

[Theoretical Museology in U.S. and Tribal Contexts](#)

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Archival Science, Digital Humanities, Educational Technology, Historic Preservation, History Education

Call for Proposals

Theoretical Museology in U.S. and Tribal Contexts

**A Symposium Organized and Hosted by the
International Committee for Museology (ICOFOM), International Council of
Museums -U.S. (ICOM-U.S.), the Association of African American Museums
(AAAM), and
Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU)**

Online August 27-28, 2020

Proposals due February 28, 2020

The practice and rationale of theoretical museology, especially regarding tribal nations in the United States (U.S.), developed from a colonial perspective. Slavery, the genocide of indigenous Americans, expansionism, and the reverence for the Founding Fathers contributed to the territorial way that museums have functioned. As such, the Indigenous community has had a “love-hate relationship” with museums in the U.S. (Lonetree, 2012, p. 25).^[1] Other entities and philosophies, such as fairs and department stores, also influenced the development of the museum industry (Bennett, 1995; Genoways, 2008; Mairesse, 2010; Pomian, 1990).

As in Europe, the history and philosophy of these museums are recorded in the archives and journals of the anthropological, historical, philosophical, and natural history “gentlemanly” societies (for example, see Chung, 2002). In Germany, Karl Otfried Müller, a Hellenic scholar, coined the word “museology” in the *Manual of*

Archaeology in 1830 (Mairesse & Desvallées, 2011, cited in Brulon, 2019, p. 21). In the U.S., H.A. Hagen published an article in the American journal *The American Naturalist* in 1876 that described the development of the field from early museums, including the collections in temples such as the Aesculapius and the instruction of medical sciences for healing (Hagen, 1876). Though the word “museology” is not written in that article, Hagen discusses museum history from the historical linearity of Christian theology or philosophy, but he alludes to the lenses and perspectives of the different periods and how Christianity overpowered this kind of thought (Hagen, 1876, p. 183). Hagen also traces the etymology of one kind of museum, “herbarium,” and the preservation methods of natural specimens (Hagen, 1876, p. 84). Moreover, he examines the way trade and the printing press contributed to collecting, and the religious powers that influenced what was collected: “Every kind of free thought seemed then, as at the present time, most pernicious to this infallible institution” (Hagen, 1876, p. 87). This particular article provides us with an early understanding of museological thought demonstrating to scrutinize the philosophical underpinnings of the founding and functions of museums.

Through this symposium, we wish to understand theoretical museology in museums in the tribal nations and the U.S., publications, and degree programs, which underlay the practice, past and present. Museography or museum practice has been a focal point for U.S. degree programs and publications, while theoretical museology has not been widely embraced. In Latin America and Europe, theoretical museology has been widely disseminated (ICOFOM LAM, 1994; Maroević, 2004; Dolák, 2007; Desvallées & Mairesse, 2010). In Asian and African countries, museology is a developed discipline (Brulon, 2019; Chanda, 2019; Chen, 2018; Kumio, 2019), but underrepresented in the dissemination throughout the world (Brulon & Leshchenko, 2018). Theoretical museology is identified as a component or sub-field of museology. Within ICOFOM, museology is traced back in the *Museological Working Papers (MuWop)* examining the structure and its definitions (Sofka, 1980, 1981). Museologists first discussed whether or not museology is a science. *MuWop* and the *ICOFOM Study Series (ISS)* authors sub-structured museology into the following categories: general museology, specialized museology (such as the different disciplines in the museum field, history philosophy, social sciences), museography or applied museology, theoretical museology (history, theory, and applied interdisciplinary) (Burcaw, 1983; Stránský, 1980; Stránský, 1983), the focus of this symposium. At the most basic level, ICOFOM has understood museology as the following:

...the study, theory, and philosophy of the museum field and the ethics of its practice and functions. It encompasses museum theory and practice as well as the critical reflection on the museum and its existent field of knowledge for this reflection ("Welcome to ICOFOM," 2019).

Furthermore, museology has also been apprehended through different interpretations, of which Indigenous traditions (Sadongei, 2019) and ICOFOM U.S. traditions have been addressed (Mairesse, 2019). Today, there is a need to further explore what museology and specifically theoretical museology means in the U.S. because the latter topic has not been examined. Thus, under the following four themes, "Museology," a Word or Not a Word?, Teaching Theoretical Museology, Theoretical Museology and Ethics, and Theoretical Museology and the Functions of Museums in the Community, especially to incorporate the diversity of museologists, will be researched.

"Museology," a Word or Not a Word?

