



University of  
Leicester

Issue 19  
2015

# Museological Review



**A Peer-Reviewed Journal Edited by the  
Students of the School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester**

ISSN 1354-5825

## **Museological Review**

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ISSN 1354-5825

Cover image: Natasha Barrett, *Whare Runanga/The House of Assembly*. Detail of a carving inside *Whare Runanga/The House of Assembly*, the *whareniui*/Māori meeting house at the Waitangi Treaty Grounds, Waitangi, New Zealand. 2012. Photo © Natasha Barrett.

Museological Review would like to thank the following people who helped in the edition of this issue: Bob Ahluwalia, Sandra Dudley, Gordon Fyfe, Sarah Pink, Richard Sandell, Cintia Velazquez Marroni, University of Leicester Creative Services Team, University of Leicester IT Services, and of course all of our anonymous peer reviewers and the PhD Community of the School of Museum Studies in Leicester.

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## Note from the Editors

Welcome to the latest issue of *Museological Review*. This year's theme explores the notion of museums as living organisms, which we believed appropriate in order to follow the interesting discussions that took place during the PhD conference - *Museums Alive! Exploring How Museums Behave Like Living Beings*, at the School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester on 4 and 5 November 2014. It is important to note that some of the articles contained in the current issue were originally presented during the conference, and as a result have been reworked and edited by the authors after a peer-review process. Other articles are presented here for the first time and have been written especially for the issue.

After the success of last year's renewed and re-branded *Museological Review* (in response to the twentieth anniversary in 2014), the new editorial board decided to follow in the footsteps and continue the excellent work of 2013/14's Editor-in-Chief Cintia Velazquez Marroni, presenting the mission of *Museological Review* as a dynamic and varied journal which encourages different contexts, visions and writing styles, thus incorporating new sections beyond traditional academic articles.

A significant new inclusion in the issue is the presence of creative, alternative formats, in the form of 'Visual Submissions' that communicate research- or practice-based work in a single image. **Natasha Barrett's** *The indigenous museum space or whareniui as the embodied Māori ancestor in New Zealand* and **Laurence Brasseur's** *Museums, young people and reciprocal relevance* mark this pioneering development. Editor **Lesley Barker** also reflects on the editorial and peer review process for visual inquiry in her editorial piece *Visual Research Submissions & the Field of Museum Studies*.

To present the rich connections with the PhD conference the editorial board invited Conference Manager **Ryan Nutting** to write a reflective piece on *Museums Alive!* in which he muses on how museums, like living beings, do not live in isolation, rather, are embedded in complex ecosystems. Whereas, in an interview conducted by **Laura Crossley**, **Bridget McKenzie** argues that using the term ecosystem as a metaphor for the world of museums is problematic and instead asserts that a discussion of ecosystems must include thinking about the environment. This concern is perhaps most pertinently explored in **Jessica Holtaway's** article *Museums and Oil Sponsorship; forming (un)ethical identities*, which discusses issues surrounding oil sponsorship of the arts and why ethics is a central concern in the forming of institutional identities.

**Dr Cristiano Agostino** goes on to explore how museums and art galleries create identities for themselves in the World Wide Web, including through the digital presentation of their collections and artefacts. Agostino calls for a reframing of the debates encompassing digitisation towards understanding digital replicas as valuable actors and as 'digital-beings', capable of enhancing users' experiences through meaningful bodily engagements. The idea of the museum object possessing many of the qualities of a living being is central to **Alex Woodall's** thesis in *Body, Mind, Spirit: an interpretive framework for children in hospital schools*. As a result of an innovative action research project Woodall proposes a new approach to interpretation, using concepts of 'body', 'mind' and 'spirit' as a means for linking museum objects with personal wellbeing.

**Dr Fabien Van Geert** also considers wellbeing, however in this case – the health of the museum. Using the metaphor of prescribing a 'Multicultural Pill' to cure the ails of the museum, Van Geert's article *Analysing the Multicultural Pill as the renovation treatment of the European Ethnological and Colonial Museums* scrutinizes shifts in the 1990s and 2000s towards the presentation of the 'multicultural' in ethnological museums in an attempt to bring contemporary relevance. For **Dr Ellie Miles** and staff of the Museum of London engaging with and critically reflecting on curatorial strategies and museum representation through a 'peopling of the past' has been crucially important to the development and evaluation of their *Galleries of Modern London*. Miles' article sets out to explore how complex projects like these give museums character and life.

Finally, we would like to thank all the authors, peer-reviewers, academics and colleagues that have made *Museological Review* possible throughout the years. *Museological Review's* main purpose is to turn academic publishing into a constructive and positive learning experience for both authors and editors. We hope that our readers will enjoy the issue and feel inspired to change their approach to museum research and practice. We also hope that in the future they will not only be readers, but also active contributors to this space for dialogue.

Enjoy reading.

**Editorial Board:** Sarah Plumb (Editor-in-Chief), Lesley Barker, Haitham Eid and Sipei Lu.

## CONFERENCE REVIEW: Museums Alive! Exploring How Museums Behave Like Living Beings University of Leicester 4 - 5 November 2014

**Ryan Nutting**

PhD Researcher, School of Museum Studies and Victorian Studies Centre, University of Leicester  
rn114@leicester.ac.uk

In 1889, at a meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in Newcastle-on-Tyne, William Henry Flower, then director of the Natural History Museum in London, remarked, “A museum is like a living organism - it requires continual and tender care. It must grow, or it will perish” (1898).

With a similar thought in a mind, a group of PhD students at the University of Leicester’s School of Museum Studies spent a year planning the sixth School of Museum Studies PhD student led conference over two days in order to explore how museums behave like living beings.

The committee invited responses to a Call for Papers from postgraduate students, early career researchers, and museum professionals that explored this theme in three principle ways. First, the Call for Papers asked respondents to explore how museums mimic the act of conscious living; namely, how museums create their own identities, create relationships, reflect emotions, and participate in social issues. Next, the committee asked respondents to reflect upon museums as open systems: for example, how museums function and coexist in an ecosystem, and adapt to or affect their environments. Additionally, the Call for Papers solicited works that examined how museums evolve, in particular whether museums follow lifecycles or mutate, how museums utilise their senses, how museums coexist or compete with other “species”, and if museums can be used as spaces for experimentation.

The conference planning committee partnered with the Migration Museum Project to develop this conference. Based upon the Migration Museum Project’s focus on migration experiences as well as the interesting model for a museum it represents - a museum without a permanent venue or collection that challenges our understanding of what a museum can be - the committee felt the museum would make a perfect partner for the conference. This partnership included a walking tour of Leicester as well as an exhibition in the School of Museum Studies building titled *100 Stories of Migration* developed and installed by School of Museum Studies PhD students. The exhibition showcased images and interactive digital media kiosks centred on five interlinking themes focusing on migration experiences.



Figure 1 – *Alternative Walking Tour of Leicester* with photographer Kajal Nisha Patel, November 2014. Photo © Sarah Plumb.

The conference began with two social activities on 3 November. During the afternoon Leicester photographer Kajal Nisha Patel led conference delegates and members of the general public on a walking tour of Leicester focusing on migration in coordination with the *100 Stories of Migration* exhibition in the School of Museum Studies (Figure 1). Later that evening, School of Museum Studies PhD student Anna Mikhailova hosted a #drinkingaboutmuseums event at a local pub as an opportunity for the conference delegates to meet and socialize prior to the start of the conference.

In order to explore the themes of a living museum, the committee planned the two days of the conference to include a number of different activities and presentations from the large response they received to their Call for Papers. The committee designed the conference around four themed sessions: Creating Museum Identities, Living Museums, Museum Environments, and Museums as Laboratories. In order to showcase the conference speakers' research the committee allowed workshop leaders an hour and other presenters twenty minutes to present their work. Each of the four themed sessions and the rapid-fire session on day two concluded with half an hour for questions from the conference delegates to a panel of everyone included in that session.



Figure 2 – Ryan Nutting, Conference Manager welcomes delegates to *Museums Alive!* November 2014. Photo © Ruth Webber.

The conference opened with remarks from three internationally renowned scholars from the University of Leicester, School of Museum Studies (Figure 2). Professor Simon Knell related the similarities between museums and specific animals living and extinct. Next, keynote speaker Dr Suzanne McLeod presented her research on how museum architecture reveals change in the museum. Professor Emeritus Susan Pearce concluded this session by exploring how both human beings and museums are living beings and examining the idea of senses in each.

The first themed session of the conference, “Creating Museum Identities”, featured three presentations that explored factors that shape a museum’s identity. Elif Çiğdem Artan, from the Frankfurt Historical Museum in

Germany, delivered the first presentation when she discussed stories of the Frankfurt Migrant Women Association. Next, Laura Carter, PhD student in History at Trinity Hall, Cambridge, examined female curators at Dr Johnson's House in London in the mid-twentieth century. Jessica Holtaway, PhD student in Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths, led the third presentation of the session and explored sponsorship of museums by oil companies.

The afternoon session, titled "Living Museums" included a mix of presentation styles which all focused on how museums mimic and explore the concept of life. The session started with a workshop led by Alex Woodall, PhD student in the School of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester, which focused on an interpretive framework for working with museum objects used with children in hospital schools. In the session's first academic presentation Dr Hannah-Lee Chalk, Project Coordinator at the Manchester Museum, addressed how to understand the history of objects as mirroring those of a living organism. Next, Dr Jon Radley, Curator of Natural Sciences at Warwickshire Museums, discussed the community's involvement in the "Night at the Museum" programme. Laura Crossley, PhD student in the School of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester, delivered the final presentation of the day with her examination of how museums adapt to meet financial challenges.

The second day of the conference featured a slightly different format. The day began with a talk by Migration Museum Project Director Sophie Henderson on the history of the Migration Museum Project. The next session featured five-minute rapid-fire sessions exploring a variety of the conference themes. Dr Cristiano Agostino, a recent PhD graduate in the History of Art at the University of Edinburgh, started this session by examining museum websites using an organic frame of reference. Katie Murray, PhD student in Museum and Gallery Studies at the University of St Andrews, followed by exploring the "species" of commercial exhibitions in the early twentieth century. Laura Kugel, researcher at Christie's, then explored how art museums can evolve to address both local and national themes of culture and of identity. Artist and educator Elena Tognoli concluded this session with an audio-visual piece used on a handheld device at the Foundling Museum in London that explores the way visitors interact with the exhibitions.

The first of the day's two themed sessions, "Museum Environments" focused on the changing nature of environments in museums. Jack Denham, PhD student in Sociology at the University of York delivered a presentation on how different museums feature murderabilia. Next, Kathleen Pirrie Adams, PhD student in the School of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester, explored how purpose-built popular music museums connect with audiences. Dr Helen Wilkinson, recent PhD graduate from the School of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester, concluded this session by using organic metaphors to examine different methods of how change happens in museums.

The afternoon session, titled "Museums as Laboratories" explored how museums can be places for experimentation. Gill Hart, Learning and Access Officer at the National Gallery, started this session by leading a workshop based on a programme at the National Gallery in which participants viewed a single painting in the museum's galleries in silence. Next Fabien Van Geert, PhD student in Cultural and Heritage Management at the University of Barcelona, explored the introduction of multiculturalism in European ethnographical museums at the end of the twentieth century. Alisa Maximova, PhD student in Sociology at the Higher School of Economics in Moscow, delivered the final presentation of the conference on visitors using hands-on interactive stations and what museums can learn from their reactions.

***"...many speakers were able to successfully demonstrate how the idea of living beings is a useful lens for examining museums" (conference delegate).***

As Flower suggested in the late 19th century, this conference produced a number of diverse outputs that helped the museum field and conference attendees grow and flourish. After the conference many attendees remarked upon how this paradigm of understanding museums as living beings allowed presenters and delegates to share their work and meet other museum scholars and professionals. The delegates enjoyed the presentations and lively panel sessions – all of which provided fresh perspectives on how museums grow and thrive. After the conference one delegate remarked, "The idea of evolution, survival, and transformation will be built into my workplace's business planning process." Another delegate echoed this remark by writing, "many speakers were able to successfully demonstrate how the idea of living beings is a useful lens for examining museums."

