Hip heritage and contemporary tastes

Packaging the Nordic in the American cultural market

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Abstract: *This article focuses on two institutions, the American Swedish Institute and the Nordic Heritage Museum that have spent the first part of the twenty-first century thinking and rethinking what the heritage under their auspices can be. In doing this, the text problematizes the manner in which elements of Nordic history and identity are being re-thought and re-framed in the cultural and economic context of the American heritage market. The article asks, how is heritage affected when it is increasingly framed as a marketable commodity? As part of the analysis the article discusses the manner in which these museums are intensively and consciously striving to be cool and chic, but even trend and fashion sensitive as they position themselves in the growing and competitive market of what we call hip heritage.*

Keywords: Heritage making, cultural economy, hip heritage, museums, curatorial agency, Nordic culture, Nordic-America, Swedish-America.

“The past few years has been about trying to understand, ‘What’s our new normal?’ Our goal isn’t to grow more, how do we sustain, how do we deepen the engagement.” These are the words of a member of the leadership team at the American Swedish Institute in Minneapolis as he reflects upon the challenges his institution faces in attracting new visitors and developing membership. However, the challenge of succeeding as a cultural institution in today’s economy is not simply a question of attracting more visitors, capital, or investors he goes on to explain. It is what he calls “a

messaging thing” and the message he and his institution are struggling to come to terms with concerns the packaging of history and heritage. Simultaneously, over two thousand kilometers to the west, in the Seattle suburb of Ballard the staff of the Nordic Heritage Museum are in the process of packing all their artifacts in preparation for a coming move to a new purpose built 45 million dollar facility. They too have been endeavoring to come to terms with how to present Nordic heritage in their new facility. Over the past few years they have come to the realization that the way they have

worked with Nordic heritage in the past, will not do, in the new museum.

The project of which these particular examples are part, examines how heritage institutions in Sweden and the United States are affected by the changing cultural and economic context in which they operate as market forces that include business models derived from the private sector are increasingly adapted to operations of public heritage institutions. The study examines the opportunities and challenges encountered by these institutions as they work in this mixed economy, and it asks how this context affects the framing of heritage, as well as the ethics involved in choosing whose heritage is deemed most relevant to showcase.

The scholarship of heritage has long shown that heritage production creates local, national and international hierarchies that often capitalize on the tradition bearers who either made the crafts, dance the dances, play the music, cook the meals, or otherwise generate objects, events and festivals that make up tangible and intangible culture (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998, 2006; Hafstein 2004, 2014; Noyes 2014; Smith 2015). This scholarship emphasizes the degree to which cultural heritage (tangible and intangible) should be understood as a compilation of processes and attitudes through which the past is used and invoked for purposes of the present in order to impact the future (Appadurai & Breckenridge 1992:35–55; Lowenthal 1996:41–60; Antonnen *et al.* 2000, Graden 2003; Aronsson & Graden 2013). An extension of this understanding of heritage bears with it the understanding that political, economical and organizational structures are intertwined in heritage as it is curated, displayed or presented on stage, and otherwise commodified in museums. However, beyond this it is equally important to appreciate the degree to which visitor

preferences, expectations, and sensibilities of taste are increasingly informing curatorial practices. As museums are increasingly pressured to attract visitors, artists and artisans of tangible and intangible culture are adapting their art in order for it to remain recognizable to museum visitors. The reason for this is that visitors expect to find these objects or events, albeit tweaked or packaged in novel and consumable ways. As Laurajane Smith has noted, rather than being challenged, or being taught new facts or interpretations about the world around, visitors tend to seek confirmation of what they already know (2015).

More than this, however, museum visitors are looking to be entertained and to have their own cultural capital boosted by their investment of time and money at museums. This, we argue below is leading to an intensification in the manner in which museums are trying to play to newer and broader audiences through the production of what we call *hip heritage*. Back in 2011 Joan Henderson fleetingly used the term *hip heritage* as a buzzword to frame the processes through which star architects and cult hotel figures refashioned historical buildings into boutique hotels (Henderson 2011). In referring to *hip heritage* here, as in other places (Graden & O'Dell 2017, forthcoming) our ambition is to push the concept further and develop it analytically. *Hip heritage* is a term we use to indicate a disposition towards heritage that increasingly focuses upon its potential as a fashionable commodity with a broadly marketable aura than its potential as an identity marker with strong ties to the past of a particular and delineable group of people. As the examples we present in this text illuminate, the emergence of *hip heritage* has become almost a truism at major American museums, whose mission is to share Swedish or Nordic culture with a broad audience.

