the exhibition, and how aims and concerns were experienced by the museum staff.

The first thing that meets the visitors at the entrance to *Typical* is an introductory panel with the title "It's just like them..." written in large, black letters (figure 14)<sup>3</sup>. It begins with quite a factual statement; "Globalization has caused great changes in populations around the world." This statement is then placed in a Norwegian context, and frictions caused by this globalization are listed. It ends with a proposition: that it is time to contemplate where the prejudice in our society comes from, how we should understand them, and if it possible to change them. Following Louise Ravelli's (2006) concept of textual *genres*, this introductory panel can be seen to represent a blend of two types of genres, namely *Expositions*, and *Directives*. Expositions is a text form used to put forward a point of view or argument in order to persuade the visitors. Directives is closely aligned to this, but has in addition an ultimate aim of attempting to influence visitors to change their behaviour (Ravelli 2006:22, 79). As

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<sup>3</sup> See appendix for all figures of exhibition texts.

such, the introductory panel to *Typical* is structured as an Exposition – opening with an argumentative statement (*Globalization has caused...*), which is followed by supporting arguments. These arguments are then followed by another statement (*In this situation, it is time...*), and then a set of questions which point to the remainder of the exhibition. What makes this a Directive in addition to an Exposition, is the proposal of the second statement, asking people to pause and think about the theme at hand, and by that become more aware of their own prejudices (Ravelli 2006:22).

The text reflects the aims presented by the museum staff during our interviews. As expressed by Project Director Gazi Özcan: “What we want is for people to become aware of their prejudices, and that [these prejudices] can have fatal consequences, if you don’t pay attention” (Özcan pers.comm. 2017, my translation<sup>4</sup>). Contents Editor Anders Bettum voiced similar goals, but with slightly less emphasis on the extreme consequences of prejudice: “The hope of the exhibition is that people are made aware of their own prejudices, and that in the end, you take it with a pinch of salt, laugh a bit about it, that it doesn’t run so deep, or maybe shouldn’t run so deep” (Bettum pers.comm. 2017). The exhibition as a whole can in fact be seen as a ‘macro-Exposition/Directive’. Many of the texts are structured as Expositions with statements followed up by supporting arguments presented to persuade the visitors of the importance of the opening statements. However, some of the texts also include final proposals functioning as Directives (e.g. *there is no reason to keep silent, if you experience that the society is moving in a dangerous direction*). The structure of the texts and of the exhibition itself is to persuade people to the notion that prejudice is bad (*In this exhibition, we consider prejudice as a social problem*) and to encourage people to become aware of, and reflect upon, their own set of prejudices (*How dangerous are our prejudices, and is it possible to change them?*). One text does acknowledge that prejudice, as a part of socialization, is something all people to some degree are dependent on, however, the view that prejudice to a large extent is a social problem is emphasised throughout the exhibition.

The introductory text also says something about the way ICM intends to interact with their visitors in the exhibition, the different *roles* which the institution and visitors can and do take up (Ravelli 2006:73). By starting with a statement, the writer of the text (ICM) takes up a fundamentally authoritative role and is in charge of the communication. The visitor is invited to acknowledge this statement, but not respond to it. At the end of the text however, when a

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<sup>4</sup> All quotes from the interviews are translated from Norwegian by the author, except the quotes from the interview with Ageliki Lefkaditou, which was done in English.



set of questions are introduced, the role shifts. The writer is still in charge, as it is s/he who asks the questions, but the visitor is now invited to respond in a much more active way, reducing the power differences between the institution and the visitors (Ravelli 2006:75). The use of a personal pronoun such as ‘us’ also creates a closer relationship, addressing the visitors as individuals, and presents the relationship between the institution and the visitors as being an equal one (prejudice is a part of all of us) (Ravelli 2006:85). These roles are also expressed by Bettum when he states that:

This couldn't be an exhibition where we were to force our knowledge on people. To find precise definitions of prejudice is hard, you do have racism and the like, but they are also common concepts which everyone has a relationship with and has strong opinions about. So, finding a balance and inviting people to bring their own reflections, their own experiences, and share them, that is the core of [the exhibition] (Bettum pers.comm. 2017).

### **The Jungle of Prejudice**

One element in the exhibition that clearly aims at letting visitors participate in the formation of knowledge, is the art installation ‘The Jungle of Prejudice’, where visitors are encouraged to share their own prejudices (figure 7). A text panel explaining the activity starts with the heading “*Share your prejudices!*” in big black letters. The visitors are encouraged to “*contribute to the art work The Anatomy of Prejudice*” before a nine-step guide of how to contribute is given. Textual elements here are also important for examining the roles taken up by the institution and the visitors. A command such as “*Share your prejudices!*” shows that the visitors are explicitly included in the co-construction of the communication, and are expected to respond through their actions (Ravelli 2006:75). This has resulted in a room filled with plastic folders containing pictures representing the visitors’ prejudices and accompanying texts. The prejudices shared represent a variety of themes, such as prejudice against people with smartphones, against bloggers, against people with a different world view, against dark-skinned people, and statements such as “Norwegians are not social” and “all elderly Norwegian ladies are racist”. The aim of the interactive elements in the exhibition is, according to Bettum that: “we want people to come in and analyse their own stuff, experiences, thoughts, ideas, their own awareness around prejudice. So, they have to do that themselves, we cannot do it for them. We also wanted the visitors themselves to show other visitors what they think” (Bettum pers.comm. 2017). For Exhibition Architect Annelise Bothner-By it was also important to include other voices: “here we are, giving one story about



what prejudice is, so it was important to include another voice, one that could say something different and maybe in another way” (Bothner-By pers.comm. 2017).

The shared prejudices are one of very few examples where groups subjected to prejudice is actually apparent in the exhibition. One might think that an exhibition about prejudice would be the perfect place to present examples of vulnerable groups, and the historical and social reasons for why these are subject to prejudice. However, this is not the case. The reasons for this was expressed by Bothner-By as one of the pitfalls during the making of the exhibition: “when you choose examples, to what degree do you amplify prejudice? When we think we should dissolve [prejudice], and instead we end up highlighting prejudice and they become stronger than they were” (Bothner-By pers.comm. 2017). Bettum expressed similar concerns: “it is implied that this is about the large groups in our time, the large vulnerable groups, it’s about immigrants, it’s about refugees, it’s about homosexuals, it’s about gender, it’s about all of these large themes. But the moment you take one group and show; ‘look how vulnerable these are’, you simply contribute to the stigmatization”, instead, the exhibition should “be about each of us as carriers of our own prejudices” (Bettum pers.comm. 2017).



Figure 7: Entrance to ‘The Anatomy of Prejudice’ and detail from ‘The Jungle of Prejudice’ (photo by Martine Scheen Jahnsen).

## FEAR

The last element to be analysed here is the cell room with the door labelled 'FEAR' (figure 8). The room is quite small and painted white, seemingly unchanged from the time it functioned as a prison cell. Upon entering the room, visitors are met with large posters of front pages and articles from a variety of Norwegian newspapers. Some of them are close to a normal newspaper size, while a few are resized into quite large proportions. The front pages and articles are all coverage of the increasing number of immigrants arriving in Norway, or the fear of Islamic extremists bringing terrorism to Norway. They include headlines such as; "*Islamic extremists are hunting Norwegians*", "*Fear that they will bring terrorism home to Europe*", and "*Oslo has become so unsafe that you don't know if you will return home alive*" (all my translations). There is also a TV-screen showing short clips from TV-series and films that use fear and its potential as a political weapon as a theme.

On the back of the door there are two text panels discussing 'fear of the unknown' and how 'fear begets danger' (figure 15). The text discussing 'fear of the unknown' contains two paragraphs which both are, like the introductory panel, structured as Expositions. The first paragraph opens with a statement (*Fear and the reaction 'fight or flee' is one of our most fundamental emotions*), followed by supporting arguments, and ends with a new statement (*Such impulsive reactions...can subsequently create new problems*). The next paragraph is structured in almost the same way, opening with the statement "*fear and anxiety of the unknown can be important factors in establishing and maintaining prejudice*", and is then followed by supporting arguments. The paragraph is ended with a new statement (*The best cure for phobias is exposure-treatment...*). However, this last statement can be seen to act as a proposal; the desired response is that visitors should acknowledge the fact that they should become exposed to their phobias in order to become less prejudiced. The second text 'fear begets danger', opens with a quote by the American philosopher Martha Nussbaum about how "*fear is a dimming preoccupation*". The next two paragraphs consist of two statements arguing that by "*contributing to a sentiment of fear*", politicians and the media can contribute to "*new social problems*". As such, this text can be seen as a clear reference to the front pages and articles hanging on the wall.