Additionally, the conference created an opportunity for museum scholars and professionals to engage and comment upon each other's work. A delegate wrote that they cherished "[the] chance to talk about my work in

a friendly environment, [the] chance to be a part of a professional, inspiring conference, [the] chance to get feedback on my work. Thanks so much for giving me the opportunity!" Furthermore, the conference created and fostered a network between museum academics and practitioners. After the conference a delegate wrote "[the conference provided] good opportunities to network and discuss research both in formal and informal events." Another delegate added, "I really enjoyed meeting students, academics and professionals from all over the world to share our research, knowledge, and experiences." Moreover, delegates also mentioned that they liked how the conference actively engaged in a discussion on the conference themes over Twitter using the hashtag #MuseumsAlive. A sample of the Twitter conversations generated by the conference can be found at <https://storify.com/MSPHDCConf>.

### Reference

Flower, W. (1898). *Essays on museums and other subjects connected with natural history, by Sir William Henry Flower*. London: Macmillan.



## INTERVIEW: Bridget McKenzie

Flow UK 26 April 2015

Laura Crossley

PhD Researcher, School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester

lfc10@leicester.ac.uk

### Biography

**Bridget McKenzie** has 23 years of experience in delivering and evaluating innovative education in arts and heritage. She founded Flow UK ([www.flowglobal.co.uk](http://www.flowglobal.co.uk)) in 2006, subsequently supporting its establishment in India and internationally. Previously Bridget has been Head of Learning at the British Library, Education Officer for Tate, lead consultant for Clore Duffield's Artworks Awards and Co-ordinator of Young at Art for the University of the Arts. Bridget is known for furthering the role of 'creative enquiry' in education and for placing culture at the heart of a shift to a sustainable future, publishing her thinking on The Learning Planet and numerous journals as well as being in demand to address audiences internationally as a public speaker. She holds both a BA Hons and MA in History of Art, and two teaching qualifications.

### In your blog post 'Ecosystems as Metaphors' you suggest that it is problematic to use ecosystems as a metaphor for museums. Please could you tell me more about this?

I don't think it's wrong to use this metaphor; in fact, I'd like to see more ecosystems thinking. However, using 'ecosystem' as a metaphor is problematic. Generally, in hegemonic culture we lack an ecological epistemology. With the exception of the discipline of Ecology, no areas of academic study think ecologically; they abstract from a real concrete space. The concept of an 'ecosystem' seems to be, therefore, used as an abstract, rather than a means by which we consider the environment (and museums' impact upon the environment). For example, the digital world is often described as an ecosystem but without discussion about the environment.

The University of Leicester School of Museums Studies *Museums Alive!* conference was an example of people from a range of disciplines that don't tend to include ecological thinking coming together to talk about ecosystems. I don't want to be disparaging as it was a stimulating concept, but I'd suggest that discussion of ecosystems must include thinking about the environment. In the museum world, this needs to include debate about how museums can be more ecologically aware.

Ecosystems are a strange metaphor to use if you're not going to consider the environment; I don't mean as just a side issue, I mean thinking about the world around us that we depend on to function healthily. I think it's more interesting to think about how museums are part of ecosystems, rather than ecosystems in themselves.

### The blogpost talks about the importance of considering museums' function in relation to big global forces such as capitalism, climate change and conflict? Why do you feel this is important?

These are the most important, devastating, overwhelming issues that the planet is facing but yet we skirt around them. Capitalism gone wrong – the exploitation of economies by big corporations – is the cause of ecocide and climate change; these things deeply affect each other.

### In your article for Medium.com, 'Towards the Sociocratic Museum', you consider how and why museums could radically change to meet the challenges of the unfolding global ecological crisis, including practices that involve more sociocratic forms of practice and governance. Could you define the term 'sociocratic'? What do you think the sociocratic museum looks like?

I came across the term in a piece of writing about systems thinking – it comes from cybernetics and the ideas of social connectivism and that digital infrastructure for decision making can be more democratic by creating a greater mass of people affecting change focused on problems in the way that web

development does. It relates to the idea of homeostasis – that systems need to work together to achieve balance. Sociocracy is a kind of democracy; the systems that people form through serving their needs for survival. The term could replace democracy, because the term democracy is used to describe systems that are not particularly democratic. I think I was the first person to apply the term sociocratic to the museum. It seems to me that most museums are bureaucratic – in each museum some people will pull towards plutocracy and others will pull towards sociocracy.

What does the sociocratic museum look like? It's hard to operate in such a way as we don't live in a sociocratic system. However, we see it most in 'change projects' that want to hear other voices, in museums that are honouring indigenous people, or in natural history museums – for example, citizen science, or research projects that are learning from indigenous people. Though not museums, the botanic gardens sector has good examples of sociocracy in action. For example Botanic Gardens Conservation International is supporting pilot projects to reinvent botanic gardens so that they're community focused, and working towards a sustainable future for the planet.

Power relations in museums' work with communities are hard to manage because we're not rigorous enough in working with questions. We're really good at community engagement where we give people cake and provide enjoyable experiences, but we don't necessarily develop problem solving and questioning with communities very well. Botanic gardens have contemporary problems to solve so they have a clearer imperative to work with communities to solve these. Museums don't often have contemporary problems to solve, but we could be working with communities to answer questions, for example, 'how do we use materials more sustainably'?

If you're focusing on what communities need you could bypass the museum. Encounters Arts in Devon focus on serving community needs, for example in areas like sustainable fishing or coastal storms, and are very participatory. They often create museums or use museums but they aren't a museum – their projects are led by artists. Museums aren't the only organisations that can do participation and sociocratic practice well. Encounters Arts are good at getting commissioned by health and social services; museums could look to them as an example of how to do this.

### **Why is it important to move towards more sociocratic practice and how do you think this can be achieved?**

We have an embedded mindset that politicians make decisions for us. There is an acceptance in the media that it's impossible for people to collaborate to make decisions. Digital platforms, museums and participatory arts organisations are three potential levers for change that can make us think about the possibilities of radical democracy.

How can this be achieved? We need to promote good practice and get on with it, and always look for the levers for change, such as funders. For example, I was part of a group that went to Arts Council England to suggest creating a category of funding for socially and ecologically engaged arts practice. There's a lack of systems thinking in the way that culture is funded; funding streams tend to be very skewed towards costs of special and capital projects, which do not support the development of sociocratic organisations. That said, Heritage Lottery Fund requires lots of community engagement in projects they fund, which is good as these could potentially trigger internal change.

One way sociocratic museums can evolve and thrive is by broadening practice in museums using digital platforms. Engaging with oral history and demotic history also suits sociocratic museums.

### **Have you seen any good examples of sociocratic practices in action?**

Tony Butler is a good example of a museum director who 'gets' sociocratic practice, as seen in the work he has led at the Museum of East Anglian Life and Derby Museums.

Mike Benson's leadership of Ryedale Folk Museum and Bede's World is an example of aiming for resilient museums that are community assets. These museums are pro-enterprise but remain true to the authentic value of their museums.

Museums can learn from other organisations that carry out participatory projects where participants know what problems they need to solve, are fully on board and know what to expect. Great non-

museum examples would be the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation that undertakes projects that improve wellbeing and Botanic Gardens Conservation International which works with local communities to regenerate their environments. In the world of plants there's a long-term vision - you want to see the plants grow over 100 years. Museums, on the other hand, are focused on the next thing, the next exhibition, rather than thinking long-term or focusing on contemporary issues.

I think sometimes funding makes people push the boundaries, especially for bigger projects or individual practitioners. However, funding streams don't always support a contemporary focus. World War One has marginal relevance today, but the BBC and the rightwing press still talk a great deal about it. Museums could break the hegemony of the press by talking about contemporary issues, rather than World War One; why is funding not focused on issues like migrants or climate change etc.?

Museums are places where people can think; they bring together evidence and let people decide on issues for themselves. Museums should be places for demotic, relevant history to be continually made in ways that help societies learn and respond to contemporary issues. If museums have a role, they have a role to help people understand the root of contemporary problems and not just the palliative end. They should help us understand the causes of these problems and how we might make changes.

### **What role do you feel digital has to play in museums' sociocratic practices and could digital solutions be problematic?**

As I wrote in the article, "the idea of a sociocratic museum is radically democratic, which arguably goes beyond a 'social museum' expanded by digital programming". I acknowledged that "digital can play a role in the transition to sociocratic museums, especially since sociocratic principles are influenced by cybernetics [but] digital alone can't achieve the necessary change, unless integrated with more democratic and ecological ethics of governance and methods of education."

My main position is as an educator and, from this position, I feel that museums need to work harder to contextualize their collections and help people interpret them using a combination of methods – enquiry-based learning, forming narratives, developing new designs, idea and solutions, and generating culture that goes back into the museum. This should be an interpretive model for all museums. Digital doesn't latch onto that model in reality, but it has the potential to do so – opening up of technology is exciting and has lots of possibilities. We don't often see a marrying of interpretation, sociocracy and digital, for example, real participatory technological interpretation. Participatory digital projects often lack rigour in questioning; they ask things like 'Tell us about your experience of...?' or 'What's your favourite...?' rather than enquiry-based questions. In addition, lots of digital stuff doesn't create sustained engagement, rather, it's an amplifier of communication. Digital shouldn't be about trying to impress everyone; small things like using free social media platforms or document sharing online are good uses of digital as they're not wasteful.

### **I was fascinated by your thoughts on how a truly ecological way of valuing culture - an 'oikonomic system' of value - might be developed, one that might take us away from using financial measures to value culture, and feel that utilising an oikonomic system might help museums to further consider the valuable role they play in promoting sustainable living and helping people cope with the global ecological crisis. Could you define the oikonomic system of value?**

The debate about intrinsic and instrumental value of culture goes on and on and on and the debate is really between whether culture has a financial value or 'another' value. Culture is spoken of as a spiritual temple where you escape all that. The oikonomic system of value is a way to flip this debate on its head by thinking about changing our notion of economics and the power and value of culture. It makes no sense to distinguish between economic and non-economic valuation approaches. Culture is an entirely productive activity (if you see product in the broadest terms) and valuation is an entirely economic process. There is another, more meaningful, distinction to be made and that is between two ways of doing economics.

In a more oikonomic system, time becomes a significant factor but one where we don't privilege speed. We see that fast action for maximum accumulation of capital or value may be superficially efficient but it is not sustainably efficient. It could be possible to give a monetary or numerical/proxy valuation to every

activity, eventually. The fastest yields occur when money acts upon itself, in the money markets (but while speculating on commodities from ecocidal land-grabbing or deforestation, and which causes hunger). The very slowest yields are when we regenerate natural environments that might take 1000 years to recover from human destruction. Somewhere between the two are yields from Social and Cultural interventions. Social interventions are more rapid because they can involve providing material human needs in a timely way. Cultural interventions can similarly see quick results in terms of joy or conversation, but these may take some more time to translate into Financial or Social value. They may translate through a very long 'food chain', which gives rise to subsidiary benefits that weren't originally planned.

The notion of *oikeios* as a favoured place is a metaphor but it's also a reality. Our planet and where we live are realities. Storytelling, culture and enquiry help us both understand and live within these realities and generate real and authentic value from places. *Oikeios* is about knitting us closer to the world and knitting our brains closer to the world, thus helping us understand our world.

I'm currently working on a *Framework for Thrivability*. Rather than a framework that evaluates culture on its extracted parts, it's a much more holistic framework that looks at individuals and how we create thriving places, thriving people, a thriving planet and thriving culture and maps projects based on their thriving outputs. In the future, research into the *oiknomic* value of culture is something I'd love collaborate on with someone who has better understanding than I do of economics.

### What do you feel are the ecological dangers of measuring cultural value in financial terms?

One danger is that the evaluation or measurement is non-systematic - you're not reporting on real ecological or systems change; you're reporting on the results of the investment of the funding, rather than unpredictable emerging change. The other danger is that if you talk about wellbeing and thriving outcomes you're not really understood by people who are just setting targets; they're only hearing the sound of cash registers. If you measure things in purely financial terms - for example, how much profit something has made or how much money you've saved public services - then the loop of progress is going to force you to build more, extract more from your workers, do something again but doing more of it, all of which can be harmful to the environment. It's problematic that museums are building bigger buildings; building over areas that could be green spaces, using more energy, generating more waste, taking money from unethical sources. If we evaluate with a 'growth mindset' - an obsession with growth - we're always going to be growing. We have to ask, if you grow and grow and grow and then collapse, what happens next?