This article focuses on two institutions, the American Swedish Institute and the Nordic Heritage Museum that have spent the first part of the twenty-first century thinking and rethinking what the heritage under their auspices can be. In doing this, the text problematizes the manner in which elements of Nordic history and identity are being rethought and re-framed in the cultural and economic context of the American heritage market. How is heritage affected when it is increasingly framed as a marketable commodity? As part of the analysis the article discusses the manner in which these museums are intensively and consciously striving to be cool and chic, but even trend and fashion sensitive as they position themselves in the growing and competitive market of hip heritage.

AN ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH TO THE CULTURAL ECONOMY

Based on qualitative methods of fieldwork, interviews and archival studies, the article demonstrates how these two institutions are moving and mobilizing the concept of heritage. The interviews that this text focuses upon have been conducted with sixteen people working with museum leadership, and taken the form of semi-structured qualitative interviews of approximately one hour in length. All interview material has been transcribed verbatim. Fieldwork has included one and a half months of participant observation in museum events, guided tours, curatorial programs, staff meetings, as well as go-along tours of exhibitions with staff members. The research team is working with four additional museums in Sweden as part of the project "Understanding the Conditions Facing Heritage in a Hybrid Market", which

will provide a comparative context in further work.

THE SHIFTING CONCEPT OF HERITAGE

The manner in which the past is legitimized and reframed in the present has been discussed both within the museum sector and the academy for decades. Cultural heritage has often been used to legitimate and support different forms of collective identity and allegiances linked to nations, places, sites, artifacts, rituals and traditions from the past. In the early twentieth century the focus was mainly on material culture and "tangible heritage". The International Charter of Venice emphasized that heritage was essentially constituted by material objects that were "imbued with a message from the past". Indeed, it was not until 1972 that UNESCO expanded the concept of heritage to include natural heritage, and 1994 to include "intangible heritage" (Vecco 2010:322).

Through their curatorial agency museums produce both heritage and history, in a process where history feed heritage and heritage in turn providing new material for history. This ongoing process of selection gives shape to the inclusion and exclusion of individuals and groups, and while drawing on the past, it is always created in the present. When accepting that the past is continually re-created in the present, focus shifts to heritage as metacultural production (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1983, 1995, 2004). Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's definition of heritage as something created in the present that produces something new builds on ideas such as Eric Hobsbawm's on the "invention of tradition" (1983) as well as those found in David Lowenthal's *Possessed by the Past* (1996).

Heritage, in short, is not only linked to selected events, traditions, and materialities of the past, but has, as Lowenthal argues, always

been an important vehicle through which the past has been mobilized in the present in the name of specific cultural identities and communities. In the process, heritage becomes charged with symbolic value and meaning for specific groups (Appadurai & Breckenridge 1992:35–38; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998:7; Anttonen 2000; Noyes 2003). This is at least how heritage has been seen in the past. However, as folklorist Torunn Selberg poignantly argues, heritage is not only formed in the present, it must be understood to be constantly in change and development as the world around us changes (2002:11). Furthermore, Selberg suggests that the production of history in society can be understood as a choir with multiple voices including academics and museums (2002:18). In connection with the two specific institutions this article focuses upon, this leads to an important question: what happens when “specific groups” are not enough to afford a cultural institution economic sustainability in the finicky and shifting market of the cultural economy?

THE FOUNDING OF A SWEDISH LEGACY

Minneapolis, Minnesota, home to the Turnblad Mansion, is located in the American Midwest. It is a place author Wilhelm Moberg put on the cognitive maps of generations of Swedes though his fictitious depictions of the nineteenth century immigration to the area. Minneapolis is today still a city with a broad population that identify themselves as people of Nordic or Scandinavian heritage. According to recent census records 27 percent of the population of Minnesota identify themselves as being of either Norwegian or Swedish heritage. In recent decades, Minneapolis has been home to larger waves of immigrants coming from Southeast Asia in the 1980s, and more recently

from Somalia (including Swedish Somali), in the years around the millennium. In this way, the demographics of the city are changing and consequently, the American Swedish Institute is trying to adapt.