First and foremost, the usage of the term "museology" in tribal and U.S. historical and current contexts should be investigated. What is the basis to name the discipline "museology" as supposed to "museum studies"? The word "museology" is being used in the museum field in the U.S., such as *Representing Diaspora & Diverse Blackness in Museology - Revisiting Our Black Mosaic Symposium* (2015). The realization of what the word "museology" means should be first examined in order to understand the concepts of theoretical museology. A U.S. ICOFOM museologist James L. Swauger (1980, p. 46) defined museology "as a set accepted as a set of universal principles holding that any museum should collect, preserve, study," and it was considered philosophy and not science. He did allude to the fact that it could be a science one day. What is the history and philosophy of the word "museology," and where and how has this word been used in tribal and U.S. contexts?

Teaching Theoretical Museology

In current degree programs, there is an interest in theoretical museology. Many of the courses are not labeled "theoretical museology" but under different titles within departments and programs such as Anthropology, History, and Art History. What is taught in courses that have the underpinnings of theoretical museology? Back in the 1980s, Daniel Porter (1980, p. 32) stated that "the effort to prepare museum professionals, both academically and pragmatically for adulthood, remains unevolved in colleges and universities." Porter noted fifty start-ups in the 1950s. He wrote of the disagreements in regard to museology as a discipline, accreditation,

and professionalism issues; the practice versus the theory was also a topic of debate. During the same period, Alyce Sadongei (2019) established the Native American training program in the Smithsonian Institution. What are the implications of African-American, Asian-American, Hispanic-American, Native American, and other culturally diverse programs in museums and academia?

Theoretical Museology and Ethics

A code of ethics is a part of most professional organizations. ICOM and the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) stress the importance of their code of ethics. Is there a need for theory and ethics in museums? An example is Gary Edson, a museum director who was active in ICOM as an executive council member and had scholarly connections with ICOFOM museologists, among them, Ivo **Maroević**, the International Committee for Training of Personnel (ICTOP), and the Ethics Committee, linked the need for museum practice, theoretical museology, and ethics at the Center for Advanced Study of Museum Science and Heritage Management at the Museum of Texas Tech University. Who and what are the examples in other culturally diverse and tribal museums and associations?

Theoretical Museology and the Functions of Museums in the Community

The online symposium aims to incorporate diverse views on museums and theoretical museology. The multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary of the museum field call for consideration of what the community and museum professionals contribute as agents and actants to influence the functions of museums. Thus, there is a need to examine theoretical museology and the functions of museums in the community. What are some of the theories that have been introduced and/or forecasted by museologists that demonstrate the cause and effect between the community and museums?

Abstracts for Presentation and Possible Publication

ICOFOM, ICOM-US, AAAM, and SNHU invite interested museum scholars* to submit abstracts in English for presentations endeavoring to address the questions posed on any one of the four sub-themed panels listed above for an online symposium to be held on August 27-28, 2020. Abstracts should be a maximum of 300 words in addition to a list of at least 10 sources that will be referenced to write up the presentation. Please include a biography of 100 words. Abstracts are due on February 28, 2020. The selection committee will notify the authors of accepted proposals by March 15, 2020.

This will be the second symposium hosted completely online, with live streaming of all events as conducted in the [Defining the Museum of the 21st Century: Evolving Multiculturalism in Museums in the U.S. 2018](#) (Denning, Chung, & Fennessy, 2018; Chung, Leshchenko, & Brulon Soares, 2019). It is recommended that potential presenters read through the [ICOFOM publications](#) for background information, museological historiography, relevant concepts and theories, and inspiration for further discussion. The symposium organizers will distribute the final schedule for presenters and technical requirements in advance of the symposium. Each presentation should be a maximum of 15 minutes to allow time for all presentations and discussions from the chair and audience afterward.

Upon completion of the online symposium, selected authors will be invited to publish in the *ICOFOM Study Series* on “Museology in Tribal Contexts.” Invited papers will go through a double blind peer review process.

Abstracts, presentations, and papers should be original and not have been previously published in any form.

Please submit abstracts and queries to the email address: icofomsnhu2020@gmail.com.

**The peer review committee promotes inclusivity and diversity and encourages proposals from scholars from under-represented groups.*

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[1]

— The term “tribal” in this document reflects the usage by Alyce Sadongei (2019) and the Association of Tribal Archives Libraries and Museums (ATALM) to mean tribes and tribal nations in the North American continent. Sadongei (2019) also refers to the tribal nations and Indigenous peoples in North America as “Native America.” “Indigenous” in this document refers to the tribes and peoples, in general, who continue to inhabit the North American continent before colonization by the Europeans. Thus, both terms “tribal” and “Indigenous” will be applied.

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