This room can be seen as an interesting example of what Ravelli terms *intersemiosis*, which is how the interaction of different semiotic modes creates an overall 'experience' that the visitor takes away from the exhibition (Ravelli 2006:151). One way of examining how different semiotic systems, such as the front pages and museum texts, contribute to this overall experience is by analysing the resources of *Appraisal* – attitudinal lexis which carry

some explicit attitude. Appraisal tends to be used to encode a point of view using either Affect (emotional reactions), Judgements (of people and their behaviour), or Appreciation (of aesthetic qualities) (Ravelli 2006:92). The newspaper articles and front pages use a combination of Affect (*Fears for Europe, Listhaug warns, Fear that they will bring terrorism home...*) and Judgement (*Everyone who claims they are not worried are lying, The politicians create fear*) in order to communicate an attitude of fear. This attitude is also enhanced by the museum by enlarging the size of some of the front pages a great deal, especially as some of the front pages include pictures of the 'stereotype terrorist'; a man with most of his face covered by a Palestinian scarf and holding a large gun. The exhibition text 'fear begets danger' also uses a combination of Affect (*a sentiment of fear...*) and Judgement (*When politicians and journalists use fear...*). However, in this case, the judgement is directed at the articles and front pages on display, clearly accusing them of "*creating new social problems*". As opposed to the introductory panel of the exhibition, this text takes a much more authoritative role. The visitors are expected to agree with the statements presented and acknowledge the potential danger that lies in the attitude expressed in the newspapers. Timothy Luke claims that "the goals of news production, like the goals of museum display, are to produce mass audiences and broad publics with particular needs and specific attitudes" (Luke 2002:204). As such the newspapers and the museum texts can be seen to compete in providing specific attitudes, but where the museum texts come across as the more authoritative. The sentence "*to contribute to a sentiment of fear without good reason*" brings with it an association with the recent phenomena of 'fake news' and enhances the idea of the museum as an institution to be trusted, as opposed to the news industry. As such, the intersemiosis created by the different semiotic modes in the 'fear' cell, is that of an experience where visitors are showed how journalists and politicians enhance a feeling of fear and xenophobia that ultimately will lead to new social problems. Visitors are encouraged to let themselves be exposed to whatever they fear, and as such let go of some of their prejudices.

As mentioned earlier, the exhibition as a whole can be seen as a macro-Exposition/Directive with an ultimate goal of making visitors more aware of their own prejudices. At the same time, the exhibition comes across as a mixture between an authoritative one and one that encourages participation. Some of the texts present very clear and strong statements that do not encourage a response (*Prejudice is a social problem*), while other elements, like the many interactive parts, actively invite to a co-creation of knowledge. As such, the exhibition can at times come across as quite moralising, something also noted by the museum staff: "The exhibition has a very clear language, it is at times quite strongly

moralising” (Özcan pers.comm. 2017). Taking a stance was important for the staff in the making of the exhibition. Bothner-By notes that it was important “to make it clear that we think prejudice is wrong. We don’t need to be neutral here, we can be a bit moralising. This is for the best, because we know what we say, clearly stating what *we* mean” (Bothner-By pers.comm. 2017). As such, the overall message communicated in the exhibition, is that visitors should reflect upon the actual meanings and effects of prejudice and become more aware of and critical towards one’s own set of prejudices. Thus, the exhibition is an interesting mix between letting visitors contribute with their own perceptions of prejudice, while at the same time being quite clear about the direction visitors should be influenced in.



Figure 8: The cell room titled ‘FEAR’. The front page reads «Islamic extremists hunting Norwegians» (photos by Martine Scheen Jahnsen).

## ***FOLK – FROM RACIAL TYPES TO DNA SEQUENCES***

In the same manner as *Typical*, the first thing that meets the visitor at the entrance to *FOLK* is an introductory panel with the title “From racial types to DNA sequences” written with white letters on a dark blue background (figure 16). The panel opens with a statement explaining how “race has a long history as scientific concept and research topic”. It then explains how this research has been used to legitimise much racist thinking such as colonialism and nationalism. It states that some of these ideas are still present in our society, and the panel ends with an explanation of how the exhibition sheds light on both historical and contemporary research, and how this research affects both whole societies as well as the lives of individuals. Following the same genre types as introduced earlier, this text can be seen as an *Exposition*, an argument put forward in an attempt to influence visitors to agree (Ravelli 2006:22). The text opens with a statement (*Race has a long history...*) which then is followed by supporting arguments. A new statement is then presented (*However, outdated race science ideas continue to affect us...*) making the contemporary relevance of the exhibition clear. The text finishes by explaining to the visitor how these statements will be elaborated on in the exhibition (*FOLK shows several examples...*). That this text is an *Exposition* trying to influence the visitors’ opinion is made clear by the second statement (*outdated race science ideas continue to affect us, and racism still exists in our societies*). The visitors will be convinced of this statement by viewing “several examples” of both contemporary and historical research in the exhibition, and “*the interactions between science, society and culture*”. The text ends with an almost warning-like sentence, that the exhibition will point to “*the profound consequences that such research can have for society and the lives of individuals*”. This text reflects the aims presented by both Curators during our interviews. As expressed by Ageliki Lefkakitou:

I think the main goal for me would be to bring to the public discussion an issue that has been tabooed, it has not been discussed publicly: how have we in this society, but also internationally, been dealing with human diversity, how we, and specifically science, have been looking at human diversity, and whether this has changed so radically or not, and reflect on more nuanced issues that has to do with the relationship between science and society, science and politics, science and culture (...) (Lefkakitou pers.comm. 2017).

Jon Kyllingstad explained how they want to influence the visitors by “problematizing both historical research and the modern contemporary research on this field. Not just negatively

criticize, but problematize, contribute so that people can reflect upon how research is undertaken and is practised in society” (Kyllingstad pers.comm. 2017).

In a sense, the whole exhibition can be termed a ‘macro-Exposition’. As Kyllingstad stated in our interview: “we do wish to influence people in a certain direction. (...) influence people to think sensibly about the questions that we address” (Kyllingstad pers.comm. 2017). However, most of the texts in the exhibition can in fact be characterized by what Ravelli terms *Reports* and *Explanations* (2006:20-21). Report is a very common genre in museum texts and is used primarily to describe something, and thereby conveying knowledge about the object, article or phenomenon reported on (e.g. *Sliding caliper: This instrument was used for measuring details on the human body...*). Explanations are also a common genre and used to explain how things happen, or why things are as they are, in order to capture events and phenomena (e.g. *Race hygiene and the Nordic race in Norway: In the early 1900s, it was common to divide humanity into a hierarchy of races*). What still makes this exhibition a macro-Exposition is the fact that the main texts, used for each new section in the exhibition, can be termed as Expositions. These are separated from the remaining texts by having a thick red frame around the text and encompass more overarching themes (figure 17 and 18). As opposed to the texts accompanying individual objects and events, these main texts include elements that makes it clear how they aim at influencing the visitors, e.g. “*a new encounter with these unusual and surprising objects challenges us to rethink the ways people and cultures have been stereotyped, romanticised, and valued – in the past, present, and future*” and “*we invite you to use the objects collected here to contemplate and discuss these objects*”.

These sentences are also good examples of what type of *role* the museum takes in relation to its visitors (Ravelli 2006:73). The texts use suggestions and invitations to involve visitors in an active exploration of the different elements in the exhibition and encourage reflection and discussion. Unlike the texts termed as Reports and Explanations, which use a conventional, authoritative presentation of knowledge, the Exposition texts invite visitors to a much larger degree to participate in the construction of knowledge (Ravelli 2006:73). The use of personal pronouns such as ‘us’, ‘we’ and ‘you’ also creates a much closer relationship, presenting the museum and the visitors as equals (Ravelli 2006:85). This is also exemplified in the introductory text: “*outdated race science ideas continue to affect us, and racism still exist in our societies*”. (These are not just problems of the past but have an impact on all of us). This text has however a somewhat more authoritative tone to it. A sentence such as “*FOLK shows...*” represents a slightly less personal way of addressing the visitors, and thereby creating a bit more distance. However, it is clear that the aim of the exhibition is to

convince the visitors that outdated ideas about race are still present in today's society and that it is important to rethink and discuss the interactions between science, society, and culture, in order to further understand the consequences such ideas might have.

### **The Curiosity Cabinet**

A section of the exhibition that clearly encourages reflection is the curiosity cabinet (figure 9). The cabinet is introduced by a text panel which asserts the origin and original purpose of the curiosity cabinets and how this is a new 21<sup>st</sup>-century version (figure 17). The curiosity cabinets started in the Renaissance and held objects obtained through colonialism. According to the text the cabinets “*exhibited the European desire to capture and classify the world*”. This new cabinet is meant to challenge the visitors to “*rethink the ways people and cultures have been stereotyped, romanticized, and valued – in the past, present, and future*”. As already mentioned, this text is one of the main exhibition texts which makes the exhibition as a whole a macro-Exposition. The sentence “*...these unusual and surprising objects challenges us to rethink...*” encourages participation and reflection on part of the visitor and invites the visitor to agree with the statements presented in the introductory text (*...race science ideas continue to affect us, and racism still exist in our societies*).