For the better part of the 20th century the Turnblad Mansion was the centerpiece and home to the American Swedish Institute. The Mansion was built by Swan Turnblad as a home for his family, but also with the intent of leaving a legacy to the Swedish community. In an article in the Minneapolis Tribune in 1929, Swan Turnblad explains:

I had this idea in mind when I first began to build the home. I wanted it to endure for a hundred thousand years. And I wanted to have it so arranged that it might be easily converted to its later uses (Turnblad 1929:2).

In 1929, formal papers were filed with the State of Minnesota that converted the Turnblad residence into *The American Institute of Swedish Art, Literature, and Science*. Since the founding of the institute, the uses of the mansion have taken numerous turns, working in alignment with the tastes of the day, and that which was understood to be Swedish or deemed to be contemporarily modern.

Soon after the mansion was turned into an Institute, it began to change to accommodate clubs and programs. In the early 1930s rooms on the first floor were covered with wallboard. Polychromic ceilings were painted white. In 1949, the name was changed to the American Swedish Institute. Between 1960 and the 1980s, membership grew and the lower level was turned into an auditorium and a working kitchen with a *kaffestuga*. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, changes in the mansion reflected an appreciation of traditional Swedish folkways. This appreciation could also be seen in the

items sold in the shop; from the traditional red painted wooden advent candle-holders to the books by John Bauer and Viktor Rydberg. In these ways the identity of the institute shifted from that of being a highbrow meeting place for a cultural elite, to being a folksy meeting place for individuals interested in celebrating forms of “traditional” Swedish heritage.

Today, the Turnblad Mansion is part of the American Swedish Institute Campus along with the Nelson gallery, which opened in 2012. The collection comprises 7,000 cataloged items of which 70 originate from the mansion: furniture, decorative arts pieces, and textiles. Collection staff believes that furniture owned by the Turnblad’s was removed during three periods. First, when the family moved from the mansion to the Posten newspaper building. Second, after Swan Turnblad donated the mansion and moved into the Park Avenue apartment building. Third, when Swan Turnblad died and his daughter Lillian moved to Holy Angels Convent in Bloomington, and donated art to the Minneapolis Institute of Art. The shedding of the material heritage of the Turnblad’s represents a step-by-step erasure of aspects of their lives. As Daniel Miller has argued in connection with the cultural processes of moving house:

[...] the objects of the home are the mementoes of the past, and so the decision to discard some and retain others when moving house becomes the active management of one’s own externalized memory (2001:8).

In part, Swan Turnblad himself was responsible for the manner in which the inventory of the house, and the manner in which the memory of his presence, was dispersed. However, in part this process of materialized memory editing continued long after Swan Turnblad’s death

as others continued to remove the material culture of his life out of the mansion, or into the basement for storage. These small movements of material culture, were in all likelihood nondramatic and perceived as part of the trivial daily events of running an institute, but when seen from a different perspective, they also communicate the changing priorities of an upwardly mobile immigrant in relation to the needs of a malleable Swedish community.

TIMES ARE CHANGING

Swan and Christina and their daughter Lillian Turnblad gave the community a building and place, but their presence in the mansion has faded. As one of the staff members explained:

We’re seeing more people coming in because of the new building [...] The only thing right now is that we don’t have anything up specifically about the Turnblad’s, so that’s the one question we get a lot. “Who are these people? Why did they build the house?”

As a consequence, the leadership of the American Swedish Institute is currently working to develop a means of telling the Turnblad story. However, instead of focusing entirely on the builders of the home, the leadership team is pondering the possibility of using the Turnblad’s to tell a migration story. As one team member explained:

We are working with an interpretive planning firm to develop our own ideas and then we have another set of focus groups also exploring kind of what people want to know about the castle. We know that the Turnblad story is going to be important, and discussing immigration in connection with this is more important now than it has been for a long time. I still have a hard time understanding how

immigrants became the bad part of society in the United States. I mean Donald Trump and building walls and all that.

The heritage of the mansion, being one of Swedishness, previously focused on the celebration of Swedish American and transatlantic heritage. However, that focus is shifting. In part as the quote indicates, as a reaction to Trump politics. But in part also due to the Institute's perceived need to distance itself from being identified in a limiting way, as Swedish. The mansion needs to be more than Swedish, as a person in a leadership role explains:

Part of it is that more people know about us. They get beyond...we say ASI. If we say the American Swedish Institute, *phom!* (motions a shutting door). I am not Swedish and therefore it doesn't mean anything to me. So doing certain things like saying ASI instead of the American Swedish Institute has helped us break through some of these barriers.