### Bridget's original articles can be found here:

*The Oiknomic Value of Culture*, The Learning Planet, May 11 2013:

<https://thelearningplanet.wordpress.com/2013/05/11/the-oiknomic-value-of-culture/>

*Ecosystems as Metaphors*, The Learning Planet, November 5 2014:

<https://thelearningplanet.wordpress.com/2014/11/05/ecosystems-as-metaphors/>

*Towards the Sociocratic Museum*, Medium.com, January 2015: <https://medium.com/code-words-technology-and-theory-in-the-museum/towards-the-sociocratic-museum-223390e2a00b>.

## AN EDITORIAL: Visual Research Submissions & the Field of Museum Studies

Lesley Barker

PhD Researcher, School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester

lapb2@leicester.ac.uk

### The Situation We Faced as Editors

*Visual research is a relatively new approach to investigating and exploring within social science and is certainly new to the field of museum studies. With this edition of the Museological Review the editors decided to include visual research in our call for submissions thinking that this would be a way to introduce visual research methods more widely. In some ways, the call for submissions was naively illustrative of "zeal without knowledge." We asked for submissions without clarifying what we meant, without having determined scoring criteria for this type of work, and without a ready pool of recent PhD graduates with experience in visual methodologies to serve as peer reviewers.*

*So, when we received a few visual submissions we realized these omissions and decided that we had a lot of work to do to support the courageous first submitters. First we went to the literature to answer the question: What do we mean by visual research? This required us to identify which scholars have been pioneering the field of visual research methodology; what visual research is being used to explore and investigate; and how the academy has received, criticized, and evaluated visual research. A key conclusion is that a visual research submission must differ in certain specific ways from an image that is used as an illustration for an article. These questions informed the evaluative guidelines we determined that a visual research submission must meet if we were to publish it here. Many thanks are owed to Sarah Pink of the University of Loughborough whose book provides a good overview of the pioneers in visual research showing both the pitfalls and the potential for this method of inquiry. She also recommended a group of recent PhD graduates from several universities whose backgrounds made them appropriate to serve as peer reviewers for our submissions.*

### What is visual thinking and how does it inform our understanding of visual research?

Visual research has been the domain of ethnographers and film makers until somewhat recently when, perhaps due to the proliferation of digital cameras on mobile smart phones, the visual has become a more accessible and affordable research tool. Visual research does not depend on language to pose a research question, to collect data, to identify, describe, or analyse that data, or to present the research. Visual research may apply to just one part of a research process. It might combine, as a mixed methods project combines quantitative with qualitative research, the visual with the verbal. Before one can grapple with defining and pursuing visual research, it is important to consider how visual intelligence works. A good starting place is the work of Howard Gardner, the John H. and Elisabeth A. Hobbs Professor in Cognition and Education at Harvard University.

Gardner innovated the theory of multiple intelligences that has changed the way classroom teachers deliver instruction so that students, whose primary "intelligence" or neurally based "computational capacity" (Gardner 2008:7) is not language, can be more successful learners. One of Gardner's several specific intelligences is spatial or visual intelligence. This has three distinct aspects: a biophysiological component, a sociological component, and an individual stylistic component. The first, and what he insists is a biophysiological component of each different kind of intelligence, is "a computational capacity" (Gardner, 2008:6, 31) that depends on neural pathways and the part of the brain that is most frequently utilized for thinking and problem solving. The sociological component of an intelligence, according to Gardner, applies to crafts, disciplines, and fields or "any kind of organized activity within a society in which one can readily array individuals in terms of experience." (Ibid: 31). The third way that Gardner defines intelligence is "the manner in which a task is executed." (Ibid: 33). Gardner's work suggests that the different intelligences hold different keys to new knowledge. Visual research should produce new knowledge because of the way it computes and presents both the questions and the conclusions of the research. "A solution to a problem can be constructed before it is articulated. In fact, the solution process may be totally invisible, even to the problem solver," (Ibid: 12) when a nonverbal intelligence is involved, according to Gardner.

Temple Grandin has been able to make her non-verbal solution process visible. She is an animal psychologist who has designed equipment for handling livestock to make tasks like slaughtering and veterinary care more compassionate and efficient. "I think in pictures. Words are a second language to me... every design problem I've ever solved started with my ability to visualize and see the world in pictures." (Grandin, 2008: 1, 4). A high-functioning person with Autism, Grandin, a PhD, understands her metacognitive processes well enough to describe them as "thinking in pictures and making associations...without language...by associating sensory based memories such as smells, sounds, visual images into categories...[and]...putting details together to form concepts." (Ibid: 200-201). "My experience as a visual thinker with Autism makes it clear to me that thought does not have to be verbal or sequential," she explains. (Ibid: 194).

Grandin's anecdotal descriptions support what other scholars who work with visual information also understand. In their book, *Visual Research: A Concise Introduction to Thinking Visually*, Marion and Crowder contrast visual and narrative approaches to information this way: "Unlike narratives, which unfold progressively, images can present everything at once." (Marion and Crowder, 2012: Kindle Loc. 247). This idea is further explored using both drawings and words by Nick Sousanis whose doctoral dissertation took the form of a comic book and has recently been published by the Harvard University Press. He privileges the visual over language saying, "While image IS, text is always ABOUT." (Sousanis, 2015: 58). He posits that there are "two distinct kinds of awareness: the sequential and the simultaneous." (Ibid: 63).

These ideas have significant consequences for research in terms of what is possible. But, because visual communication has existed since cave paintings and petro glyphs for millennia, what has prevented the visual from being used within the academy for both inquiry and the dissemination of new knowledge until very recently if the visual is a means through which "new knowledge and critiques may be created"? (Elizabeth Chapin quoted in Pink, 2013:24). Sousanis blames Plato's distrust of perceptual distortion such as that a pencil seems to bend when it is inserted into a glass of water. He further indicts Descartes' fear that "all he perceived might be the deception of a supremely powerful evil spirit" (Sousanis: 54) as a reason to rely on logic, not sensory information.

Work in developmental optometry, in the brain science of human perception, and in the phenomenology of perception such as that contributed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (Merleau-Ponty, 2012), combine to push us and, perhaps, the academy, past these archaic opinions. By discussing, via images, the role of images as conveyors of new knowledge in a comic book format, Sousanis disrupts "the status quo" by "using multiple vantage points to create new ways of thinking." (Mulhere, 2015). His work is a powerful demonstration of the potential for visual research to be used, as Claudia Mitchell explains, "as modes of inquiry, modes of representation, and modes of dissemination." (Mitchell, 2012: Kindle Loc.86). By risking to think and research using visual methodologies we stand at a "threshold" (Sousanis, 2015:94) for new explorations of thought and inquiry because, "thinking in a new medium means seeing the world beyond the confines of a singular direction... [where]" as Sousanis says ... "Nothing changed, except the point of view -- which changed everything." (Mulhere, 2015).

### **What is visual research being used to explore and investigate?**

Visual research has been used since the 1970s in anthropology, sociology, medicine, education, and applied business primarily as a means of data collection. This is especially true with a participatory action research methodology known as photo-voice that was developed by Caroline C. Wang of the University of Michigan. Claudia Mitchell of McGill University adopted this methodology to explore, for example, the conditions that youth with HIV/AIDS face in rural South Africa as well as many other social research projects that she presents, using the visual as both a participatory method for data collection and to present the conclusions, online at <http://participatorycultureslab.com/clauidias-research/>. Aimee and Hunleth have utilized this methodology to explore community attitudes in St. Louis about colorectal screening for the Siteman Cancer Institute at Washington University (Aimee and Hunleth, 2011). Like Mitchell, the visual has been utilized primarily as a method for participatory data collection. Visual methods have become widely used in education for the delivery of instruction by means of graphic organizers like Venn Diagrams, KWL charts, and "mind-maps" which have replaced traditional linear logic-driven outlines for teaching the writing planning process. Visual methods are also widely used in business for strategic planning and task management protocols. This, as in the use of the visual in the classroom, is an application that has been shown to increase the learning or strategic outcomes and that could also be collected and analysed in a research setting. Studies using visual ethnographical methods have also been widely used in the field of Human Computer Interaction and related computer science areas and a

methodology for visual research has been established in that arena. (McNely, 2013). McNely, at the University of Kentucky, has issued a call for the development of specific standards for visual research methods in the field of communication design research after his own work has demonstrated that: "Visual methods are more than merely illustrative; they may lead, rather, to wider frames of analysis, improved understandings of processes and change, and qualitatively different forms of thick descriptions (than field notes alone)...[as well as offering] communication design researchers an alternative feedback instrument, where participants are able to reflect upon their own practices and environments by seeing them in a different way." (McNely, 2013).

### How has the academy received, criticized and evaluated visual research?

Claudia Mitchell addresses each aspect of the research process: inquiry, representation, and dissemination in her book that uses case studies from her sociological research into rural South African girls' health and safety using photo-voice methods to explore how the visual works as a research tool. She writes that "the emergence of visual and arts-based research as a viable approach is putting pressure on the traditional structures and expectations of the academy." (Mitchell, 2012: Kindle Loc. 401). The academy has embraced ethno-visual methods of data collection within the social sciences as illustrated in the preceding examples. However, there remain issues of analysis, validity, and ethics. In addition, the traditions of the academy when it comes to the presentation of research, in a PhD dissertation, for instance, serve as a barrier to experimentation with the visual as a means of disseminating knowledge. This has been recently challenged by the comic book dissertation by Nick Sousanis. (Muhere, 2015).

Gillian Rose calls working with, and analyzing, visual data "a complex process...[that, for example,] draws attention to at least three modalities related to photographs: the technological, the compositional, and the social." (Mitchell, 2012: Kindle Loc. 2460). Katie MacEntee identifies and applies a set of four criteria to the analysis of photo collages. She evaluates their "persuasiveness", "evocativity", "action orientedness", and "reflexivity" (Ibid: Kindle Loc. 3858). Mitchell cautions that we must be prepared both for the "iterative" (Ibid: Kindle Loc. 121) and "reflexive" (Ibid: Kindle Loc. 234) nature of doing visual research. Sarah Pink advises that "a reflexive approach to analysis should concentrate on how the content of visual images is the result of the specific context of their production and in the diversity of ways that video and photographs are interpreted." (Pink, 2013: 160). This connects to her understanding that an image has layers of meaning that make it able to demonstrate that "sets of diverse worldviews exist simultaneously" and that the meaning of an image may change over time. (Ibid: 166).

Machin and Mayes insist that the visual is a form of discourse that must be subjected to a Critical Discourse Analysis to identify how meaning has been constructed by "the kinds of ideas, absences and taken-for-granted assumptions in the images as well as the texts which will also serve the kinds of power interests buried in them." (Machin and Mayes, 2012: 9). They evaluate the "truth claims" of an image using devices such as foregrounding, style, lighting, context, and framing to test its validity. Their concerns should inform any peer review process of visual research within the academy, in my opinion.

Not the least significant of the concerns levied by the academy about visual research are its ethical implications. Mitchell's work with at-risk and teen populations in third world cultures makes her very aware of ethical concerns such as accessibility, ownership, and the potential for harm to come to the people portrayed. She asks, "How can we ensure that research with marginalized populations does not further marginalize them?" (Mitchell, 2012: Kindle Loc. 783). She notes that ethics boards subject visual research projects to a "more rigorous scrutiny...than most other data because it is so accessible." (Ibid: Kindle Loc. 384). Of course, it is just this affordability and widespread availability of digital audio and visual recording devices coupled with its potential to unlock new understandings and engage different participants that makes visual research projects likely to become more popular.