The cabinet exhibits a variety of objects, all of which seem intended to serve as examples of how people and cultures have been stereotyped, romanticised and valued, and are all accompanied by small text labels. There are objects exemplifying how people have been classified, such as wax ethnographic busts that were common in European museum during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a set of sixty small phrenology heads, a hair colour chart used for typological racial classification etc. There are objects showing how people have been stereotyped, such as an anti-Semitic caricature from a Norwegian magazine from the 1920s, a drawing of “Mr. Bullock’s Laplander exhibition”, an exhibition in London in 1822 where a Sami family were exhibited alongside a small reindeer herd, and there are objects showing how people have been glorified, such as a Norwegian postcard from 1935 containing a drawing of the ‘Nordic race’. The cabinet also contains examples of reactions toward classification and stereotyping, such as anti-racism campaigns and posters from the post-war period.





Figure 9: The 'curiosity cabinet' in *FOLK* (photo by Håkon Bergseth/Norwegian Museum of Science and Technology).

The following analysis will focus on three of the displays in the cabinet (figure 10). They have been chosen as they exemplify some of the overarching messages communicated in the exhibition. The displays are located at the back of the cabinet, making visitors walk around almost the whole structure to encounter them. They are quite small and placed above one another in a straight vertical line. The middle display shows a chromatic scale used from 1900 until the mid-nineteenth century in order to racially classify people. The display above it contains contemporary whitening and self-tan creams, while the display below contains a miniature classical statue. By placing these displays in a straight line, and quite close to each other, the objects appear as associated with each other and, together with other visual and textual elements, allows for a certain creation of meaning (Moser 2010:27). By using Stephanie Moser's framework for display analysis, as well as Ravelli's textual analysis, I will examine how different elements participate in influencing visitors to 'read' the displays in a certain way. The choice of colour and lighting for example, can say something about the emotional response and mood which is expected from the visitors (Moser 2010:26; Ravelli 2006:133). The dark grey colour of the cabinet wall conveys a serious mood, eliciting a more contemplative response from visitors. This is enhanced by the use of a dim yellow light to illuminate the objects, which in turn promotes a sense of wonderment, defining the objects as mysterious and intriguing (Moser 2010:26). However, the individual lighting of the objects



elevates their significance, signalling to the visitors that they are to be regarded as important. This design brings to mind the original purpose of the curiosity cabinets, namely one of systematizing and classifying the world, as well as creating a sense of wonder (Mauriès 2002). However, as opposed to the Renaissance trend of using every available surface for display, the limited number of items on display here emphasise the value of the objects as active participants in the exhibition message. Also the inclusion of only one or two objects in each display case makes the objects effective in their communication of specific meanings (Moser 2010:27). The small size of the displays adds to this, presenting the objects as individual ‘stories’ that can be engaged with on a more personal and questioning level (Moser 2010:25). As such, the miniature statue can by itself stand as an example of Western classical perceptions of beauty, while the creams can represent the strange things that people do to themselves in order to become more attractive. However, by placing them in association to each other, a different narrative is created, which is possible for visitors to ‘read’ when they move through the exhibition (Moser 2010:27).

The ordering and vertical arrangement of the displays also signals a certain semantic relation. The ordering could be seen as a chronological one, with antiquity represented by the miniature statue at the bottom, then the chromatic scale dating to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, while the contemporary period is represented by the creams. However, this ordering could also express other logics, for example how the establishments of ideal beauty has changed, or the different ways in which physical appearance has been measured and valued throughout history. The vertical, rather than horizontal, arrangement also forces visitors to ‘read’ either upwards or downwards. A chronological arrangement can, traditionally, make statements about the level of cultural attainments of particular cultures, while vertical readings often are associated with hierarchy, where the items placed at the top have the value of the *ideal* (Moser 2010:26; Ravelli 2006:128). As such, the creams in the top display might be read as an ‘apex’ of a certain type of cultural attainment. However, this is clearly not the case here. If any, it would seem that the ordering here is actively subverting this traditional reading, where the creams can be said to stand for the fact that we are still not rid of these archaic notions of the ideal appearance.



Figure 10: Detail of display cases in the curiosity cabinet (photos by Martine Scheen Jahnsen).

The texts accompanying the objects also make it clear that these objects are connected and meant to function as examples of how skin colour is related to classification and different ideas of beauty (figure 19). The texts might appear, at first glance, as conventional Reports and Explanations, however, all texts include certain resources of Appraisal that incorporate an explicit attitude (Ravelli 2006:91). The chromatic scale is accompanied by a small text which explains that this scale consists of 36 glass tiles that were used to racially classify people according to their skin colour. The text uses Judgement (*Although criticized as subjective and imprecise, the scale was used internationally from 1900 until the mid-twentieth century*), creating a critical stance toward the object. This is enhanced by the use of the phrase “*racial classification*” in the description of its use, as this is something that, for most people, conjures negative associations. The text accompanying the self-tan and whitening cream also uses Judgement when it asserts that when people use these creams they “*conform to dominant cultural stereotypes*” even though skin colour is “*the characteristic most associated with racial thinking*”. Again, the words “*stereotypes*” and “*racial thinking*” bring to mind negative connotations. The miniature statue is, according to the text, given to the exhibition by a member of the museum staff (this is the case for several of the objects in the cabinet). She

explains in the text that this figure represents her high-school years in the Netherlands, which were filled with pictures of the perfect human beings, namely the Romans and Greeks. She then goes on to problematize the connection between these notions of perfect, classic, pure, divine, and the whiteness of the statue. She ends with proclaiming yet another Judgement, that “*Society is obsessed with whiteness*”. As such, by juxtaposing these objects, visitors are encouraged to view them critically, and at the same time draw parallels between the different ideas of race and skin colour that are connected to them. The act of displaying modern material culture together with older artefacts can, as suggested by Moser, function as interpretative aids, i.e. that an attempt is made to place the objects in certain contexts (Moser 2010:28). The self-tan and whitening cream for example, might appear as innocent and unproblematic if viewed in a different context, but takes on a much more serious and problematic effect when displayed in connection to the chromatic scale. The same goes for the miniature statue. However, the meaning embedded in this last object is enhanced by the personal story presented with it and might not be agreed upon by all visitors.

These three displays function to create a certain narrative when displayed together but are also a part of the narrative created by the cabinet as a whole. The combination of older and contemporary artefacts and their placement in separate display cases, allows visitors to ‘read’ the displays as separate stories, while at the same time creating effective links between past and present ideas and research methods. Likewise, the association to the Renaissance cabinets created by the title and the design of the cabinet adds to a sense of wonder, but at the same time marks the objects and ideas as something from the past, as outdated. Thus, the semiotic systems represented in the introduction text, the design and the objects all point to the same overarching message: that racial ideas from the past can still be found in the present, and that we need to understand these ideas in order to tackle them in the future. This can also be seen in one of the aims expressed by Kyllingstad, that they want to convince visitors of the fact: “(...) that simple conceptions of race or ethnic groups has little to do with reality. The traditional conceptions that you can split the world into simple categories, that is, such closed categories, to which there is tied a lot of characteristics (...)” (Kyllingstad pers.comm. 2017).

### **The Archive**

Another element in the exhibition which juxtaposes past and present ideas is the second, round structure in the centre of the exhibition space, named the archive (figure 5, 11, 12). As mentioned in the previous chapter, the archive consists of four sections of rounded open shelves filled with different objects. As explained by an introduction text placed at one of the

openings to the archive, the archive “*represents scientific practices as efforts to reach the truth through changing theories, methods, and techniques*” (figure 18). The objects in the archive are all examples of studies of human variation and consist of instruments and objects used for measuring and classifying humans; books, drawings and charts by prominent researchers; books on anti-racism; pictures from reburials of human remains in Norway and in New Zealand; facial reconstructions of Viking Age and medieval skulls; objects from contemporary genetics and DNA research, and so on. All the objects are accompanied by small informational text panels.

All the shelves are open, enabling the visitors to stand inside the archive and still see the exhibition and the other visitors on the outside. The four sections of shelves also mirror to an extent the part of the exhibition which is located on the outside. So, at the part of the exhibition where the photos from the surveys conducted by Alette and Kristian Schreiner are presented, the archive contains objects such as an instrument used by anthropologists to measure angles on a skull, charts and scales used to observe and describe eye and hair colour, and books with the work of both Alette and Kristian Schreiner. At the part where racial science between the 1920s and 50s is presented, the archive exhibits work done by racial hygienists at the time, such as theories about both racial and social hygiene, as well as examples of scientific anti-racism aimed at educating people in both the US and Norway. Where the exhibition presents the contemporary science studying human variation, through a series of interviews shown on flatscreens, the archive presents projects such as the Human Genome Diversity Project, a computer showing what genetic material from DNA samples look like, and facial reconstructions of both Viking Age and medieval skulls. This creation of several *vectors* (Ravelli 2006:124), produced by the sequencing of similar themes and objects, realises a connection between the science presented in the archive to the larger social and political themes presented on the outside. It reflects the main aim of the exhibition, as expressed in an internal interpretation document at the museum<sup>5</sup>: “The exhibition’s main aim is to portray science as a truth-seeking practice that is not static and fixed but in a continuous negotiation between past and present knowledge, as well as embedded in society and culture”.