The focus on a heritage of mobility could in this context potentially work as a way of opening the American Swedish Institute to a wider public, as it has transformed into ASI, and perhaps as the Turnblad story is converted into a migration story. Indeed, moving beyond an entirely Swedish migration narrative, ASI leadership is contemplating the possibility of including other migration stories such as those of the Hmong or Somalis who are also prevalent ethnic groups in the Minneapolis area, although with emerging museums of their own. The goal here is, in short, to tell a contemporary story, or one might say, to present a "contemporary heritage" that confronts the current Trumpian political climate in the United States.

The push towards contemporary heritage is

even apparent in other on-going and planned strategies at ASI. For example, since the opening of the Nelson Campus, the institute has staged numerous fashion, art and design oriented temporary exhibitions as part of a program called the "international exhibitions program", that have ties to institutions in the Nordic countries. Beyond this, however, the Turnblad mansion is endowed with a wealth of ornate woodcarvings fixed to the walls throughout the house. ASI staff sees the opportunity to push the theme of arts and design in the direction of the craftsmanship of the mansion's ornamentation. To these ends they have identified "makers" of craft and folk art as an important foundation upon which to cultivate a "crafts" profile to develop a new form of contemporarily appealing heritage. As a board member explained:

This is Minneapolis, we happen to be very craft focused. [...] The American Craft Council is here and publishing out of Minneapolis and we have a glass center, a textile center, and a wood center that are all nationally known that we share the culture scene with. So that was kind of like, well let's make that connection really strong.

When explaining the motivation for investing in a crafts program board and staff members point to a heritage of Swedish crafts, and align this with a current appreciation of artisan crafts. It is a trend, which they identify as having local (Minneapolis) roots. The rationale for moving into crafts exhibitions is thus twofold. It is said to have linkages to Swedish heritage on the one hand, and on the other hand it is an interest, which extends to broader contemporary segments of the educated and arts interested Minneapolis middle and upper middle-class population. While parallels are drawn to Swedish folk art traditions of

Fig. 1. Hip heritage is a market driven form of heritage that produces, arranges and mediates culture in ways that suit contemporary tastes. Hip heritage takes front stage as exhibitions, programs and events and gains credibility by being sold or rented to established museums and cultural institutions that are aspiring to reach broader and often cosmopolitan audiences. Cocktails at the Castle pictured here, at The Turnblad Mansion features food and drink vendors, rented saunas, music performances to frame exhibitions at the American Swedish Institute in Minneapolis. Photo: Lizette Gradén.

yore, the intention is to move beyond those traditions to more contemporary trends in artisan craftsmanship.

NORDIC HERITAGE

The Nordic Heritage Museum is located in Seattle, Washington, in the Pacific Northwest, which has a slightly different migration history

than that of the Midwest. Although the early waves of migration from the Nordic countries to the United States took place during the mid nineteenth century, migration to Seattle experienced its growth in numbers a half-century later, around the turn of the twentieth century. Seattle, at this time experienced both immigration coming directly from the Nordic countries, as well as secondary migration

Fig. 2. Viking Days, the annual summer weekend festival held at the Nordic Heritage Museum originated as Tivoli and exemplifies market driven heritage making. Produced by staff and volunteers and hosting craft vendors, musicians and businesses selling food and drink, the event generates revenue for museum operations. Photo: Lizette Gradén.

as people left the Midwest in search of new opportunities and a better life in the Pacific Northwest. The majority of these immigrants found a livelihood in working class fields such as forestry, fishing and agriculture, while others, in smaller numbers, also took positions in academia, politics, retail, and other white-collar careers.

The Nordic Heritage Museum, with its lease having expired in December 2017, faced similar challenges as it was in the processes of moving to a purpose designed facility. Prior to the move, the Nordic Heritage Museum was located in a

1907 schoolhouse in Ballard, a sleepy residential neighborhood in Seattle. The museum was founded in 1979 by immigrants and descendants of immigrants from the Nordic countries who all sought a platform to share among themselves and with others their tangible and intangible cultural heritage and emigrant experience. Since its opening in 1980, the museum has grown from being volunteer-operated to becoming increasingly professionalized.

