

Dr Ken Arnold Keynote speaker for New Practices.

Abstract

Two of Clifford's central claims in his Contact Zone essay were first that museums should go beyond "educating and edifying a public, beyond... consultation and sensitivity," that they should engage in "active collaboration and a sharing of authority"; and second that curators should "reckon with the fact that the objects and interpretations they display 'belong' to others as well as to the museum." Reflecting on these ideas, my talk will explore how the work of a new type of science and medicine museum is creating opportunities for understanding by bringing together different people and exhibits, perspectives and stories.

I will mostly describe the work of the venue I know best, Wellcome Collection in London, outlining our methodology for putting medicine on show, focusing on the idea of museums hosting investigative public projects - a form of thinking aloud (and maybe 'thinking allowed' too). I will spend some time talking about a particular form of contact that we regularly enable in our exhibitions and events between the worlds of science and art. And finally, I will try to locate the institutional shift that Wellcome Collection is part of within recent trends in science and medical museums as well as broader cultural currents.