Several aspects of the archive also actively invite interaction from the visitors. Below the shelves in the archive are several drawers which the public can open and close as they please. In the drawers are several more objects connected to the objects on the shelves. The act of letting the visitors interact with the exhibition, even if it is just opening and closing

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<sup>5</sup> The author was given permission to use this document after personal communication with Ageliki Lefkadiou.

drawers, makes the museum seem less authoritative, encouraging visitors to ‘discover’ knowledge on their own (Ravelli 2006:73). This is enhanced by the last sentence in the introduction text to the archive: “*We invite you to use the objects collected here to contemplate and discuss these topics*”. This invitation might then lead to a wish expressed by Lefkadiou:

One thing I want people to go away with is feeling empowered, that we can examine science and interrogate science, and how science works in society without missing the point that science is an activity that is searching for the truth. It may be that this truth is not achievable, it’s an aim and it’s a goal, and this is a continuous process, and this is why we need to examine that process (Lefkadiou pers.comm. 2017).

The sentence in the introduction text is, however, the only place in the archive where the visitors are openly encouraged to reflect and discuss. The remainder of the small text panels accompanying the objects can be termed Reports and Explanations, as explained previously. They mainly describe or explain the objects, theories or methods on display. There are for example no use of questions or strong statements which demand a more explicit response from the visitors. This low-key subjectivity was also stated by Kyllingstad in our interview: “We discussed [how explicit we should be] a lot. In the project group there were many voices that wanted to avoid being too didactic, (...) that it is important to avoid a too explicit exhibition, that people should think for themselves, be more open for reflection rather than one-way learning” (Kyllingstad pers.comm. 2017). However, there are times when the opinion of the curators does shine through. In the shelf section devoted to contemporary science, two of the drawers contain some highly controversial books, namely *The Bell Curve* published in 1994 and *A Troublesome Inheritance* published in 2014, which both ended up being best-sellers (figures 13, 20). According to short texts accompanying these books, they both caused much anger among liberal academic communities as they reproduce stereotypes as well as being highly prejudice by presenting arguments linking intelligence, social behaviour and IQ with racial differences. The headings of the two texts accompanying the books, namely “*Twentieth-century scientific racism*” and “*Twenty-first-century scientific racism*” makes the position of the curators toward these books quite clear. The texts also use different forms of *Appraisal* as a resource for incorporating opinion (Ravelli 2006:92). For example, the sentence “*The book caused outrage among liberal intellectuals for its overt endorsement of prejudice*” uses both Affect (*caused outrage*) and Judgement (*its overt endorsement of prejudice*) to evoke a negative attitude towards the book. In the same manner,

a sentence from the second text; “*Wade speculated on results of genetic studies and reproduced insulting stereotypes*” uses Judgment (*reproduced insulting stereotypes*) to arouse a similar attitude. The stance taken here was also one voiced by Lefkadiou during our interview:

I want people to know that the curators who made this exhibition have this point of view, but I am a little bit still debating, not on the knowledge topics, the knowledge issues, for that I am sure, I feel secure, I know there are no races. I don't doubt that we should not say that this is not a scientific controversy. If this issue is controversial, it is not because of what we know from science, but because of how science has been used and is being used, and because of the power relations in society that makes racism not go away (Lefkadiou pers.comm. 2017).

Kyllingstad had a similar view: “(...) there is a debate regarding this concept of race, that some defend and some use without thinking. We do have a clear stance that this is a way of thought which is neither scientifically meaningful or socially good” (Kyllingstad pers.comm. 2017). With this last quote as a backdrop, the elements analysed here; the texts, the cabinet of curiosities, and the archive, all contribute to making *FOLK* a complex exhibition which combines several different semiotic systems. Historical and contemporary theories and methods are continuously juxtaposed, both through the use of objects, but also through the different associations created by the exhibition design. The visitors are invited to discuss the issues on display and to ‘encounter’ knowledge on their own but are at the same time encouraged to agree with the overall messages communicated in the exhibition.



Figure 11: Inside ‘the archive’ (photo by Håkon Bergseth/Norwegian Museum of Science and Technology).





Figure 12: Details from ‘the archive’. Top right: Martin’s eye colour chart. Bottom right: A sliding caliper used for measuring details on the human body (photo to the left by Håkon Bergseth/Norwegian Museum of Science and Technology. Photos to the right by Martine Scheen Jahnsen).

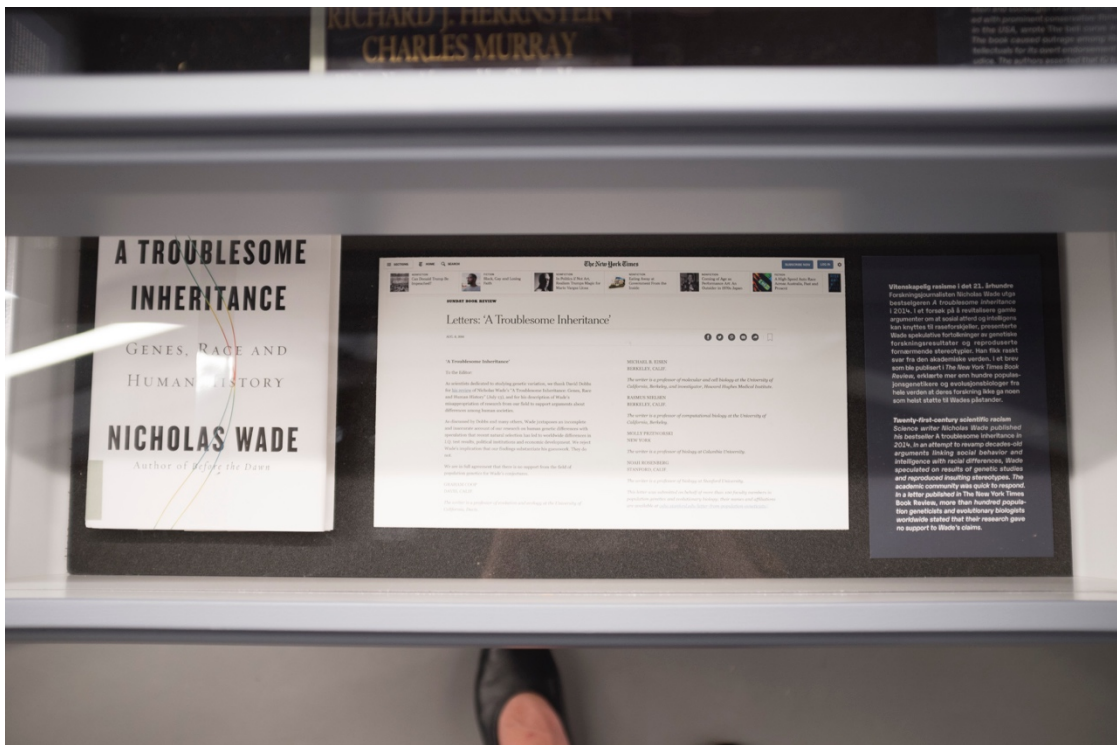


Figure 13: Details from ‘the archive’. The book *A Troublesome Inheritance*. The book *The Bell Curve* is just visible in the top of the photo (photo by Martine Scheen Jahnsen).

## 5. DISCUSSION

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### **Social issues on display**

As shown in the analysis, the two exhibitions *Typical* and *FOLK* respond to the divisive issues and discourses apparent in the Norwegian society in different ways. In *Typical*, ICM has used a very explicit way of communicating their position, with the clear message that prejudice is a social problem. Already in the introductory text, visitors are made aware that the exhibition is a response to the contemporary frictions caused by people's different feelings about a growing multicultural society. The examples of hate speech and the use of fear by the media and politicians to secure more votes and readers, presented in the rooms labelled 'HATE' and 'FEAR' respectively, make it clear how this exhibition is a direct response to the polarizing and troublesome discourse that is becoming more prominent in Norway during recent years. At times, the exhibition comes across as quite moralising, which is enhanced by certain textual elements encouraging people to respond and reflect in a certain way (e.g. '*Pigeonhole yourself!*', '*Share your prejudices!*', '*...we consider prejudice as a social problem*'). The many interactive elements also mirror the aim presented in the application to the Arts Council, that one of the purposes of the exhibition is to "assign accountability to the individual" (Arts Council Norway 2015b). As such, the exhibition does point to specific contemporary social issues and debates, but also makes it clear that prejudices are something affecting all of us, and something that everyone can work with in order to create a better and more inclusive society.

*FOLK* on the other hand is much less explicit in its communication. The link to contemporary social issues is subtler and the position of the museum is not as clearly stated as in *Typical*. This is partly because the *FOLK* exhibition is much more object-oriented in its appearance. It is easier to make clear statements through text, while objects have a bigger potential for multiple meanings. However, the message that race as a concept used to explain human variation is socially and scientifically problematic does come across quite clearly, both through implicit associations created by the juxtaposing of past and present research methods, values and ideas, but also through more explicit messages, such as Nazi propaganda posters and examples from the eugenics movement. There are also several elements in the exhibition which create clear associations to contemporary public debates, such as one of the flat screens showing several scholars discussing human diversity, race and racism today. Even though none of the scholars addresses issues in Norway specifically, the themes discussed, such as



how a belief in races can lead to racism, that race is a social construction, and that all people in fact are 99,9% similar, is transferable to current discussions in Norway. This is also the case with the display of the two books *The Bell Curve* and *A Troublesome Inheritance*. For example, recent examinations of social media pages connected to far-right movements in Norway show that both the concept of race, and the idea that certain groups of immigrants have ‘lower IQ’, is, in fact, alive and well among the users of these pages (Bangstad 2017:247). Even subtler ways of taking a stand in the exhibition, such as the three displays containing the miniature statue, the chromatic scale, and the whitening and self-tan creams, point to specific contemporary problems in the Norwegian society, namely how people are treated and valued based on their appearance. The report published by The Norwegian Centre Against Racism in 2017, mentioned in the introduction, states that most of the youths interviewed in their survey had experienced discriminatory or disparaging abuse or comments about their looks, religion or background (Antirasistisk senter 2017:17).