McNely provided a call for the academic field of communication design research to draw on visual anthropology and visual ethnography methods and standards to produce protocols for visual research for his field. "There is an opportunity, however, for more researchers to build robust and theoretically informed incorporations of visual methods into studies of communication design. In particular, visual methods can be more meaningfully deployed throughout communication design research processes, so that photography and videography become more than merely illustrative." (McNely, 2013). In general, I think that McNely has discovered a primary hurdle to the adoption of visual research methodologies across the academy at large.

## What can visual research contribute to the field of museology and what can museology contribute to the academy in the area of visual research?

The Museum is a sensory arena where visitors interact by moving through exhibits which always include the visual. Museological research is concerned with how people learn, move through and linger in physical spaces enriched by sensory information that often requests some kind of response. Where sociologist Claudia Mitchell talks in the subjunctive voice about an "emerging scholarship of display... as inquiry, bringing together, as it inevitably would, technical issues and participatory processes and policy dialogue" (Mitchell, 2012: Kindle Loc. 3976), the field of museology can provide a research-basis for this scholarship that is nuanced and informed by layers of research done over decades across museums world-wide. The field of museology, is, in my opinion, uniquely situated to take a leading role for the academy in developing broad standards and informed research-based practices in visual research methodologies and methods. Advances in visual research, in turn, will provide the field of museology with the two-fold gains noted by McNely for his own field: "a means for better documenting, analyzing, and understanding participant experience, and working with others to produce or discuss visual representations in a participatory way." (McNely, 2013). To this end, we editors echo McNely's call for our field to take the challenge to move forward and produce both opportunities for experimentation in visual research and for the communication of museological research visually. Museums, then, will be poised to take a lead role in promoting visual literacy and visual critical thinking such as what is being made available to the public by the Toledo Art Museum in Ohio through its web-site and Center for Visual Literacy (<http://www.vislit.org>).

## In what ways must a visual research submission differ from an illustration for an article?

Once we editors had invited and received visual submissions for this current edition, we relied on Elizabeth Chaplin's distinction between an image used as an illustration and one used as the main conveyance of information. She uses the words "medium" and "mode" where "medium" is a means "through which new knowledge and critiques may be created" and "mode" is a tool for "recording data and illustrating text." (Pink, 2013: 24). We decided we would look for a successful visual submission to feature an image, independent of any text, that provides accessible information and meaning that does not rely on text to unpack even though a title and caption should assist the reader's understanding of the image. These decisions presumed that we have a position on how meaning is imbedded within an image so that the intended meaning of the image maker would be both accessible and enhanceable by the viewer with the potential for layers of different meanings to become "invested ...over time" (Ibid: 75). The meaning would be informed by the maker's explanation of why and how the image was produced but the image should also contain "the potential...to question, arouse curiosity, tell in different voices or see through different eyes" (Edwards, 1997 quoted in Ibid: 172).

We agreed that images manipulated by digital or chemical means, or by the application of special lenses, filters, other distortions, cropping, and framing would not be disqualified. This decision differs from the University of Leicester policy which does not allow any manipulation of a photograph, other than cropping, for submissions to the festival of postgraduate research. However, because we decided to open this edition to visual submissions that could have included photographs, posters, and other graphic presentations, and because we agreed that visual research methodologies represent a different way of knowing and, in fact, a new research medium, we decided not to limit the maker's options in the production of an image as long as the caption describes what and why it was done.

## What evaluative guidelines must a visual research submission meet for publication in *Museological Review*?

In addition to evaluating the meaning of an image, its intrinsic value, its relevance to the theme of the *Museological Review* issue for which it was being considered, there are additional elements that we decided should be appraised prior to deciding to publish a visual submission. These, according to Machin and Mayes, create "salience" and indicate the "choices" made by the image's producer and include: cultural symbols, size, colour, tone or brightness, focus, foregrounding, overlapping, positioning both of subjects and objects, distance, angle, use of either individuals and/or groups, use of generic and/or specific individuals and objects, inclusion, and absence (Machin and Mayes, 2012: 54). For our purposes as editors and for the peer reviewers of each visual submission, we decided to evaluate whether any of these elements a) were present; and b) contributed or detracted from the intended meaning as far as we could tell from the submitted title and caption.



## Conclusion

This edition of the *Museological Review* is dedicated to exploring how the museum behaves as a living, in this case a human, being. Of course, humans have five senses through which we explore and come to understand our world, one of which is vision. So the inclusion of visual research in this edition adds a layer of meaning as well as opens a new avenue of investigation. Both of the images included for publication in this issue relate to the theme. Laurence Brasseur's image, "*Museums, young people, and the possibility of reciprocal relevance*", is an example of how visual methods serve as inquiry to pose a research question. The museum, in the background, has a responsibility to be welcoming and hospitable but is it fulfilling that human-like virtue for the youth portrayed and for youth in general as represented by this small sample? Natasha Barrett's image, "*The indigenous museum space or wharehau as the embodied Māori ancestor in New Zealand*" is an example of how an image serves as data to be analyzed and interpreted. It makes the surprising claim that the museum, in this Māori cultural context, is the ancestor, a most human role, indeed. We offer both submissions as evidence that visual thinking can be used to open avenues of new inquiry and analysis and as a promise that the field of museum studies serves the academy at a threshold for the advancement of visual research. To that end we editors hope to pose two new challenges to the field of museum studies: 1) What can visual research contribute to our field that perhaps can be achieved through no other mode of inquiry; and 2) What can our field of museum studies contribute to the academy in terms of standards and research-based practices for the wider adoption of visual research methodologies and methods in the future?

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## **VISUAL SUBMISSION:** **The indigenous museum space or wharenui as the embodied Māori ancestor in New Zealand**

Natasha Barrett  
PhD Researcher, School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester  
nmb20@leicester.ac.uk



Wharenui and their contents are complex, visual indexical mixes of carvings, weavings and photographs; physically embodying ancestors and mnemonically recording oral histories. Predating colonisation, wharenui have remained vital community centres and resemble multisensory, polyvocal museum-like spaces of socio-cultural knowledge. This contemporary photograph shows a carved ancestor inside the wharenui at the Waitangi Treaty grounds. There would often also be a photograph of the ancestor in a meaningful location in the same wharenui thus illustrating meaningful photographic emplacement in contrast to their common exhibitionary role supporting other objects.

This project concentrates on colonial-era photographs of Māori (1860s-1910s), which are approached as three-dimensional cultural objects with material, social, biographical and sensory qualities. Using dyadic foci, photographic adoption and use of ancestral photographs inside wharenui/meeting houses is explored as exchange and assimilation, rather than mimicry or acculturation. The historical and contemporary uses of these photographs in British museums will also be analysed for how this might be transformed by understanding their meaning to Māori and their use in wharenui.

## VISUAL SUBMISSION: Museums, young people and reciprocal relevance

Laurence Brasseur

PhD Researcher, School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester

lb298@leicester.ac.uk



It is widely acknowledged that young people are underrepresented in museums and art galleries – particularly as independent rather than school visitors (Xanthoudaki 1998; Mason and McCarthy 2006). To date, research has investigated the problem mainly by assessing young people's needs and interests and then proposing strategies that museums can implement to better respond to those needs.

This photograph (1), taken in front of the Musée National d'Histoire et d'Art (National Museum of History and Art) in Luxembourg City, views the issue from outside of the museum's walls. Although photography is not part of my research methodology, this image translates my research objective: to look at the museum from the perspective of young people themselves. Rather than simply focusing on young people's interests and attitudes, it questions the place of the museum in their lives.

The image is a literal and symbolic snapshot of teenage life: while two of the young people prefer to play sport and listen to music outside in the sun, one young girl tentatively opens the door to the museum. The sun is creating reflections in the glass; she cannot see through it. She seems to hesitate: is she wondering what awaits her inside that dark museum?

This moment represents the museum's opportunity to welcome her with open arms. It should not be fear or apprehension that guides the museum's attitude, but a desire to embrace young people and to open the dialogue on an equal-partner basis. The aim of my study is to explore whether there is a place for museums in young people's lives and, if there is, how museums can fit into young people's social and cultural environment. A truly welcoming museum would serve as an ideal starting point for building a relationship based on reciprocal relevance, which would certainly be enriching for both sides.

### Note

(1) This picture was initially taken for the PhDepictions photography competition organised by the University of Leicester in 2014. It was selected as the winning entry.

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## Peopling the Galleries of Modern London

Dr Ellie Miles

Interpretation Officer, Learning, Volunteers and Audiences, The British Museum

EMiles@britishmuseum.org

### Abstract

Using three case studies from the Museum of London, this paper explores the museum work of peopling the past, and the complexities of such projects. This paper looks at how museums change, and the ways that these changes are shaped by human and nonhuman actors within and beyond the museum.

The *Galleries of Modern London* argue for the professional organisation of community history: a peopled history shaped through curatorial authority. The galleries advocate a model of the museum that extends beyond co-existing communities, peopling the past with some community voices, and including the curators' perspective.

This paper comes out of doctoral ethnographic research carried out surrounding the creation of the *Galleries of Modern London*, using this insight to reflect critically on the museum's contribution to on-going debates about museum representation. Looking at how London's public past has been peopled, the paper explores how 'museum work' gives museums character and life.

**Keywords:** civic engagement, museum work, Museum of London, diversity, representation

### Peopling the Galleries of Modern London

The work of making museums is creative, and contingent on both its cultural context and the people carrying it out. Throughout this paper the term 'museum work' is used to refer to various kinds of human influence on the museum: not just the work of museum employees, but also of people from beyond the museum. Museum work gives museums character, personality and life, and the processes are shaped by both living and non-living beings. To explore these processes in more depth this paper draws three case studies from the Museum of London, exploring the work and examining the process from the position of an embedded researcher. 'Peopling the galleries' has two overlapping meanings here. Firstly it refers to the ways that historical people – including people from the very recent past – are represented in a museum of urban history. In its second sense the phrase refers to the museum work that contemporary people do to shape the process of representing them.

The projects in this paper were all part of the *Galleries of Modern London* (opened May 2010), a major project undertaken by the Museum of London. When the galleries opened one newspaper reviewer noted the modesty of some of the objects, comparing them to the scale of investment: 'The mummified cat, the single best-loved object in one of the world's greatest urban history collections, has a £20m new home from next week when the Museum of London opens its spectacular new *Galleries of Modern London*' (Kennedy, 2010). The galleries were the biggest project the museum had undertaken since it opened in 1976. The Museum of London stated that its aim was to change the way that the museum represented London and its people. This paper examines how the museum expressed its aims to populate the galleries, then discusses three case studies of how this work was carried out, and finally draws to a conclusion that explores how museums are peopled through the museum's work and gallery narrative.

In its bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund in 2004 the museum emphasised its intentions to change the way that it presented the past. Arguing that the existing museum didn't bring the story of London beyond the First World War, the museum's bid stressed the need for the museum to reflect the post-war city and its increasingly diverse population (Museum of London 2004a). The museum's wish to present London's diverse population had two overlapping motivations. Firstly, representing London's more recent multicultural past would redress a prominent absence in the museum's narrative. Secondly, representing London's diversity was seen as a necessary step to encourage visitors from minority ethnic communities to come to and use the museum: 'it will increase our opportunities to attract and retain target groups under-represented in the Museum's current audience profile' (Museum of London, 2004a: 22).

The museum's ambition was a product of how staff perceived the role of the museum. At the time of the bid's preparation Cathy Ross led the curatorial department covering London from 1700 to the present day. Ross explained that she saw the role of city museums 'as agents of civic improvement' and argued that the

Museum of London had 'a responsibility to say this is generally a good society: that, on the whole, London may not be a Jerusalem but it is a good Babylon rather than a bad Babylon' (Ross, 2006: 43). Ross argued that the museum had an important civic responsibility to represent London in positive terms.

Ross's model of the museum's civic role differed slightly from prevailing theory of the time, exemplified by Hirzy's 2002 report on museums and civic engagement, published by the American Association of Museums (Hirzy, 2002). In it, Hirzy advocated a model of the museum as a facilitator for external processes, enacting its civic purpose by fostering community relationships and incubating change (Cameron, 2006). Different teams within the Museum of London were working in ways more closely allied to Hirzy's model: for example the museum's Inclusion Programme included community archaeological excavations in Shoreditch Park (Museum of London, 2006: 40). In this paradigm, the museum's civic role, and social value, was defined by the community engagement work it carried out for its own sake, rather than as a means to give legitimacy to the curatorial content (Hirzy, 2002).