Local supporters, founders and volunteers donated the artifacts accessioned into the collection and exhibited in the museum. Apart

from galleries for temporary exhibitions, the three story museum held a core exhibition (the Dream of America) featuring possessions the immigrants brought with them to the United States, stories about the fishing and logging industry, which the immigrants became part of in the Pacific Northwest. One floor featured national gallery displays produced by volunteers who were first generation émigrés of the five Nordic countries. The content and compositions of the Nordic Heritage Museum's exhibitions had traditionally worked to interweave aspects of Nordic identity and history, with perceptions of local identity, and community spirit.

While the temporary exhibitions had a contemporary focus the bulk of the museum space that was devoted to core exhibitions, was squarely focused on the past. In short, Nordic Heritage was consistently constructed in ways that Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Hobsbawm, and Lowenthal would readily recognize.

RESHAPING NORDIC HERITAGE IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

But things are changing. Seattle is currently the fastest growing city in the United States attracting a large pool of young international professionals. However, Seattle continues to be home to a large Nordic community (12,5 percent in Washington state in census after census, including the most recent from 2014). At present, the city is attracting a young Nordic population to companies such as Microsoft and Amazon. In the midst of all of this, the Nordic Heritage Museum is trying to adapt to new times, shifting demographics and a new cultural and economic context.

In August of 2016 the Nordic Heritage Museum completed demolition of the Fenpro building, an industrial warehouse hosting

an artist collective, and celebrated the groundbreaking for a new museum facility. In April 2017 the museum held a tree-topping ceremony to mark the raising of the girder framework. On the fence separating the general public from the construction teams at both occasions, hung a large poster promoting the coming of "The New Nordic Museum". Conspicuously missing was the word "heritage" which had since the museum's founding in 1980 been an integrated aspect of its name and identity.

In order to understand the changes that were taking place around the museum as it geared up for its move to the new building, we spoke with many factions of the community. In this particular article we focus on museum staff and leadership who occupy key positions in the organization (in the following we will refer to all as simply staff, for reasons of anonymity). A number of staff members spoke about the Nordic's priority to reach a wider audience. Repeatedly, the word heritage emerged as an impediment to the process. As one staff member explained:

I know that in spirit, in content and identity of this (the Nordic) museum that the idea of heritage is never going to go away. It's ingrained here. It's part of the inception of this museum and it's always going to be an important foundation of this museum.

But this being said, this staff member went on to qualify the statement and implications the notion of heritage might have for the museum.

We have a partner organization down in the Oregon area. They have recently undergone a transition. [...] They thought the word heritage sounded too old and fuddy duddy and they thought the word Foundation was too referential to money and needing money. So they did not want to see those names.

Fig. 3. Hip heritage is shaped and shared through close collaboration between museums and businesses, such as the Aquavit display arranged and operated by Old Ballard Liquor Co., at the 2016 Viking Days. Photo: Lizette Graden.

If heritage increasingly seemed “fuddy duddy” in the eyes of partner organizations and the general public, the museum had to choose between aligning itself with that, or to re-tailor the suit it was to clothe itself in in the future. This required a great deal of soul searching and new visionary work that led the museum to stake out a new path of development. As a manager explained:

My goal is that the new audience is all of Seattle, all of Puget sound, and all of Washington State [...] I think that a lot of what contemporary Nordic art and culture is about is not necessarily about Nordic identity but about the shifts in Nordic identity and

about how other people from other cultures can relate to those shifting demographics.

With an aim to reach beyond their current constituency, the Nordic Heritage Museum leadership wanted to reform the museum. Indeed, it became apparent that relying on existing groups of visitors would not be a sustainable strategy to allow for the future growth of the museum in its coming facilities. Framing that which was Nordic had to be expanded and, at least in part, re-imagined. Part of reimagining Nordic culture implied the transformation of the institution itself. In order to better understand the shifting sands upon

which Nordic Heritage was being understood and framed by museum members and the local community, focus group interviews were conducted. These interviews proved to be revealing. As one member of the leadership team said:

We were in the middle generation that really was not as interested in their great grandparents immigration story as they were in film or design [...] and this was coming out of the focus groups, there was also a lot of interest in Norse mythology and the Vikings and all this stuff, and the Finns all wanted a sauna. You know so there was this, instead of getting more narrow, there was a widening of the desire for the museum to be more than just the Ballard ca 1910.