Even though the exhibitions come across as quite different in their communication, a similarity between them can be seen in the way they position themselves in relation to their visitors. Even though *Typical* has more interactive elements, they both use textual and design elements that enhance an equal relationship between the institutions and the visitors and encourage interaction and co-production of knowledge. This emphasis on visitor participation is a consequence of some major shifts in museums’ concerns with visitor relations which has developed alongside the introduction of the ‘new museology’ over the last 20 years. These shifts are central to the concept of the *post-museum* (Hooper-Greenhill 2000), where communication has changed from that of the modernist museum – an authoritative opinion communicated as a one-way method of mass communication, and where the voice of the visitor was not heard – to that of the post-museum – a communication of many voices and many perspectives, where dynamic and responsive relations with visitors are enacted (Hooper-Greenhill 2000:151-152; Ravelli 2006:71). Instead of playing the role of an authoritative expert, the post-museum plays a role in partnership with the visitors, where the public is invited to explore information and ideas, and by this allow them to participate in the formation of knowledge (Ravelli 2006:72). As such, by actively involving the visitors, the exhibitions *Typical* and *FOLK* can be seen to shift some of the responsibility from the museums, as visitors no longer are regarded as passive recipients of knowledge. By including interactive elements, visitors are encouraged to reflect upon their own role in contemporary social issues. These inclusive elements might then help both museums in reaching their goals of influencing visitors in a certain direction.

## **Activism and social agency**

How the exhibitions respond to contemporary social issues and debates, as well as how aims and concerns are expressed by the museum staff, can all be seen to be elements connected to an activist museum practice. Even though not all of my informants viewed their exhibitions as activist, I will argue that elements from both exhibitions fit with the definitions of an activist practice given previously in this thesis. However, as shown by the difference between these two exhibitions, an activist approach can take many forms. ICM was in fact “a result of activism”, according to curator Bothner-By. The founder, Bente Møller, had as her main aim “that we must open the museums to diversity, everyone must have the opportunity to see themselves, their history, in our cultural institutions” (Bothner-By pers.comm. 2017). Bettum asserted in our interview that ICM does lean toward an activist approach:

It is absolutely an objective, to maintain a bit of an activist role. We are in that line of thought, and we cheer the activists, but whether we qualify as activists ourselves, I don't dare answer. ICM has always had a clear political position (...) it's a very clear message that we have come with, which we stand for and have never tried to hide (Bettum pers.comm. 2017).

The *FOLK* exhibition can also be said to have elements from an activist approach, as they want to function as a space where visitors dare to ask questions. Lefkadiou expressed that:

We want people to feel empowered to ask questions which they might think are tabooed. And that they can put things on the table, like ‘should we use the terms race and ethnicity in medical research? What does it mean if we do so?’ Or questions like ‘but I do see that there is all this diversity around me, why does it match or not match with the proposition that there are no human races?’ Questions that maybe people are afraid to ask, because if they ask them they will be seen as racist, or seen as holding on to stereotypes (Lefkadiou pers.comm. 2017).

As such, the museum might function as a ‘safe place for unsafe ideas’ (Casey 2001:233). However, this notion of ‘unsafe ideas’ is, as argued in chapter 2, not necessarily something that is actually possible, or desirable, in many museums. For example, holocaust denial will by many be seen as an ‘unsafe idea’, but many museums will probably not be willing to give this viewpoint a voice in their exhibition spaces. As such, the ideas which are actually possible to voice within museums might be argued to still exist within a certain political and social consensus. The same can be argued for the notion of ‘activism’ in museums. For many Western European museums, functioning within a liberal democratic discourse, there is no doubt that it is important to promote diversity, equality, human rights etc. However, as noted

by Chantal Mouffe, by acknowledging the ‘hegemonic’ nature of every kind of social order, it is also important to recognise that what at a given moment is “accepted as the ‘natural’ order, jointly with the common sense that accompanies it, is the result of sedimented hegemonic practices” (Mouffe 2013:2). Raimundo Panikkar, for example, has illustrated how our understanding of ‘human rights’ is, to a large extent, culturally dependent (Mouffe 2013:30; Panikkar 1982). As such, according to Mouffe, the liberal democratic model, with its particular concept of human rights, has developed within a specific cultural and historical context. She argues that even though this is a form of life worthy of our allegiance, there is no reason to present it as the only legitimate way of organizing human coexistence (2013:29).

In the same manner, ‘activism’ is usually presented as something that brings about ‘positive change’. However, in the same manner as ‘unsafe ideas’ is not an objective notion, the idea of what is meant as ‘positive change’ is not universal either. In fact, what is presented as ‘positive change’ in many Western European museums leaning toward a more activist approach is the idea of liberal progressive politics where multiculturalism is championed, and where difference is accepted or even promoted (Whitehead, et al. 2015:46). However, as exemplified in *Typical*, not everyone shares the view that this change is positive. The point here is that while the promotion of liberal ideas of diversity, equality and human rights *should* be explicitly expressed in museums, it is still important to acknowledge the existence of other political and moral orders, and that instead of silencing or ignoring them, these antagonisms should be recognised in order to create an adequate response to them (Mouffe 2013, 2016; Whitehead, et al. 2015). This does not mean that those who believe in ideas such as holocaust denial should be ‘given platform’ in museums, but that through historicizing them contextually they can be made into “objects of distanced scrutiny” (Whitehead, et al. 2015:46). *FOLK* does this, to an extent, by presenting the history of the eugenics movement and the idea of the ‘Nordic race’, and how this came to be actively used by the Nazi party. These ideas are experiencing an upsurge in contemporary Norway, and should therefore be critically scrutinised, in order to combat them effectively.

Similar thoughts are expressed by Fiona Cameron. According to her, an important aspect of museums aiming to participate in a promotion of ‘social activism’ is that museums can have the potential to foster critical thinking skills and by that “better equip people to deal with claims and counter claims they see in the media, and to ask questions and share those questions with other audiences” (Cameron 2003:41). Elements of this can be seen in some activities organised at NMoST in connection to *FOLK*. In addition to the exhibition itself, the museum organised a series of public lectures and specially themed guided tours both before

and after the opening of the exhibition. According to Gro Ellefsen, who is in charge of the programmes at NMoST, the aim of the programmes after the exhibition opening is “to get a dialogue with the visitors” and that the most important aspect with the exhibition is “that we try to, both ourselves, and the visitors, give ourselves a vocabulary to talk about these things, so that it actually becomes a subject” (Ellefsen pers.comm. 2017).

The *FOLK* exhibition is an especially good example of what both Cameron and Whitehead et al. argue for (as presented in chapter 2), namely that museums should identify, contextualise and historicise divisive opinions around contemporary topics, create awareness and facilitate discussions, and thereby act as sites for social activism (Cameron 2003; Whitehead, et al. 2015). The exhibition historicises racial science by showing several case studies where racial studies have been performed and how these studies came to be used as arguments for the later eugenics movement and the Nazi regime. At the same time, past and present objects, theories and ideas are juxtaposed throughout the exhibition, creating links between the different ways of studying human variation. As stated in the internal interpretation document: “The meeting between past and present of human biological diversity research is pervasive throughout our exhibit. The two are not separated or narrated in a linear way that proceeds from bad racial science to a race-free and unproblematic contemporary science”. By juxtaposing interwar racial science with contemporary genetics and DNA research, ideas about race and human variation are contextualised, allowing the visitors to understand some of the origins of these ideas, while at the same time showing how they continue to affect both science, societies and individuals today. As such, the relevance of the exhibition is made clear. As explained by Kyllingstad:

(...) the increase in racism and identity thinking, about ethnic Norwegianness and such-like is more fiercely on the agenda again, and it’s more common to link this to biology, and many have started gathering arguments from genetics and DNA-research in those circumstances. The increase in the market for self-testing of DNA contributes to this discussion about ethnicity and heritage, which after my opinion has some similarities and continuity with the old racial thinking (Kyllingstad pers.comm. 2017).

By emphasising a nuanced representation and not “making a simple black-and-white picture of heroes and villains, victims and offenders” (Kyllingstad pers.comm. 2017) the museum can be seen to offer a reflective space in order to allow visitors to “really understand foundational beliefs and divergent opinions around topics” (Cameron 2003:40). As such, by showing the genealogy of contemporary notions of ethnicity and heritage, and how this is presented in social debates, the museum makes it possible for visitors to come to more critical and

complex understandings of these issues, rather than drawing simplistic (and maybe wrong) conclusions to complicated questions.