Much discourse around civic engagement stresses the need for projects to be mutually beneficial for the community and the museum (Kadoyama, 2007; Buntinx and Karp, 2006). At the Museum of London this often meant an exhibition output: such as an art exhibition collaborating with offenders from Wandsworth Prison and a film and photography exhibition working with community groups to explore black identity in London (Museum of London, 2006: 41). The Museum of London's Docklands site was home to the *London Sugar Slavery* gallery, exploring London's links with the transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans, and the museum was praised for 'being particularly active in recognising and harnessing expertise beyond [its] walls' (Nightingale and Mahal, 2012: 21).

South Africa's District Six Museum was another example of a museum that combined its social and emotional role with its public displays. The museum's civic purpose was performed by providing excluded communities with a platform to discuss their experiences, and museum director Layne published a piece in the 2008 special edition of *The Public Historian* that reflected on the emotional power and community value of the District Six Museum (Layne, 2008). At the District Six Museum the sadness and grief about the removal and destruction of a community and its built environment was a crucial feature of the museum. At the Museum of London there was a move to take an altogether *happier* approach: 'We must give deep thought to our new galleries but at the end of the day we must wear our deliberations lightly and create spaces that visitors will enjoy and take pleasure in' (Ross, 2006: 44).

The celebratory vision of multicultural London used in the city's bid to host the 2012 Summer Olympic Games has been criticised as 'banal cosmopolitanism' for failing to acknowledge the complexity of multiculturalism, including overlooking the racism that minority communities have suffered (see Beck in Newman, 2007). Ross was sensitive to this kind of concern: 'We would lose another sort of legitimacy if we delivered a tourist board vision of London as a place of happy, smiling people. But how far can we explore the less admirable aspects of our past without making the museum into a place of collective penance?' (Ross, 2006: 43). The then director of the Museum of London, Jack Lohman, did not question the need for the museum to celebrate the city. In 2008 he argued that 'before we come to the question of what sort of institution we might want to represent a city it is crucial that we first understand what sort of a city it is that we wish to celebrate' (Lohman, 2008: 61). The museum's 2004 bid for lottery funding gave clear signals for how this would work in the *Galleries of Modern London*.

In its bid for lottery funding, the Museum of London included a poem that it had commissioned – *The London Breed*, by Benjamin Zephaniah (Zephaniah, 2001, quoted in Museum of London 2004a, 2004b). Although the rhythm of the poem's opening line ('I love this great polluted place') recalls the rhythm of William Blake's *London* ('I wonder'd thro' each charter'd street'), Zephaniah's poem is a celebration of the city, as a distinctively diverse place to live. As the poem begins, Zephaniah foregrounds pop stars, ravers and politicians, all of whom have come to London in pursuit of their desires. As the poem continues the categories are left behind in a celebration of the music and food Londoners can enjoy, and by the middle of the poem Zephaniah includes a numerical celebration of the population, where 'two hundred languages' are spoken. The poem ends by stressing that London's value is in bringing people and cultures together in a specific sensory landscape. Aside from mentioning old and new buildings, the poem makes no topographic references to the city, and Zephaniah's London is defined by the people who populate the poem. The poem is a celebration of living in London, and ends with the lines:

'I love this concrete jungle still  
With all its sirens and its speed  
The people here united will  
Create a kind of London breed.'

(Zephaniah, 1996, in Zephaniah, 2001)

The poem is a celebration of the distinctive experience of multiculturalism in London. The last lines emphasise 'this' concrete jungle, that being 'here' is important and that London itself engenders its characteristic populace. It was this kind of city that the museum sought to celebrate.

Zephaniah's poem was commissioned by the museum in the 1990s, when the museum began the *Peopling of London* project. The *Peopling of London* exhibition and book showed how waves of migration brought the city diversity, vibrancy and wealth (Merriman, 1993). The *Peopling of London* identified ethnic groups within London's population, and showed the long historic context of different groups' presence in London. The work of the *Peopling of London* was to represent the historical context of ethnic diversity, but in the decade between the *Peopling of London* and the time of the *Galleries of Modern London*, theories of the city assessed cultural diversity in different ways. Massey's 2006 analysis, for instance, argues that:

'Urban space is relational, not a mosaic of simply juxtaposed differences. This place, as many places, has to be conceptualised, not as simple diversity, but as a meeting-place, of jostling, potentially conflicting, trajectories. It is set within, and internally constituted through, complex geometries of differential power. This implies an identity that is, internally, fractured and multiple.' (Massey, 2007: 89).

This fractured and multiple model of urban cultural identity was a challenge that the museum grasped. As one member of the Museum of London's directorate argued in 2008:

'You've got to deal with the politics within communities... which can be quite fractured in terms of its sub-groups... There's not one single voice, so it's multiple voices, but often they're in conflict with each other so you just have to be careful how you deal with that and present those multiple voices.'  
(McIntyre, interview, 29th October 2008).

Representing the experience of London's diverse population was an ambitious aim for the museum, and even the museum's community partners were sympathetic to what seemed an impossible task: 'I would not like to be in their shoes – they may raise expectations that they can't deliver. It's too huge to deliver to all of London's communities' (in Lynch, 2011: 18).

Turning to the galleries themselves now, this paper will now follow the structure of the *Galleries of Modern London*. The galleries take the story of London from just after the Great Fire through to the present day, in a broadly chronological perspective. The story is broken down into three historical zones, which then look at important themes from that time. The first, *Expanding City* (Figure 1), looks at London from the rebuilding through to the mid-nineteenth century. Following this, *People's City* (Figure 3) looks at how the city changed from the 1850s through to after the Second World War. The final gallery in this series is *World City* (Figure 4) and looks at London from the Festival of Britain to the present. This paper will take a case study from each of these galleries, to look at the ways that the museum has worked with people living in the city in the twenty-first century to tell stories about the people in the city in the past. The first case study looks at underfloor cases, the second looks at the London in the Second World War and the third focuses on the Brixton riots. The paper will discuss each of these before drawing out some themes towards a conclusion.

## London Beneath

The first case study is in the *Expanding City* section, the first gallery in the historic sequence, shown in Figure 1. It is one of a series of distinct spaces defined for community content within the *Galleries of Modern London*. The early gallery plans proposed a series of underfloor cases, submerged beneath the floor and covered by reinforced glass. Two of these cases make up the first case study. Project work began on the project to fill these spaces in 2008, two years before the galleries opened. The museum worked with an external programme called 'Pathways to Work' and participants were referred to the museum project individually. The project's participants were all job seekers who had been long-term unemployed. Working with the museum and an artist, the group



designed the underfloor cases with objects from the London Archaeological Archive Resource Centre (LAARC). The process involved meetings with curators to learn about the galleries as a whole, being given a tour of the LAARC stores and meetings with designers. The group then selected and arranged objects, creating layouts in a process reflecting that undertaken by the curators and project assistants employed by the museum. These layouts were then photographed, and the objects were prepared for installation.



Figure 1 – *Expanding City*, with the underfloor cases. Photo © Ellie Miles.

The project group carried out some work with conservators on the objects that they had selected. As a museum conservator reports:

‘The selected objects needed marking (as museum display objects) and basic conservation work. This was carried out by two volunteers from the community group, plus conservation students, supervised by conservation staff. In some cases “un-conservation” was required, such as taking down the occasional fill and removing old joins and tape residues, as the objects needed to look freshly excavated... The cases were designed to be well sealed and dustproof, and consist of metal boxes inserted into a false floor. They are lit with fibre optics. The case bases are filled with a layer of black “granular sand”... The public will be able to walk over the cases, with the archaeological objects directly beneath their feet.’ (Long, in Fitton, 2010).

On their own the objects probably wouldn’t have been displayed. The cases are full of items like burnt brick and domestic waste –objects whose significance is not especially visual, and might not ordinarily be displayed. The two underfloor cases in Figure 1 reflect the period of rebuilding in London that took place after the Great Fire of 1666. Several hundred objects were selected and include broken domestic pottery, slate, glass bottles, elm water pipes, dice, marbles, gold rings and a desiccated cat. The group finished their work on the project before the gallery installation began, and the photographs were a reference used to replicate the display that the group had designed.

Over the period between object selection and installation it became apparent that the dead cat the group had wanted to use was still decomposing. Its chemical instability meant that it couldn't be used in the case, so the project participants' plans could not be followed. Happily, the museum already had a second dead cat already in the collection. The second dead cat was more stable and could be used in place of the one the group had originally selected. However the replacement dead cat was much larger than the group's choice, so the case was much more crowded than the layout that group had intended (Figure 2).



Figure 2 – The larger cat in the case. Photo © Ellie Miles.

There are layers of authorship and authority influencing this case, and in this way it is a good example of how multiple voices and kinds of agency intersect with one another in museum work. The case's context is provided by a broad gallery plan, curators defined the case's thematic concept and the contents were selected and arranged by the community group. The photographic stage was an intervention from the group's intention, and crucially the material qualities of the objects also had a bearing on the contents of the case. The most obvious difference between the images and the finished case is the foreshortening of the space and the crowdedness of the objects. In the group's layout, one end was intended to be far more crowded than the other and the objects resembled the flow of water from a pipe. Because of the unanticipated larger cat, the case does not completely resemble the one laid out by the group. These are minor changes compared to some of the object rejections and additions that happened in the making of the gallery, but demonstrate the variety of forces, both human and non-human, that shaped the peopling of the galleries.

One of the lessons learned from the *London Beneath* cases was the need to spend time and give space to developing community content with the rest of the galleries, subject to these various pressures. If the group had worked later on in the project, or if any members of the group had been present during installation then they would have been included in the discussion of how to fill the case around the second dead cat.

## The Blitz

Moving through the galleries, the next case study looks at how the museum represented the ways that London's inhabitants experienced the Second World War. Using individuals' stories, the museum exhibits some of the effects of the conflict onto the city's population.



Figure 3 – Part of the *People's City* gallery, showing the Blitz installation. Photo © Museum of London.

The oral history curator at the time, Annette Day, was keen that the museum's new galleries should include space for a high profile oral history display. From early on in the project, the *People's City* section, dealing with the time period from about 1850 to about 1950 and shown in Figure 3, seemed like a good fit. The museum's oral history collections were especially strong on the topic of Second World War, and these were used alongside one more interview recorded especially for the project. The museum worked with several specialist companies to produce elements of the new galleries, and the Blitz film was produced with the firm Elbow. The museum produced a brief for what they wished and worked with Elbow to produce it.

The film they made is shown on a large projected screen, at the end of a corridor that contains objects from both World Wars. The room, shown in Figure 3, includes a mirrored wall, some seating and some smaller screens that show footage synced to compliment the main screen. The middle of the room holds a tall glass case, with a bomb suspended from the ceiling. The film consists of oral history extracts accompanied by images of the speakers and photographs from the museum's collection.

Although the finished film is very close to the written brief, Day describes a central dispute during its production about the way the film was populated. Although the museum insisted on using its oral history recordings, Elbow were keen that the oral history words were repeated by actors, who they felt would be able to put more emotion into the words. These discussions went on for some time, but Day reports that they stuck with their convictions and won round the film specialists (Annette Day, interview, 18th July 2011).

Day described some of the factors that were important in her decision-making process during the editing of the oral history extracts. Working from a long-list of extracts, the film began with oral histories and only when these had been chosen did the team work on including images. On one or two occasions the images led sections of the film, and although these are not obvious, Day feels the voice-led segments of the film were the most effective. The selections and editing were carried out by Day at the museum, as was the picture research. Elbow researched the moving footage and it was their job to produce the installation: editing it all together and adding the digital effects.

The length of the oral history extracts was crucial, as pace was important to the editing. As an exhibit that dominated a space, the film needed to flow differently from the headphone extracts more often used to present oral history in the museum; they needed to be quick. As Day explains: 'All of the extracts are quite short. If we'd done it on headphones we would have had a minute or a minute and a half between extracts' (Annette Day, interview, 18th July 2011). Day used the word 'weaving' several times when she discussed how she edited the extracts, to describe the process. Through this 'woven' editing, the museum integrated the different voices into a coherent whole. Day described her intention during the editing was 'not to tell a single narrative but show the variety of experiences' (Annette Day, interview, 18th July 2011).