Trying to find a new profile and direction of growth for the museum was akin to opening Pandora's box. Rather than quickly finding a new focus for the museum, its many constituencies weighed in with a plethora of vastly different and competing ideas of what the future should hold. Indeed, leaving the immigrant story out of the new museum's narrative entirely did not seem as a realistic option either. As one manager in the department for development and marketing explained:

I think [...] the immigrant story will continue to be a piece of the museum story, but not the only piece of the museum story. There is that sense that, it's not I'm a Swedish American, it's just I'm Swedish. And so for the museum to talk about identity and to talk about what shaped and forged this identity over how many thousands of years, and made it unique, I think that maybe of interest to people, and I think that may be of interest to people who aren't Nordic as well. And then I think on the other side of things, is this sense of contemporary culture and how you remain connected to the Nordic countries, whether

that's through arts and culture exhibitions or other types of exhibitions.

This staff member too, concluded by hedging on the degree to which the museum wanted to assert heritage as a central component in a new museum,

My sense is that people who have invested, or made these contributions all want to see more people coming to the museum. They want to see the museum more widely accessible. And if the word "Heritage" in its name is an impediment to that, then they would probably be open to having a discussion about that.

BROADLY RELEVANT, AND BEYOND HERITAGE: THE CONTEMPORARY AS HERITAGE

There is no doubt museums all over the world are changing in the twenty-first century. The question is: How far can the Nordic Heritage Museum transform without losing its identity? A staff member explains.

Speaking in blunt terms, I don't need to do a *bunad* [here the term means traditional dress from the Nordic countries, not only Norwegian bunad, authors' note] exhibition to hold onto the members we already have. They already know, but the reality is that in this particular region, the bunad is only going to be of interest to a very small and finite group outside of our community.

At issue here is a movement away from the past, and from folk traditions, which are taken for granted, to more contemporary and design-oriented influences coming for the Nordic region. As an extension of this, exhibitions are not only being oriented more towards contemporary culture, but are even being

framed to attract audiences more interested in contemporary arts and fashion than traditional folkways. Considering that the exhibition openings, next after the museum's festivals, draw the largest audiences, museum staff is re-imagining the audience by partnering with various organizations and businesses, which bring their members and clients. A manager in curatorial explained:

The adding of a programmatic component to your openings definitely influences a higher turnout. We had a fashion show this past Thursday to accompany the artist presentation. Building in things like that really turns it into an event, not just an opening.

The Nordic, like many museums, is re-imagining its past, to legitimize its role in present society. As we know, these re-imaginings take on concrete forms. Aspiring to change the institution in a direction of being more contemporary, the museum leadership taps into trends from the Nordic countries. For example, New Nordic cuisine, established by the restaurant Noma (*nordisk mad*) in 2003 and based on Rene Redzepi's idea of heritage as terroir, was used in one of the museum's attempts to reach the community of foodies in Seattle. This occurred as at least some visitors and staff questioned the relevance of traditional foods recognized as Nordic in America. One member of the curatorial department explained the changes:

We were getting young Norwegians coming in and young Danes and looking at our applaskiva (*aebleskiver*), which is very popular at our various festivals, and the Lefse, and saying that nobody eats that shit in Denmark anymore. Why are you serving that? Nobody eats that in Norway anymore, why are you serving that? But then, at the same time, you have a food truck, a Viking soul-food truck, down

in Portland, where they do fried chicken and lefse, and it is one of the most popular food trucks in all of Portland because they find ways to hybridize and re-identify these traditional items. So in looking at our exhibition schedule programmatically, I think it was focusing on being very contemporary, and very modern in terms of what the reach and scope would be for audience identification.

Fashion shows, artist presentations, and Viking soul-food all represent ways of moving the past to new forms of hip heritage that strives to engage new groups in the rapidly expanding demographic profile and cultural cityscape of Seattle. While heritage is always in the process of change as it is adapted to new contexts, the process at work here is increasingly driven not so much by the desires of the local group of museum members to redefine themselves, as by a desire on the museum's leadership behalf to meet the expectations of a broader potential market of young upwardly mobile middle class adults. We call this hip heritage, but this is not to imply that it is any less honest than the museum's original orientation, which more strongly emphasized the immigrant experiences of its constituency. In fact, we view hip heritage as a market-oriented strategy of transforming museum institutions and of potentially transforming the museum community's view of itself. As a staff member explained:

Ex-patriots and especially the folks in the embassies and others, really wanted it (the new museum) to be modern contemporary Scandinavia, here we are world leaders in sustainability and innovation. And they don't want to be portrayed as, you know, the farmers who came out and lived in sod houses.