*Typical* also does this to some extent by highlighting a concrete problem resulting from the tensions implicit in a more multicultural society. Instead of making solely partisan statements about the benefits of a more diverse society, they point to the real social issue of prejudice and explain its origin and possible outcomes. However, as prejudice in itself is an abstract concept, the exhibition might have been even more effective if it did attempt to trace the genealogy of some specific form of prejudice. Although, as already expressed by the museum staff, if you exhibit an example, you do run the risk of doing more damage than good and end up increasing the prejudice you want to diminish. Instead, Bettum and Özcan (2018) argue, in a newly published book, how the inclusion of a polyphony of different statements and attitudes in the exhibition, also those that the museum might not share or represent, creates opportunities for the museum to facilitate a democratic debate, and enables the museum to voice its opinion in current social debates. Through a selection of voices, the museum also has a chance to highlight those that are not heard through other channels, and to illuminate uncomfortable, marginalised and controversial themes (Bettum and Özcan 2018:216-217). As such, the many interactive elements in *Typical*, such as ‘The Jungle of Prejudice’, can be seen as an attempt to “foster critical thinking skills” (Cameron 2003:41) by encouraging visitors to participate, and share their thoughts with other visitors.

### **Roles and expectations**

When working with a more activist approach, museum staff also encounter broader political, structural and social forces, such as visitor expectations and government guidelines, which can both limit and enhance this work. ICM and NMoST are for example, in the cultural landscape of Oslo, two quite different institutions. ICM is located close to the city centre, in one of the most multicultural neighbourhoods of Oslo. The marketing reflected through the museum’s website is one that focus on the neighbourhood and themes related to multiculturalism. NMoST is located in one of Oslo’s suburbs and is highly popular among school children and families, mainly due to the interactive science centre in the basement. Consequently, a lot of the marketing seems to be focused on this part of the museum. These factors have certain implications for how an activist practice might be carried out at the museums.

Özcan asserts that one of the advantages of ICM is its position as an institution standing between the majority population and the many minorities living at Grønland, a

neighbourhood inhabiting over 170 different ethnicities (Özcan pers.comm. 2017). He explains that the position of the museum is a highly interesting one as they have the ability to negotiate the wishes and demands from both the majority and the minorities: “It is a constant battle, you have almost infinite possibilities to build an exhibition” (Özcan pers.comm. 2017). This unique position would seem as a perfect one for taking on an activist role. However, the position the museum has taken in the museum landscape of Oslo could also work somewhat against it. As Bettum commented: “ICM gets away with anything. We try to trigger the press, we try deliberately to provoke, to do untraditional things. But it’s just like water off a duck’s back because people expect it from ICM” (Bettum pers.comm. 2017).

NMoST is, as mentioned, often associated with technology and the family-friendly science centre. As stated by Lefkadiou: “In most people’s minds this museum is more about fancy cars and fancy machines and a place where people can play with their children”. However, she also asserts that “what we are doing is that we are trying to change this perception of the museum, to accommodate these other activities and other exhibitions and objects that we have at the museum, and also these more reflective exhibitions” (Lefkadiou pers.comm. 2017). Ellefsen also voiced similar aims: “...for the museum it is important to show that we work with history of science. That is something which is under-communicated, and people react, especially when we had the “Typical Norwegian” meeting, it could be seen to fall a bit outside our mandate” (Ellefsen pers.comm 2017). The “Typical Norwegian” meeting was one of the public meetings held at the museum prior to the exhibition opening. The aim of the meeting was to generate a discussion about identity, belonging and heritage, and discuss questions such as ‘what is a typical Norwegian?’ and ‘do you have to be white to be accepted as ‘Norwegian?’’. The comment section in the Facebook-event made for this meeting showed that not everyone saw the relevance of the meeting at this particular museum, and the museum was accused of being made into a political tool where some ‘activists’, clearly not interested in the museum’s true mandate, were influencing the museum in a certain direction (Teknisk museum 2017). This comment mirrors one of the worries mentioned by Lefkadiou: “I would be a bit disappointed if people did not see why this exhibition fits in a museum of science and technology. ‘Why is this an exhibition that is not happening at the Folk museum or Ethnographic museum?’” (Lefkadiou pers.comm. 2017).

The examples mentioned here point to some of the problems posed by an activist approach when actually put into practice. ICM has, throughout its entire history, exhibited brave, controversial and difficult themes, which, as a result, might have reduced their ability to generate much surprise. An activist approach will have less effect as people expect it. What

might be different with this exhibition though, is that the primary audience consists of high school students. These students might not have encountered exhibitions like this previously and will potentially be more susceptible to the messages in the exhibition. Also, as stated by Mark O’Neil, museums tend to preach to the converted – that is, audiences that hold similar views and values as museum staff – but that it is still a valid exercise as everyone has pockets of prejudice (paraphrased in Cameron 2003:20). NMoST, on the other hand, experiences quite the opposite, as visitors have a very clear idea of what the museum is about, an idea which probably does not involve themes such as those expressed in *FOLK*. Their status as a family friendly museum might lead some to view it as a site inappropriate for exhibitions leaning toward social activism. However, the public talks and guided tours given both before and after the opening of the exhibition can be viewed as an attempt to ‘convince’ visitors of the exhibition’s relevance at this museum.

The activist approaches, as defined here, are also in line with visions and statutes at both museums. As mentioned in the NMoST’s vision and strategy plan<sup>6</sup> “the museum shall be an active participant in society and contribute in the social debate with a clear voice” (my translation), while in the statutes of Oslo Museum (which ICM is a part of), one of the museums purposes is expressed as follows: “The institution shall be in dialogue with and mirror the society which the museum is a part of. The museum shall contribute to foster respect and understanding for cultural diversity, cultural processes of change and majority/minority questions in the past and the present” (Oslo Museum 2006, my translation). As such, both the curators and the museums themselves emphasise a wish to participate in social debates. However, they can be seen to be somewhat limited by the roles and expectations placed upon them. All the same, by making exhibitions like these, the museums might hopefully contribute to convincing visitors of the fact that museums are “complex entities” and not “neutral sheltering places for objects” (Duncan 1995:1).

### **Governmentality**

An expressly activist practice within museums might also lead to criticism from actors other than just visitors. For example, a recent debate in Swedish media shows that there is an existing fear of museums becoming party political. Swedish culture has, during recent years, been strongly affected by a norm critical method – a method used to highlight how norms tied

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<sup>6</sup> Permission to use the document was given to the author after personal communication with Ageliki Lefkadiou.

to gender, sexuality, functionality, skin colour, and religion works limiting and can lead to discrimination. Critics claim that, by focusing on norm criticism, the current Swedish government, and primarily the Minister of Culture, are using the museums as political tools in order to fight right-wing populism, and that the museums should stick to their original mandate of collecting, preserving, and exhibiting artefacts (Klassekampen 2016). A similar large-scale debate has not appeared in Norway yet, but some cases, such as the Facebook comment mentioned above, show that similar concerns exist here as well.

Also, several cases from abroad have shown that politically-motivated interference in museums can be a very real experience for many museum professionals. One of the most recent high-profile cases is the Polish government's move to take over the new Museum of the Second World War in Gdansk in order to tell a narrower perspective of the war (Adams 2018). In response to this and other similar cases ICOM has issued a statement on the independence of museums (ICOM 2018). The statement says that “regardless of their funding source or governance model, museums should maintain control of the content and integrity of their programs, exhibitions and activities”, and that “the high level of professional and institutional integrity and autonomy of museums should not be jeopardised by financial or political interests”.

Even though government intervention is not a big issue for Norwegian museums, the fact that governmental guidelines for the last 20 years have pushed the notion of the ‘societal role’ of museums, with a growing emphasis on diversity and inclusion, might lead some to claim that the museums are being “recast as exercises of governmentality” (Luke 2002:3), where museums are directing people how to see and think in order to become good citizens in the eyes of the government. Both of the exhibitions in my study, for example, were funded by institutions which are run by government departments, *Typical* by the Arts Council Norway, and *FOLK* by the Research Council of Norway. The subsidy programs launched by these institutions voice similar emphases on their relevance to contemporary society by highlighting themes such as democracy and diversity. The aim of the subsidy programme *The Societal Role of Museums*, which was launched by the Arts Council in 2015, was to contribute to making museums more relevant and inclusive by encouraging projects that would show the diversity in society and participate to a greater degree in the public debate (Arts Council Norway 2015a). The subsidy programme launched by the Research Council in 2011, titled *Cultural Conditions Underlying Social Change* (SAMKUL), focuses on social change characterised by challenges such as “climate change and ecological depletion, social inequality and antagonism, war and terror, democracy development, centralization and



urbanization, new technologies, international migration and a multitude of religion, ethnicity and culture” (The Research Council of Norway 2017). The aim of the programme is to provide high quality research which is relevant for society’s direction and political choices, in order to “better equip society to address these and other challenges, as well as opportunities arising from them” (The Research Council of Norway 2017). As institutions positioned between the Ministry and the sector they fund and advise, the Arts Council and Research Council will to a larger degree be affected by governmental guidelines. With the subsidy programme by the Arts Council, for example, it is clear that the programme is partly based on the white paper *The Museum of the Future*, which states that it is an “overarching aim that the museums mirror the society of which they are a part. The museums are important forerunners in a modern democratic society and should have an active societal role” (St.meld. nr. 49 2008-2009:123, my translation). Åshild Andrea Brekke at the Arts Council acknowledges that an important part of the programme is the power of the Arts Council:

The Arts Council does partly have funding power, power to announce specifically earmarked money: ‘this money will go to these types of projects’. That is a form of power. We also have a symbolic power, we are assigned a position in society between the Ministry and the museums sector. We are aware that if we flag something, then it will have consequences for how the museums organise their practice in certain areas. They pay attention to our opinion about things (Brekke pers.comm. 2017).