In the editing process the museum sought to include very vivid recollections. Day explains that during the editing process she:

'Tried to include memories when people said "I think about it every day" or "I can still hear the screaming" or "when I smell building sites dust it takes me back". We're trying, quite deliberately, to show that people are still living with these memories, because I think it seems very distant to a lot of people' (Annette Day, interview, 18th July 2011).

Using oral history gave the museum the ability to argue that the memories are on-going, that these events have a degree of currency to the people who lived through them. This would be harder to convey without using the actual oral history recordings. The remembered stories are acts of telling that take place in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and are commanding because of their immediacy. This part of the museum deliberately encouraged an emotional and reflective response from visitors, using oral history accounts that demonstrate the on-going emotional effects of the conflict. This corresponded with the technique Ross advocated: 'dealing with hard truths' by presenting them 'through people, delivering the messages of cause and effect through personal stories' (Ross, 2006: 43).

### Brixton riot recollections

The last of the three case studies is in the *World City* section, shown in Figure 4. *World City* discusses London's more recent history, from the post-war period to the present day. With the previous two examples, peopling the collections was a way of bringing collections into the public and to make the past seem more immediate. With this third example, the telling of the 1980s Brixton riots, the peopling of the story was perhaps more essential - the museum had little material evidence of the riots and what it had wasn't especially evocative.

A project assistant working on the *Galleries of Modern London* discussed how the museum had to:

'think it through again just because we didn't get any objects. People had photos but what kind of objects can you think to get from a riot? You know, a bit of rubble? You're talking about the riots, but if you just have a policeman's helmet and not the other side of the story told in an object it can seem one-sided' (Liz Scott, interview, 24th February 2009).

The absence of material testimony meant the museum needed to find alternative ways to discuss the riots.

As Figure 4 shows, eventually the policeman's helmet was installed, and the museum displayed some paintings from its collection to give the narrative some visual representation. The small panels in Figure 4 are one of the outcomes of a social reporting project run by the museum. Like the *London Beneath* project, the Brixton project got underway during 2008. The museum worked with a group of young people living around Brixton, most of whom weren't in education or employment at that time. The focus of the project was on social reporting and involved giving the participants training in doing interviews, using recording equipment and editing software to produce oral history accounts of other people's memories of the riots. The project participants interviewed people in Brixton in 2008, and also people who had been involved, seen the riots or lived in Brixton in April in 1981. The project participants blogged about their experiences and themselves and were interviewed by the Guardian and Time Out.

Despite the successful outcomes of the project, and its favourable reception in the press, the audio material they collected was not displayed in the galleries. The project leader suggests that this was because there was not money available to include the audio clips, and stresses that she would like to have fought harder for their inclusion (Lucie Fitton, interview, 18th July 2011). Although they are available online, and in the Sackler Hall section of the galleries, only photographic portraits and brief quotations were included in *World City*. Had this project been designed into the galleries sooner, the cost of the audio equipment could perhaps have been

accommodated and the museum would have included a relatively high-profile civic engagement project, and engaging oral histories of what it was like during the time of the riots.



Figure 4 – Part of the *World City* gallery, showing the Brixton riot display. Photo © Ellie Miles.

### Authority and agency

The case studies have shown how museum work shaped these outcomes in different ways. One aspect of this was how the museum began to question the relationship of museum authority and agency.

In cultural geographer Mike Crang's description of Skansen, an open-air museum in Stockholm, he reflects on the representation of 'a Sweden conceived a mosaic of local cultures... a mythic space where in the space of an afternoon the diversity of Swedish culture could be encompassed' (Crang, 2003: 6). The Museum of London had already explored the history of different ethnicities' presence in London, for the *Peopling of London* project (Merriman, 1993). Subsequently the museum had encountered the internal conflict within communities during its work, and had begun working on cross-community projects, where communities were linked by location or experience (Darryl McIntyre, interview, 29th October 2008). The first case study in this paper showed how staff at the museum mediated the contributions from participants in one of these projects, as they worked around the objects' material qualities.

In its bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Museum of London stressed its aim to 'produce a very heavily "peopled"' gallery that must 'do real justice to London's multi-cultural character' (Museum of London 2004b: 25). Annette Day argued against the approach Crang has described at Skansen, stressing that: 'actually in London that doesn't make sense. Because actually London is so diverse that we need to find other ways of reflecting that and being inclusive. Otherwise it would never end, but never actually say very much' (Annette Day, interview, 18th July 2011). Rather than repeating its *Peopling of London* project, the Museum of London professed to set out to explore the multiple and fragmentary identity of London in a manner that Doreen Massey described: 'relational, not a mosaic of simply juxtaposed differences... an identity that is, internally, fractured and multiple' (Massey, 2007: 89). In structuring these voices for visitors, the Museum of London enacted what Hetherington

has described as the museum's tendency to 'articulate a coherent cultural response to the fragmenting and challenging conditions of modernity' (Hetherington, 2006: 602).

Narratives about conflict, riots and protests run through the galleries, which include stories of disparity, displacement and diasporas, all of which are integrated into the gallery narrative. Throughout the lengthy funding application documents, the museum reiterated that it hoped to 'personalise history' (Museum of London 2004b: 6). The documents stressed that 'the gallery story is being told by London's people, past and present' (Museum of London 2004a: 6). Although the *Galleries of Modern London* used contributions from beyond the museum, the core narrative and overall structure was defined within the museum. The second case study explored the ways that the museum wove voices into its narrative about the Blitz, bringing multiple experiences of the event into one exhibit by using oral history recordings in an immersive display. The curator discussed how she selected and edited these to be used in the film shown in the galleries. As Ross explained in 2005, the museum aimed to 'tell stories *with* rather than *to*' its audience (Ross, 2006: 44). Here, and in the Brixton riots case study, the paper has shown how project participants' voices were used to strengthen the museum's narrative, and legitimise the museum's authority.

The museum has been criticised in a report published by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, for the extent to which these stories are controlled by the museum. Lynch's report argued that: 'Community engagement is largely 'contained' and always on the museum's terms. It is defended as a level that is 'manageable' by the institution in terms of its scheduling, planning and funding priorities' (Lynch, 2011: 22). Just like the inclusion of Zephaniah's poem in the museum's HLF bid, the community contributions to the *Galleries of Modern London* are edited and contextualised by the museum. By using quotations from historians, poets and everyday people in its HLF bid, the museum foreshadowed how people would be represented in the galleries. The *Galleries of Modern London* argue for the professional curatorial organization of individuals' voices, just as Ross argued it should in 2005: 'We must reclaim the perhaps slightly old fashioned role for the museum as the place which delivers an authoritative public history' (Ross, 2006: 43).

Following Foucault, Hetherington has described the museum as 'an exhibitionary space in which heterogeneous effects and uncertainty are subject to controlling and ordering processes' (Hetherington, 2004: 52). This paper questions the extent of Hetherington's claim, by interrogating how the controlling and ordering processes of the museum are themselves subject to heterogeneous effects and uncertainty through museum work and nonhuman agency. In the first case study, the photographic stage and decomposition of one of the objects demonstrated how nonhuman agency influences museums' controlling and ordering processes. The second case study showed how discussions about producing gallery films depend on personal conviction – had the curator not insisted on using the oral history recordings then the installation would be very different. The third case study showed how project management issues affected the installation of the Brixton riots audio recordings. Here the controlling and ordering processes of the museum were themselves uncertain and subject to heterogeneous effects.

Staff within the museum were highly critical of the limitations of the projects – especially the outcomes of the work carried out in the third case study. One employee said:

'I think there's one big area that looking back when we open I think we'll say "we could have done that a lot better", and that is representing multiple viewpoints within the stories and how we have involved communities and individuals outside the organisation in collecting, acknowledging and building in those perspectives.' (Senior management level museum employee, interviewed in November, 2009).

The gallery outcomes are only one of the products of the work that took place at the museum. Another output was how the organisation continued to develop its relationship with individuals and communities beyond the museum. The definition of community is problematic in many of the texts calling for community engagement, and some writers call for further analysis of the model (Buntinx and Karp, 2006). The community collaboration and inclusion strategy (released internally at the museum in 2010) picked up this challenge. It opened with an acknowledgement that community is a contested term, and then explored ways that the museum could work with communities. With the development of the Junction Youth Panel, and the Stories of the World project, the museum developed ways of collaborating with communities that are less restricted than the projects that fed into the *Galleries of Modern London*.

City museums are contingent, and the *Galleries of Modern London* do much to reflect contemporary agendas and concerns. Looking at the work of producing the galleries has made some of these relationships and influences clear. The *Galleries of Modern London* are of their time, reflecting the aims and agency of the individuals who produced them, the technology they had at their disposal and something of the social and political climate in which they found funding. Subsequent funding cuts, and associated redundancies, have prompted an outcry of concern that this work should continue to develop (Kendall, 2013).

The Museum of London sought to guide visitors through voices of the city's complicated history. It presents contrasting opinions, debates and discourse, in order to show how people have continued to change the city through time. The work people do to make these representations is lively, creative and critical, and suggests a model of museum work that links objects, narratives, places, plans and, crucially, people.

### Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Luke Taylor, Sally Brooks, Sarah Demb, David Gilbert, my interviewees and the History department at the Museum of London and the anonymous reviewer for their help.

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# Body, Mind, Spirit: an interpretive framework for children in hospital schools

Alex Woodall

PhD Researcher, School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester

acw18@leicester.ac.uk

## Abstract

There is an established tradition for the arts to be used in healthcare and therapeutic settings. Yet that museums can equally impact upon wellbeing is a relatively recent area for research, with pioneering work taking place for example in the North West in Manchester, and at University College London (UCL). In 2012-13, the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG) at the University of Leicester was commissioned by Arts Council England (ACE) to explore health and wellbeing in museum contexts in the East Midlands. An innovative partnership project, this work brought together museum professionals, healthcare providers and social services in a unique research collaboration to explore the role of museum collections in supporting community wellbeing. After a brief contextual overview, this paper explores one strand of the research: a partnership between Leicester's Children's Hospital School and New Walk Museum & Art Gallery, in which a new framework for interpreting objects was devised, using concepts of 'body', 'mind' and 'spirit' as a means for linking museum objects with personal wellbeing.

**Keywords:** objects, health and wellbeing, interpretation, hospital schools, materiality, touch

This paper explores a unique partnership between a local authority-run museum (New Walk Museum & Art Gallery) and the local children's hospital school in Leicester. This collaboration was established as part of a wider action research project, to reflect on the role that a museum might play in enhancing health and wellbeing, particularly in this case, for children and young people in hospital schools. Of particular significance to the theme of this journal and its related conference, *Museums Alive!* (2014), rather than conceptualising the whole museum in itself as a 'living being', here, it is the *museum object* that is explored as though it shares some of the attributes and characteristics, real and metaphorical, of a 'living being'. This paper first explores the wider historical contexts out of which such health and wellbeing work in museums has arisen. It then details the background to the East Midlands project and its partners; it explores the new interpretive framework devised to enable engagements with objects; and briefly investigates some of the evaluation tools used (1). Finally, the paper asks whether it is indeed helpful to think of museum objects as though they might have body, mind and spirit, both within a health and wellbeing context, as well as in a more general sense.