Hip heritage emerges as a tool of institutional transatlantic connectivity, guided by priorities made by current Nordic diplomacy and

Fig. 4. The American/Austrian artist duo Sarah Cooper (1974) and Nina Gorfer (1979) are the curators behind the *Weather Diaries*, a traveling exhibit that included the works by twelve artists and fashion designers from Greenland, the Faroe Islands and Iceland. The *Weather Diaries* was presented by the Nordic House in Reykjavik and adapted to suit particular museum galleries and shape new audiences while touring the US, including stops at the Nordic Heritage Museum in Seattle and, as shown in the image here, at the Turnblad Mansion of the American Swedish Institute in Minneapolis. Photo: Lizette Gradén.

overseas nation branding, rather than from within the complex communities themselves. At the crossroads of that which is perceived as “fuddy-duddy” and that which is hip and in tune with the times, a new framework for heritage is taking form.

CURATORIAL AGENCY AND HIP HERITAGE FOR SALE

The ways in which museums perform and present heritage and history has shifted over the years, always striving to be in tune with

trends and their contemporary contexts. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett spoke in the 1990s about an identity crisis among museums which arose as they competed with more distinct commercial actors in the experience economy field (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998), we contend that the language about such a crisis has come to stay. Today it is not just a matter of various techniques involved in producing exhibitions. With the increased diffusion of curatorial agency, through digitization and accessibility, museums are looking even more to audience engagement through events

and programs. At times the collections and collection strategies seem to fade into the background. The shift from a heritage based on collections and volunteer engagement into a theatrical showroom for visiting exhibitions (often from overseas) and rapidly changing programs calls staff at ASI to rethink the museum, how it might be envisioned as a stage for different kinds of events such as glögg tours at Christmas and evenings with “cocktails in the castle” (see fig. 1 above). A manager explained:

We have started doing cocktails at the castle! Many of these people have never been here before. But now we had a hot, night-time, cocktail party, and at the same time they were being engaged into the exhibits, they were being engaged into the crafts. They were having really awesome music outside. So I would say that, to a certain extent this is how we have transitioned ourselves.

Up until very recently, food and drink were prohibited from exhibition areas due to the preservation threat they could pose to objects and the historic house. At the ASI cocktail parties, the mansion and its traditional collections fade into the background of Gatsbyesque events designed to draw in paying visitors. An extension of this trend towards hip heritage is reflected also in changes occurring in the gift shops of the museums. At ASI the gift shop has moved from the Turnblad Mansion to the new Nelson Gallery where it is undergoing a new phase of transformation. As one staff member envisioned:

The goal is to make the store more of a destination store [...] I want more people to see the store and not just see rosmaling and small handcarvings. I want to make it more cutting edge. Something that reflects current Scandinavian culture, in home décor and gift-giving.

The New Nordic presents almost an identical strategy, yet leaning more towards design. A manager reflected.

The goal is to make the store a destination in itself, and to make it reflect the quality of our exhibitions. We envision the store filled with high quality design items such as Marimekko and Iittala, and cookbooks featuring Nordic cuisine like Magnus Nilsson's book.

The vision from a management point of view is that a store that operates close to its customers is a winner. In the case of ASI and the Nordic, the customer being forged is hip and attracted by “cutting edge” items and “quality design” just as the audience being shaped for exhibitions and programs is hip, financially able and attracted by contemporary culture from the Nordic countries rather than cultural expressions from their own backyard.

HIP HERITAGE AND HERITAGE FASHION

Heritage is about the construction of identity and senses of community. It demarcates the symbolic boundaries within which communities can perceive a space of maneuverability. But as Anthony Cohen has argued, communities that find themselves in the midst of rapid social change also find themselves in a position of having to negotiate a great deal of border work that often involve atavistic re-engagements of the past (Cohen 1985:46). Heritage is also as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett convincingly states, created through metacultural practices that extend museological areas and methods, such as collection, preservation, presentation, interpretation and evaluation to include living people, current knowledge, and the museum personnel themselves (1998, 2006). As an expansion, we argue, heritage and particularly hip heritage making is itself a trend and taste

sensitive practice that operates at the crossroads of political aims and financial markets.