Brekke points out that there are consequences of this power dynamic: “there are those who think that ‘we have to orient ourselves in that direction, because we will then get money and kudos from the Arts Council’” (Brekke pers.comm. 2017).

Bettum at ICM recognises that their exhibition was affected by the subsidy programme: “this is also a project supported by the societal role programme... It’s always on the cards that this is meant as popular education” (Bettum pers.comm. 2017). Bothner-By also acknowledges that the government papers are important: “We know the programmes well. The content is highlighted in most contexts where we discuss our strategies and when we apply for funding for projects” (Bothner-By pers.comm. 2018). However, she also emphasises that “at the same time, we think it’s important that our mandate should not be dependent on political guidance. (...) We are concerned with taking the role!” (Bothner-By pers.comm. 2018). She draws on Brekke at the Arts Council who asserted in our interview, as she has also done elsewhere, that “a societal mandate is something you are given, a societal role is something you take” (Brekke pers.comm. 2017). Both Hans Philip Einarsen at the Arts Council and Brekke stress that even though government papers underlie the subsidy

programme, what is important for them is that “this comes from the museums themselves” (Einarsen pers.comm. 2017), and that “the most important thing is that the museums take on an active role in terms of who they are and who they want to be as a museum” (Brekke pers.comm 2017). Einarsen elaborated on this when we talked about how much the subsidy programme was based on the government papers:

Why do we do this? Yes, we do it because it says so in the white papers and it's in the conventions, and you shall follow these conventions etc. etc., but is that why we do it? Is that the point, to do what the government or the state wants? And I don't think that is the important point, even though I work in the public sector. It's because this makes the world better. (...) There has to be something that is greater and more important than [because] it says so in white paper 49 that we should do it (Einarsen pers.comm. 2017).

Even though I do not doubt the truthfulness of these statements, the use of governmentality as a theoretical framework has certain complications for viewing if “this comes from the museums themselves” or not. As already mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, Tony Bennett (1995) argues that the transformation of museums from semi-private into public institutions led them to be regarded as “major vehicles for the fulfilment of the state's new educative and moral role in relation to the population as a whole” (1995:109). As such, through the governmentalization of culture, institutions such as museums could be used to progressively modify the thoughts, feelings and behaviour of those exposed to its influence, and thus function as instruments for civilizing the morals and manners of the population (1995:22,24). According to Foucault, this form of governmental power depends on a close relationship between the government of the state and the government of the self (Bennett 1995:23; Foucault 1991 (1978)). Thus, by functioning as spaces for observation and regulation, the early public museums were to mould the public into becoming self-regulating subjects, where the public themselves would curb their own tendency of uncivilised conduct (Bennett 1995:23-24).

Some of the interactive elements in *Typical* could, following this theory, be seen to encourage visitors to participate in such self-regulation, by telling visitors to reflect upon, and maybe let go of, some of their prejudices on their own. This can also be argued to be the case in *FOLK* where a lack of moralising and didactic statements encourage visitors to recognise the dangers and falseness embedded in the concept of race, this time also on their own. This argument means, in a simplified way, that social institutions have the power to govern what we think and how we behave, and that we are taught to have certain values by institutions

such as museums. Theoretically speaking then, the participants in my study will not necessarily be able to disentangle whether their reasons for making these exhibitions come from “themselves” or are in fact internalised through governmentality.

This is, no doubt, a rather pessimistic view, and there are some who would rather view governmentality as a two-way relationship between government and subject. Clive Gray (2015) for example, argue that even though the “rules for social conduct and organised action may be derived from ideological preferences” they are still dependent on the willingness of societal members to abide by them in order for them to operate effectively. The consequence of failing to establish this willingness can be politically catastrophic and lead to a loss of authority (2015:18). Gray claims that, rather than viewing citizens as being constrained beings subjected to adopt the power imposed upon them (as in the more structural version of Foucault’s self-regulation), they can instead be “seen to have an active role to play in making and remaking the worlds that they inhabit” (2015:22). As such, museums can be seen to be “in the position of being both policy active in the pursuit of their own goals, and policy reactive in being expected to contribute to political strategies and objectives that extend far beyond the doors of the museum itself” (Gray 2015:100). Thus, the government guidelines directed at museums for the last 20 years in Norway can be seen to both function as a means to encourage museums to function as “exercises of governmentality” in that they have the ability to direct people in what to see, think and value, in line with governmental goals (Luke 2002:3), but also to enable museums to pursue their own goals. This means that museums can both exercise their own judgements about how guidelines should be followed, as well as being able to effectively contribute to the national public debate (Gray 2015:97). As such, it can be argued that both *Typical* and *FOLK* are instrumental in that they are trying to achieve certain types of influence upon society, which are in accordance with government guidelines, but this can be seen as an active choice, just as well as a learnt one.

This chapter has attempted to answer the research questions presented in the introduction, by discussing how the exhibitions *Typical* and *FOLK* respond to divisive discourses and issues in the Norwegian society by applying elements of an activist approach, and by examining the political, structural and social forces which both enhances and limits such an approach. The next chapter will present some final thoughts on these questions. I will also discuss the limitations of this thesis, and present subjects for future research.

## 6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

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The aim of this thesis has been to examine the societal role of two Norwegian museums by shedding light on how they respond to contemporary divisive issues and discourses in the Norwegian society. Through analyses of the exhibitions *Typical* and *FOLK*, I have illustrated how these exhibitions use certain methods to communicate specific statements about contemporary issues in the Norwegian society. By using the theoretical framework of an activist museum practice, I have demonstrated how the two museums respond to divisive issues and discourses in the Norwegian society. I argue that despite theoretical and practical issues with the concept of ‘social activism’, both exhibitions include elements which fit with the definition of this concept given in this thesis, i.e. “a set of actions designed to bring about social change, often in relation to an issue which is characterized by moral, social or political contestation” (Sandell and Dodd 2010:14). Even though their way of communicating is quite different, with *Typical* being much more explicit in its communication than *FOLK*, they both apply many of the same tools in an attempt to encourage participation and reflection from the visitors in order to influence them in a certain direction. *Typical* examines the abstract concept of prejudice and shows how a human trait embedded in all of us can turn into, and has in some cases turned into, a social problem in contemporary Norway. Through the use of interactive elements and powerful statements, the exhibition can be seen to urge visitors to think critically about their own prejudices and participate in discussions by sharing their thoughts with other visitors. *FOLK* contextualises the genealogy of contemporary perceptions and use of the term race by juxtaposing past and present objects, theories, ideas, and research methods. I argue that the exhibition allows visitors to understand the complex histories and viewpoints surrounding these issues, and thereby provides tools for visitors to reach informed conclusions to complex questions. As such, as well as influencing visitors in a certain direction and encouraging critical thinking and self-reflection, the exhibitions can be seen to enable visitors to participate in public discussions by providing contextualised information about the social issues on display.

I have also discussed the broader political, structural and social forces that the museum staff negotiate when working with social issues. I have shown how an activist approach can lead to reactions from visitors, especially when this approach does not match the primary role and image associated with the museum. This clash of expectations has, as shown with the case of NMoST, led to the museum being accused of being used as a political

tool in order to convey certain party-political viewpoints. I will argue that, even though the accusation of Norwegian museums becoming party-political is unjustified, it can be stated that the museums, to some extent, are being used as exercises of governmentality. The themes taken up in both exhibitions are part of a larger trend developed over the last 20 years where a focus on topics such as diversity and inclusion have been increasingly emphasised. As such, I have in this thesis illuminated how the museum staff are affected by the governmental guidelines published during these years, and the power of funding institutions such as the Arts Council have been acknowledged. At the same time, the participants in my study argue that they are not dependent on political guidance, and that there is a bigger reason for making exhibitions like these than because the guidelines say so. Even though I have argued that it can be difficult to conclude whether these thoughts come from the museum staff themselves or are in fact taught by being exposed to government institutions such as museums, I claim that, in the end, it comes down to a combination of the two. Museum practice does not exist in a vacuum, and so the museum staff will be affected by the notion of the societal role of museums which have been pushed by governmental guidelines the last 20 years. Both exhibitions are also very much in line with these guidelines, with an emphasis on inclusion, difference, and complexity (Holmesland 2013).