## Contexts: situating the research

Using culture and the arts for therapeutic purposes within healthcare settings has an ancient lineage in the western world (Cork, 2012). That the arts are valued in western healthcare can be traced back to the fifth century BC, when Asclepius, the god of medicine, was the main focus of a healing cult both at Epidaurus (Risse, 1999), and also at Pergamon and Kos, where amongst other therapeutic activities, walking to the amphitheatre to enjoy the arts by participating in the dramatic performances there, was recognised as significant and incorporated into the healing process (Senior and Croall, 1993: 3). Much later, in England, artists such as eighteenth-century satirical painter William Hogarth also had close associations with art and healthcare, particularly using the Foundling Hospital to exhibit works to the public (Chatterjee and Noble, 2013: 19). In 1959, the charity *Paintings in Hospitals* was established, still thriving today and now caring for a collection of more than 3500 works of art, which are loaned to health and social care providers to contribute positively to healing processes. Clinical evaluation has concluded that placing art within these contexts has numerous benefits including that it can:

- Reduce levels of anxiety, stress and depression
- Reduce patients' length of stay within the hospital
- Reduce the use of some medications
- Improve communication between patients and healthcare professionals

(taken from 'A Study of the Effects of Visual and Performing Arts in Healthcare' completed by Chelsea and Westminster Hospital from 1999 to 2002) (2).

To see museums as powerful and active agents of social change is nothing new. Since the publication of the GLLAM report, *Museums and Social Inclusion* (Hooper-Greenhill et al., 2000), there have been numerous academic studies, policy initiatives and museum programmes further developing and questioning the role that museums can play in creating inclusive and just communities (for example Sandell, 2002; Silverman, 2010; Nightingale & Sandell, 2012). Current agendas within the UK museums sector include *Museums Change Lives* (Museums Association, 2013), a 'vision for the increased social impact of museums' with three headings at its heart, and an implicit understanding of the socially inclusive role and potential of the museum for:

- enhancing wellbeing,
- creating better places, and
- inspiring people and ideas

(Museums Association 2013: 5)

Yet using museum collections to enhance wellbeing, however, has a much more recent history within museum practice (Chatterjee and Noble, 2013).

A report for the World Health Organisation in 2009 notes overlap between the terms 'wellbeing', 'positive mental health' and 'flourishing'. It argues that these have dual elements: 'hedonic', which deals with subjective feelings of happiness and satisfaction, and 'eudemonic', which is about positive functioning in society and having a sense of purpose (Friedli, 2009: 10; Bergdolt, 2008). Within the museum context, wellbeing can be understood in a broad way using these notions of 'feeling good' and 'functioning well' (Aked et al., 2008:1). In relation to health agendas, wellbeing might be seen as having a preventive drive, rather than a curative one. Sector-wide projects such as *The Happy Museum*, originally funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, and now through Arts Council England, have a great stress on wellbeing, emphasising the health of the mind as well as of the body, and the welfare of society and communities as well as of individuals, thus also linking health with wellbeing. Wellbeing is about the quality of our human relationships with the world, with ourselves, and with others (3).

One particular tool used within *The Happy Museum* and other projects, has been the so-called *Five Ways to Wellbeing*. These are evidence-based actions which promote people's wellbeing, as identified by the New Economics Foundation and based on evidence from the *Foresight Project on Mental Capital and Wellbeing* (2008). The Five Ways have been used in various sectors from schools to healthcare providers to community organisations as a means to enable a more reflective and active approach to enhancing wellbeing. *The Five Ways to Wellbeing* are as follows:

#### **'CONNECT...**

With the people around you. With family, friends, colleagues and neighbours. At home, work, school or in your local community. Think of these as the cornerstones of your life and invest time in developing them. Building these connections will support and enrich you every day.

#### **BE ACTIVE...**

Go for a walk or run. Step outside. Cycle. Play a game. Garden. Dance. Exercising makes you feel good. Most importantly, discover a physical activity you enjoy and that suits your level of mobility and fitness.

#### **TAKE NOTICE...**

Be curious. Catch sight of the beautiful. Remark on the unusual. Notice the changing seasons. Savour the moment, whether you are walking to work, eating lunch or talking to friends. Be aware of the world around you and what you are feeling. Reflecting on your experiences will help you appreciate what matters to you.

#### **KEEP LEARNING...**

Try something new. Rediscover an old interest. Sign up for that course. Take on a different responsibility at work. Fix a bike. Learn to play an instrument or how to cook your favourite food. Set a challenge you will enjoy achieving. Learning new things will make you more confident as well as being fun.

## GIVE...

Do something nice for a friend, or a stranger. Thank someone. Smile. Volunteer your time. Join a community group. Look out, as well as in. Seeing yourself, and your happiness, linked to the wider community can be incredibly rewarding and creates connections with the people around you (4).'

That museums can play their part in enhancing the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities is an agenda which ties in with the *Five Ways*. While museums and health strategies stem from and are grounded within the Arts in Health movement (Chatterjee & Noble, 2013), they also have resonance with many other current concerns with the health of the nation. It is out of such agendas and related groundbreaking research and programmes taking place in several locations in the UK that the project explored in this paper emerged. For example, *Heritage in Hospitals*, UCL's pioneering programme established by Helen Chatterjee and colleagues, which both developed object-based initiatives within healthcare settings, and importantly, created measures for evaluating the impact of these deriving from a large body of work on touch within museums (5), has been of particular influence in establishing the framework for evaluating the East Midlands project. In addition, ongoing collaborative work taking place across the North West, managed by Wendy Gallagher at the Whitworth Art Gallery and Manchester Museum with partners including healthcare professionals, museums and galleries, and researchers from the Psychosocial Research Unit at the University of Central Lancashire (6) has also been extremely influential.

In her important contribution on the social work of museums, Silverman notes that there are at least five ways in which museums contribute to the self's pursuit of health:

'Museums can promote relaxation, an immediate intervention of beneficial change in physiology, emotions, or both. They also encourage introspection, a process of understanding one's feelings and thoughts that is essential to mental health. Museums foster health education that helps equip individuals to care for themselves. They address broader social conditions related to health through public health advocacy and by enhancing healthcare environments.' (Silverman 2010: 43)

While she evidences these claims referring to numerous examples in recent practice, what she does not address within the examples given is the distinct role that engagement with the material objects within the museum's collections may play. Such object engagements are briefly alluded to by the Museums Association in *Museums Change Lives*: 'Museums boost people's quality of life and improve mental and physical health. It is good for wellbeing to engage closely with collections and ideas in the presence of other people.' (2013: 6, italics mine). But although there is a recognition by the Museums Association that handling objects and engaging with them through the senses can have positive effects and can be encouraged within museum practice, nevertheless this topic is dealt with to a far greater extent in some of the literature in a growing body of work on the value of touch and the materiality of objects within museums (for example Chatterjee 2008, Classen 2007, Dudley 2010, Edwards, Gosden and Phillips 2006, Pye 2008), and out of which the author's own research and related practice has emerged (see Woodall, 2015 forthcoming), which have clearly shaped aspects of the Children's Hospital School project on which the author worked as Project Developer: Learning and Digital. There is also a small, but growing body of literature that, in addition to reflecting on our bodily and sensed responses to museum experiences (such as Leahy, 2012), also points out the 'beyond bodily', or transcendent, even mystical responses to engagements with objects in museums (Wood and Latham, 2014) and is again an area of particular interest to the author who has an academic background in theology.

It is in the overlaps between all of these developing bodies of research, and in a growing need to evaluate the impacts of health and wellbeing work within museums, that the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG) in Leicester was commissioned by Arts Council England (ACE) to develop an exploratory year-long action research project within the East Midlands, 'to show how museums are well placed to respond to changes in public health, using their collections to improve the health and wellbeing of individuals, to counter health inequalities within communities, and contribute positively to the goals of public health bodies' (Dodd & Jones, 2014: 3). And so it was that the project *Museums, Health and Wellbeing in the East Midlands* arose, along with its accompanying report *Mind, Body, Spirit: How museums impact health and wellbeing* (Dodd & Jones, 2014).

## Projects: establishing the research

*Museums, Health and Wellbeing in the East Midlands* was framed around the establishment of a new network of five museums in the East Midlands, who worked together with local healthcare providers and social services on

a variety of projects to explore their very different communities' wellbeing, addressing some of the statistical evidence about health in the region. Priorities across the region centre on addressing health inequalities; tobacco and alcohol use; obesity and lack of exercise; affordable heating; the health of children and young people; as well as with the national concern of an ageing population (Dodd & Jones 2014: 9).

The five museums involved in the project were:

- Nottingham City Museums and Galleries
- Crich Tramway Village and the National Tramway Museum, Derbyshire
- The Cottage Museum, Woodhall Spa, Lincolnshire
- Kettering Museum, Northamptonshire
- New Walk Museum & Art Gallery, Leicester

Staff from each museum worked with colleagues from at least one local health or social care provider and those communities using such services. Regular cross-partnership networking workshops and visits took place during the year to allow for idea sharing, mutual support and further collaboration.

*The Five Ways to Wellbeing* Framework was used to establish the wider project objectives during one of the initial networking meetings (and at which most participants were entirely new to the framework). These objectives were:

- to offer learning opportunities and activities that encourage people to connect with people and with ideas (connect and learn)
- to provide new experiences through encounters with objects through enjoyable social activities (take notice)
- to provide opportunities for people to give, take ownership and achieve (give)

Three specific projects emerged out of the different contexts and strategic interests of the partners.

Significantly, each project was entirely object-centric, focusing on unique items within its museum's collections, since it was a core principle of the action research that: 'Collections are at the core of museums' work on health and wellbeing. They are what give museums their unique role and contribution to health and wellbeing, both in the qualities that objects possess and the uses to which they can be put.' (Dodd & Jones, 2014: 26) Nottingham City Museums and Galleries focused on their John Player & Sons Archive, using it alongside the city's Smokefree Coordinator as an intervention to reduce young people's uptake of smoking. A second project brought together smaller museums in Derbyshire. Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire used objects in outreach sessions for the elderly.

### **Body, Mind, Spirit: contexts**

The third project is the focus for this paper. *Body, Mind, Spirit* was a partnership between New Walk Museum & Gallery in Leicester, and the Leicester Children's Hospital School (Figure 1). Although the two services had worked together in the past in an ad hoc way, there had never been a formal partnership through a learning or interpretation project. Before exploring some of the details of this collaboration, a brief context for each organisation is outlined below.

New Walk Museum & Art Gallery opened in 1849, and was one of the first public museums to be established in the UK. The collections are diverse, including decorative arts, costume and textiles, archaeology, geology and Egyptology. The museum sits on New Walk, Leicester's historic eighteenth-century walkway, which stretches over 1km from the city centre to a large park. It is ideally located to act as a hub for heritage and to play a key role in the cultural life of the city. Over recent years, the museum has undertaken a plethora of activities that have seen visitor numbers rise from 111,000 per year in 2002 to an average of 170,000 between 2007 and 2010. In 2011, visitor figures peaked at 250,000 as a result of specific exhibitions (RCMG, 2012).

Leicester Children's Hospital School provides appropriate education for students who are too ill to attend their mainstream school. Its role is to support, educate and enable students to reintegrate as, when and if appropriate. Four types of provision are offered:

- Day provision at Willow Bank School (c.80 pupils)
- Oakham House residential adolescent psychiatric unit (c.10 pupils)
- Leicester Royal Infirmary (6 wards, 140 beds)

- Outreach/home tuition (c.40 pupils)

Staff and pupils work across these three bases or school sites as well as on outreach in pupils' homes. The length of time students are with the hospital school varies from a few days at the Leicester Royal Infirmary and Oakham House, to over a year at the Willow Bank Day School and on outreach. Often students move through different parts of the school as dictated by their health and other circumstances. At the Leicester Royal Infirmary and at Oakham House, pupils are taught as they are admitted, depending on the state of their health and emotional wellbeing. The Leicester Royal Infirmary team will pick up students after five days, and at Oakham House, students attend school as soon as possible after admission, if they are deemed well enough to do so. There are 33 Teaching and Support staff working across all parts of the school. The *Body, Mind, Spirit* project worked specifically with pupils and staff at Willow Bank School. These students are unable to access their own schools for both medical and psychological reasons. Each student has his or her own personalised timetable which incorporates core and foundation subjects, as well as a focus on the arts and a therapeutic curriculum built around individual needs (7).



Figure 1 - *Body, Mind, Spirit* Workshop at New Walk Museum & Art Gallery. Photo © Julian Anderson.

So, pupils in hospital schools fall into extremely varied categories, and include both those with medical (and profound recurrent medical) needs and those with (severe) psychological or emotional needs. What these diverse young people often have in common however, is an issue with their everyday mobility, for wide-ranging physical and/or emotional reasons, and as a result they may have a lack of access even to everyday environments, objects and situations. Many may rarely get beyond the confines of a bedroom, let alone be able to visit and engage with a museum and its collections.