The Nordic Museum and ASI, like many museums, are re-imagining the past, sometimes to legitimize it and sometimes to criticize it. However, if heritage has been about re-invoking the past in the present as part of the process of staking out the contours of a community and understanding of a collective identity for the future, then it might be possible to say that when heritage becomes a market bound commodity, the process at work at both the New Nordic and ASI indicate a shift in orientation. The effort at the Nordic is to drop the term “heritage”, but to nonetheless select and mobilize a certain heritage (Norse mythology, saunas, selected food, Vikings, handicraft etc) that is now re-trope as “contemporary” in an outward direction beyond the local community on the competitive catwalk of heritage fashion. The processes at work at ASI run in a parallel direction as the emphasis upon the Swedishness of the institute are down-played more than ever and new narratives are being developed which touch upon the past but are intended to explicitly address contemporary issues, and appeal to the tastes of the educated American middle classes – and do so in ways that work to replenish their cultural capital in class terms, rather than ethnic terms. This is particularly evident when museums engage artists and artisans as well as emphasize the handcrafted, while simultaneously stocking the gift shop with goods that have been selected based on price point. Revenue is also at the center when the New Nordic Museum gears up for their move, leaving traditional craft behind to give room for recognized design items and New Nordic Cuisine.

The curatorial agency that the museums perform forges a middle class fashionable

audience. To be certain, as a means of asserting a collective identity, heritage has always had a high degree of outward orientation, but what is new in the case of these two museums is the degree to which representations of the past are filtered through a hip factor in the name of gaining broader relevance. While UNESCO’s slogan “unity in diversity” aims to represent harmony and understanding, frictions emerge in practice on the national, regional and local level, with a risk of forging diverse voices into a one-size-fits all model (Turtinen 2006; Hafstein 2014; cf. Selberg 2002). Similar frictions occur within the museum community (Karp *et al.* 2006). When star museum exhibition design firms select to steep complex heritages and histories in similar designs the museum as institution runs a risk of becoming a medium that messages conformity rather than diversity. Museums that seek to succeed through the hip factor that guide market forces, have to be on their toes and in constant tune with audiences’ current desires. They depends more on trend analysis, focus group interviews conducted by hired market consultants, and flexibility based upon gut feelings than on in-depth knowledge about collections, their origins, migration history, and cultural value as well as the complexity of the changes occurring in the Nordic countries.

This is not a process unique to the ASI or to the New Nordic, it can be witnessed in museums throughout North America and Europe, but it does raise questions as to how we might understand heritage, not primarily as something highlighted and celebrated among a specific group or as attributing community identity, but also as a marketable “re-tropeable” commodity in a rapidly and ever changing global experience economy. Hip heritage may be able to draw in larger audiences at the moment, but it comes with the risk of

homogeneity, and for this reason it is perhaps not surprising that there are similarities in the ways the Nordic and ASI work with art, fashion and design, share traveling exhibitions and receive indirect or direct financial support from such entities as the Nordic Ministry of Culture and the Swedish Arts Council, thus serving both as avenue for cultural connectivity and a market for nation branding.

At the same time, it is interesting to observe how ASI while working in the spirit of hip heritage is also striving to tease out the contours of a politically subversive strategy that is meant to be a challenge to some policies of the currently reigning American government. Leadership at ASI and the Nordic are thus finding ways to attract larger and larger publics while simultaneously striving to be slightly politically subversive. In relation to the discussion we have presented here about hip heritage, in Minneapolis, being subversive in this way is pretty hip.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank our colleagues who have commented on earlier versions of this article in seminars and workshops in Sweden and the US. We would also like to thank our anonymous peer-reviewers for their input on the final version. We would also like to thank the Swedish National Heritage Board, Erik Philip-Sörensens Stiftelse and Birgit and Gad Rausings Stiftelse for the economic support that has made this article possible: as well as the staff, community members and volunteers whose generous collaboration also made this work possible.

SOURCE MATERIAL

Interviews with the leadership team and staff of the Nordic Heritage Museum were carried out in

August 2016, and October 2017. Recordings and transcripts in the possession of the authors.

Interviews with the leadership team and staff of the ASI were carried out in May 2017 and August 2017. Recordings and transcripts in the possession of the authors.

Photographs and fieldnotes in the possession of the authors.

Fieldwork conducted in Seattle and Minneapolis 2014, 2016, 2017.

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