This also comes down to whether museums and museums staff are truly autonomous. As discussed in the previous chapter, most activist approaches taken at museums are in fact quite in line with accepted liberal-democratic values. Also, even though the personal opinions of the museum staff are expressed in the exhibitions, illuminating how they aim at contributing to the public debate, we cannot properly disentangle their personally held beliefs from the values that circulate in society. Within this line of thought lies also the argument that it can be difficult to imagine any other kind of activism. In contemporary Norway, with the current form of government, it can be hard to imagine a museum funded by an institution such as the Arts Council, promoting the value to society of for example eugenics. State-sponsored museums tend to exhibit, more or less, that which is within the parameters of acceptability. However, as ideas *not* within these parameters are in fact on the rise in the Norwegian society, these exhibitions, with their emphasis on liberal values might then be all the more important.

Some of the aims and challenges discussed here were also expressed by the museum staff during our interviews. One of the aims when using interviews was to understand how the museum staff experienced working with social issues, and how aims and concerns are reflected in the exhibitions. The museum staff at ICM emphasised their goal of influencing visitors to become aware of their own prejudices, something which is reflected in the many

eyinteractive elements in the exhibition. At the same time, their fear of enhancing prejudice toward vulnerable groups led to the exhibition not including any concrete examples of groups affected by prejudice. The focus is instead shifted to the visitors themselves. The staff at NMoST aimed at influencing visitors to reflect upon the history and current status of research on human diversity, and thereby being able to participate in public debates. This is reflected through their juxtaposing of objects and ideas to show the interactions between science, society and culture, and textual elements encouraging visitors to reflect and discuss. Their concern that visitors will not see the relevance of the exhibition at this particular museum, and their wish to change the dominant perception of the museum, is reflected in the many activities arranged both prior to and after the opening of the exhibition, in an attempt to convince visitors of this relevance.

My intention with this thesis has been to analyse how these two museums use the medium of exhibitions to communicate certain statements which in different ways can be seen to act as responses to the divisive discourses and social issues in contemporary Norway. Thus, my thesis has been limited to analyses of the exhibitions, as well as interviews with the museum staff. An inclusion of the visitors' perspectives could be the subject for future research. It would be interesting to see whether the visitors' perceptions of the exhibitions correlate with the museums' aims. Moreover, both quantitative and qualitative visitor studies could be done in order to measure both short and long-term effects of the exhibitions. Also, an even deeper analysis of what the roles and expectations mean for museums when exhibiting issues like these would be interesting. Rather than just focusing on Oslo-based museums, a larger sample including more rural museums could be applied. Smaller, rural museums often have stronger ties to, and expectations from, the local community. How this would affect an activist approach could provide an interesting study.

Nevertheless, this thesis has shed light on what a response to contemporary social issues looks like at two Norwegian museums, something that hopefully can be transferable to other museums as well. In a Europe where prejudices against minorities are on the rise (Bangstad and Døving 2015:24) it is important that museums take their societal role seriously, and engage in the public discussions. As such, both *Typical* and *FOLK* offer spaces where visitors can understand some of the ideas leading to this rising prejudice in context, both in terms of where racial ideas come from, and how to participate in contemporary discussions around ethnicity and heritage, but also that these prejudices are embedded in all of us, and that we can all participate in creating a less prejudiced society.

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## APPENDIX

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All texts analysed in chapter 4 (Analysis) are here reproduced as they appear in the exhibitions.

### **IT'S JUST LIKE THEM...**

Globalisation has caused great changes in populations around the world. Just a couple of generations back, Norway was still a relatively homogeneous country where it was attempted to eliminate, hide and taboo differences.

Today, we are living in a society where the boundaries of normality are challenged constantly. For most people, differences are seen as a natural fact of life.

But the emergence of a more diverse society also causes frictions. Right-wing populists appealing to xenophobic sentiments are becoming more and more prominent in Western democracies. Also in Norway, a sharper tone can be registered in the public debate. Refugees and Muslims are suspected as terrorists, east end kids are portrayed as gangsters, and media's coverage of criminal aspects of Romanian immigration cause people to attack innocent beggars on the street. Hand in hand with incidents like these, threats and hate-speech flourish on the internet and in social media.

In this situation, it is time for us to pause and ask ourselves: What is prejudice, exactly? Where does it come from? Is it part of our nature, or a cultural construct? How dangerous are our prejudices, and is it possible to change them?

Figure 14: Introductory panel to *Typical*.

### **Fear of the unknown**

Fear and the reaction 'fight or flee' is one of our most fundamental emotions. It has saved human beings from immediate danger for as long as we have walked the earth. But as an impulse, neither flight nor fight is particularly well suited to solve more lasting problems. In fact, such impulsive reactions may have severe consequences, and can subsequently create new problems.

Fear and anxiety of the unknown can be important factors in establishing and maintaining prejudice. Victims of violent crime may develop prolonged irrational anxiety of traits associated with the culprit. But as the word suggests, fear of the unknown, or xenophobia, is rarely triggered by personal experience with the object of fear. On the contrary, it is usually the result of limited personal experience with it. The best cure for phobias is exposure-treatment, which involves a step-wise approach closer and closer to the object of the anxiety, until the patient learns that the fear is unfounded.

### **Fear begets danger**

"Fear is a *dimming preoccupation*: an intense focus on the self that casts others into darkness. However valuable and indeed essential it is in a genuinely dangerous world, it is itself one of life's great dangers."  
Martha Nussbaum (2012:58).

To contribute to a sentiment of fear without good reason, is to put something at stake.

When politicians and journalists use fear as a means to gain votes or enhance view counts, they risk creating new social problems.

Figure 15: Texts from the 'FEAR' cell in *Typical*.

### **From racial types to DNA sequences**

Race has a long history as scientific concept and research topic. Such research has contributed in legitimizing slavery, colonialism, class difference, and nationalism. The heyday of scientific racism is over. However, outdated race science ideas continue to affect us, and racism still exists in our societies. *FOLK* show several examples of contemporary genome research and historical race science, sheds light on the interactions between science, society, and culture, and points to the profound consequences that such research can have for society and the lives of individuals.

Figure 16: Introductory panel to *FOLK*.

### **A new curiosity cabinet**

The objects displayed here make up a 21<sup>st</sup>-century curiosity cabinet. Starting in the Renaissance, curiosity cabinets exhibited the European desire to capture and classify the world. Colonialism enabled collecting, while curiosity, along with profit and power, drove colonization. A new encounter with these unusual and surprising objects challenges us to rethink the ways people and cultures have been stereotyped, romanticised, and valued – in the past, present, and future.

Figure 17: Text to the ‘curiosity cabinet’ in *FOLK*.

### **Welcome to the archive**

Science is a human activity aiming to bring rationality to the world and to understand it by observing, classifying, mapping, measuring, experimenting, theorizing, and evaluating. This ring of shelves that we call “the archive” represents scientific practices as efforts to reach the truth through changing theories, methods, and techniques. But science, like this archive, is an open-ended and tentative process, embedded in society and culture. This is even more so for the sciences studying human diversity; we are both the subjects and objects of research. We invite you to use the objects collected here to contemplate and discuss these topics.

Figure 18: Text to ‘the archive’ in *FOLK*.

### **Whitening and Self-tan cream**

Skin colour is the characteristic most associated with racial thinking. People, however, may buy whitening or tanning creams to conform to dominant cultural stereotypes or as a response to changing ideas of beauty.

### **Von Luschan's chromatic scale**

The 36 glass tiles in this scale represented the shades of skin colour and allowed for racial classification. Its inventor was the Austrian anthropologist Felix von Luschan. Although criticized as subjective and imprecise, the scale was used internationally from 1900 until the mid-twentieth century.

### **Miniature decorative statue**

My high-school years in the Netherlands were filled with pictures of the perfect human beings: the Romans and Greeks. I now wonder whether these notions of “perfect, classic, pure, divine” and the whiteness of the statues are connected in our brains. You see it all over, in our language, commercials, TV shows...  
Society is obsessed with whiteness.

Figure 19: Texts from display cases in the 'curiosity cabinet' in *FOLK*.



### **Twentieth-century scientific racism**

Controversial psychologist Richard Herrnstein and sociologist Charles Murray, affiliated with prominent conservative think-tanks in the USA, wrote *The Bell Curve* in 1994. The book caused outrage among liberal intellectuals for its overt endorsement of prejudice. The authors asserted that IQ is largely heritable, and therefore unchangeable, as well as correlated to race and anti-social behaviour. Murray has reappeared recently on the news due to the book's connections to the American alt-right.

### **Twenty-first-century scientific racism**

Science writer Nicholas Wade published his bestseller *A Troublesome Inheritance* in 2014. In an attempt to revamp decades-old arguments linking social behaviour and intelligence with racial differences, Wade speculated on results of genetic studies and reproduced insulting stereotypes. The academic community was quick to respond. In a letter published in *The New York Times Book Review*, more than hundred population geneticists and evolutionary biologists worldwide stated that their research gave no support to Wade's claims.

Figure 20: Texts accompanying the books *The Bell Curve* and *A Troublesome Inheritance* in 'the archive'.