As a result, many students have a limited range of life experiences or 'cultural capital': there are numerous barriers to their engagements with and participation in the world at large. *Body, Mind, Spirit* aimed to address this limitation, and to introduce pupils in hospital schools to museums and their collections in an inspiring way, even leading to a desire to see the objects at first hand and experience them in the museum environment. It was hoped that the project would add to literature and practice on visitor voice in museums and galleries (Simon, 2010; Govier, 2009; Lynch, 2009) and that it would offer the opportunity for these young people to contribute from their own perspectives.

As such, the project was about access for these pupils to museums and their collections and participation in them. Access was understood as twofold:

- *First-hand* experience of objects at the museum
- *Virtual* experience of objects and museums within the hospital school setting

This paper focuses solely on the first of these means of accessing a collection with the aim of using a visit to create a bridge between the museum and the students. Just as pupils might gain from their museum experience, so museums might also gain from working closely with this underrepresented audience and developing new interpretation and engagement strategies.

### An interpretive framework?

On working together with head teacher George Sfougaras, a keen advocate of the arts and creative object-based learning (Paris, 2002), and Lisa Jacques, the Learning Officer for Contemporary Art at Leicester Arts & Museums Service, it was decided that while an on-going legacy of the project would be a digital object-based online resource for pupils to be able to engage with objects virtually (8), it would also be important to immerse those students who were able to access the museum in a real sensory experience of its objects and collections. This would take place through at least one handling session on site, and at least one follow-up creative artist-led workshop at Willow Bank. In any case, the outputs from such visits might provide valuable material for the website. It would be important to ensure that the pupils could engage with the objects on their own terms, in a relatively open-ended and subjective way, reflecting on what objects freely chosen from the museum's displays might mean to each individual.

In the many discussions about the students' diverse needs, the team kept returning to the concept of education of the 'whole child'. Sfougaras referred to the perceived need to address the 'body', 'mind', and 'spirit' of each young person. Not only might these themes be significant within our own lives as ways of conceptualising ourselves and our identities, but, as he argued, these themes may have particular resonance in the lives of children with profound physical and psychological needs: 'They're important to all of us, but we spoke about the added complexity of adolescence and then on top of that about the added complexity of mental illness or physical disability... the challenge of illness was the thing we wanted to bring out.' (Sfougaras in Dodd & Jones, 2014:52).

The idea that led to the interpretive framework was that through a close focus on objects from museum collections, almost using objects as metaphors to explore their own identities, pupils might be able to engage with themes central to their own selves: body, mind and spirit. Through encountering and interpreting museum (and their own) objects, pupils would have a unique opportunity to reflect on themselves through a sensory encounter with an object. Themes of body, mind and spirit lend themselves to exploring mental health and disability issues as presented by the pupils, as well as having further resonance and relevance for similar groups in a wider social context. Initial explorations of the themes in relation to young people's identities are outlined below, as described by Sfougaras in an unpublished internal planning document:

#### **Body:**

We are all physical beings. No other vehicle exists for creating such a varied collection of responses, than the human body. Likewise, museum objects are physical. In particular, objects, which relate to the changing needs and demands of society in relation to our physicality, may create a rich starting point for discussion and exploration. Through careful exploration, objects can even show acceptance and the celebration of overcoming the challenges of disability.

#### **Mind:**

Young people ask lots of questions about adjustment and about emotional wellbeing. Growing up brings significant challenges to our emotional and psychological world. Different cultures deal with rites of passage from childhood to adolescence and adulthood in diverse ways. Museum collections are of immense value in creating connections and shared sense of journey. Objects can be used to show the rich diversity of human thought and behaviour, and doing so may begin to address the anxiety many adolescents feel about their own identities.

### Spirit:

There will always be big questions for which we have no answers. Religions and their many cultural artefacts, manifestations and nuances, provide a rich platform for philosophical exploration of the issues that concern us all as human beings: purpose, morality, ethics, interdependence, suffering and life beyond our physical existence on the planet. Objects of worship, as well as museum objects that we may find moving or uplifting in other ways, can be used to explore some of these questions.'

There are of course numerous contextual questions that might be raised about the value of using these concepts as a framework for understanding oneself, let alone for using them to try to understand objects and the relation between self and object: How culturally specific are the ideas of body, mind, and spirit? Are they fixed within a western worldview? Are they borne out of a theological (Trinitarian) conception of the self? If so, how might this be understood in a non-theological context? How might we use this framework without instrumentalising the museum object? Nevertheless, that there were ideas contained here to unpick further was something that the team was keen to investigate further.

Since the publication of Alfred Gell's significant work *Art and Agency* (1998), there has been much discussion within anthropology on the not uncontroversial idea of the agency of objects (see Gosden & Marshall, 1999; Gosden, 2005; Knappett, 2005). While this is not the place for discussing the finer nuances of such debates, suffice it to say that while thinking of body, mind and spirit as profound concepts through which to think of a person as being a living being, these also might be used to describe 'living' objects in museums. What if museum objects too were to be seen as 'living beings'? What if objects in museums could also be described as having a body, a mind and a spirit? What, if any, sorts of new understandings of the objects might emerge? Would it be a helpful way to explore collections? Would it be a helpful way to use collections to explore ourselves? How might this interpretive paradigm be used by pupils within the Leicester Children's Hospital School?

### The workshops



Figure 2 - *Body, Mind, Spirit* Workshop at New Walk Museum & Art Gallery. Photo © Julian Anderson.

Two pilot and investigative workshop sessions were held at New Walk Museum & Art Gallery with a small group of students aged between 13 and 16 years old (Figure 2). After an introductory handling activity based on a Russian *matryoshka* doll on display in the museum's world arts gallery, pupils were invited to consider its different layers as symbolic of the different layers within themselves (rather like Peer Gynt's onion analogy). They were introduced to some ideas about the body, mind and spirit of an object, and then the group was given the opportunity to find an object that they were drawn to, collect details about it using iPads to capture images and drawings, while engaging with a series of questions in an 'interpretive framework'.

This interpretive framework is simply a way of conceptualising the qualities and stories of objects - of interpreting them - and comprises a series of questions about the object. These questions are aligned with body, mind and spirit themes, and these are closely linked to three common ways in which objects are interpreted in museums. Firstly, a series of questions relates to the materiality and sensory qualities (or body) of an object; secondly a series of questions is about their historical context, biographies and stories (or mind); and finally, the series of questions is concerned with more esoteric, emotional and imagined aspects of an object (or its spirit).

### BODY

- What is the object made from?
- What does it feel like?
- How do you relate to it with your senses?
- How does this object relate to your own body?
- Does this object have different materials/elements?
- What might it be like to be this object?
- Where can this object be found?
- Does the use of this object depend on where and by whom it is used?

### MIND

- What is the context of this object?
- Where does it come from?
- What do you know about the origins of this object?
- What can you find out about how it was made?
- What does this object remind you of?
- How can you relate this object to different subjects?
- What is the value of this object to you? To other people?
- Does this object's value differ among different groups of people?
- If this object did not exist, would we have to invent it?

### SPIRIT

- How does this object make you feel?
- What amazes you about this object?
- How do you think this object might be used?
- Do you think this object could have a spiritual purpose?
- How might this object relate to themes such as life and death, birth and rebirth, the meaning of life, or celebration?
- What do you think is the history of this object?
- Who owned it and what might they have felt towards it?
- What special value could this object have for a previous owner?

Pupils completed several activities both individually and in groups, reflecting on the body, mind and spirit of particular objects in the collection including Egyptian amulets, a meteorite and any other objects towards which they felt drawn.

Feedback demonstrates the value they gave to the opportunity for handling real objects. Many noted how it made them feel special to be able to hold such ancient objects: 'it's like you're touching part of the past... you



think maybe an Egyptian touched that at some point' (Dodd & Jones, 2014: 53). Others found handling real objects particularly important given their own health and wellbeing contexts: 'I think real is going to win always... [but] it's very important because if you're not well, you don't get out much and if you don't go to school and you worry about what happens if you go out... it can be quite challenging' (Dodd & Jones, 2014: 53). Other pupils were empowered to share personal stories with the group about the objects: engaging with the Barwell meteorite inspired one participant to tell the story of his great grandfather who was hit on the head by it as he cycled home from work (Dodd & Jones, 2014: 37).

## Evaluation

While as yet, there has been no further investigation on the value of such a structure for interpreting objects (which is clearly an area for future research), nevertheless, across the whole East Midlands project network, a shared framework for evaluating the impacts of the projects on individual health and wellbeing was used. Measures to give evidence of the impact of such work is vital, not least in the current economic and political climate, and while several tools have been developed in the UK, this project elected to use the *Museum Wellbeing Measures Toolkit* devised at UCL (9). This consists of *Positive and Negative Wellbeing Umbrellas* (Figure 3), with questions adapted from clinical scales, which measure psychological wellbeing. Participants rate how positive (active, alert, enthusiastic, excited, happy and inspired) and negative (anxious, distressed, irritable, nervous, scared, unhappy) they feel on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely) both before and after a health and wellbeing session and mark the scores in different coloured pens on their wellbeing umbrella.

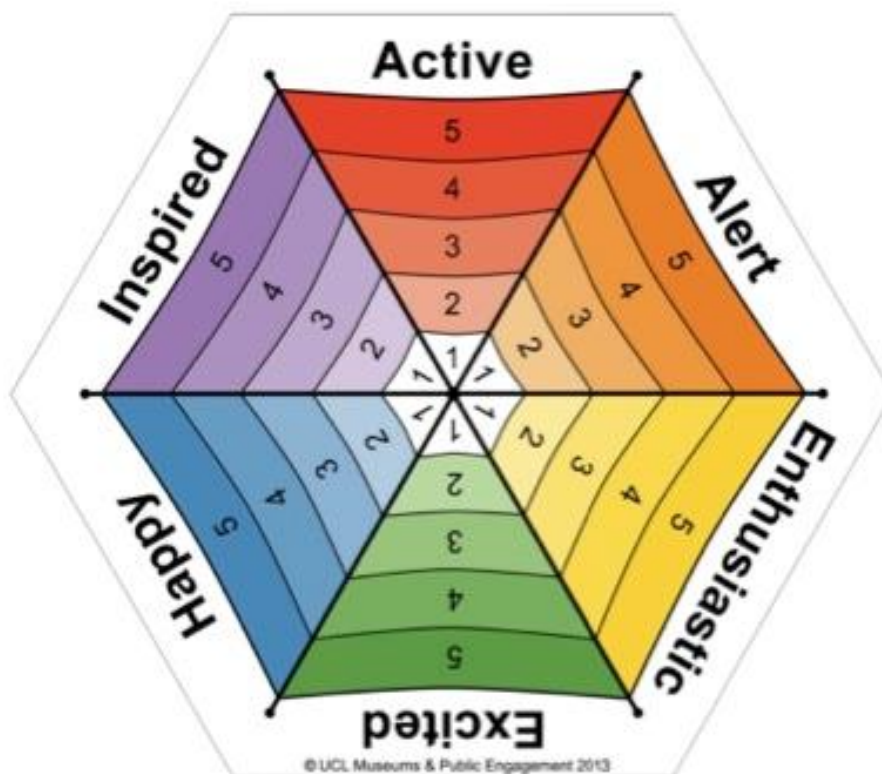


Figure 3 - Positive Wellbeing Umbrella

(from <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/museums/research/touch/museumwellbeingmeasures/wellbeing-measures>)

A shorter adapted version of these umbrellas was used with the pupils from the Hospital School, which amalgamated positive and negative emotions together, partly to avoid too much time being taken up or too much potentially confusing overlap (for example if I measure '5' for happiness, I am likely to measure '1' for unhappiness). This data was triangulated with additional qualitative data from interview and observation due to a small sample size. An example of the results can be seen in the table below (Figure 4), which is further explored in Dodd & Jones (2014: 36-37). In summary, students felt more happy, excited and inspired after their session than prior to it.

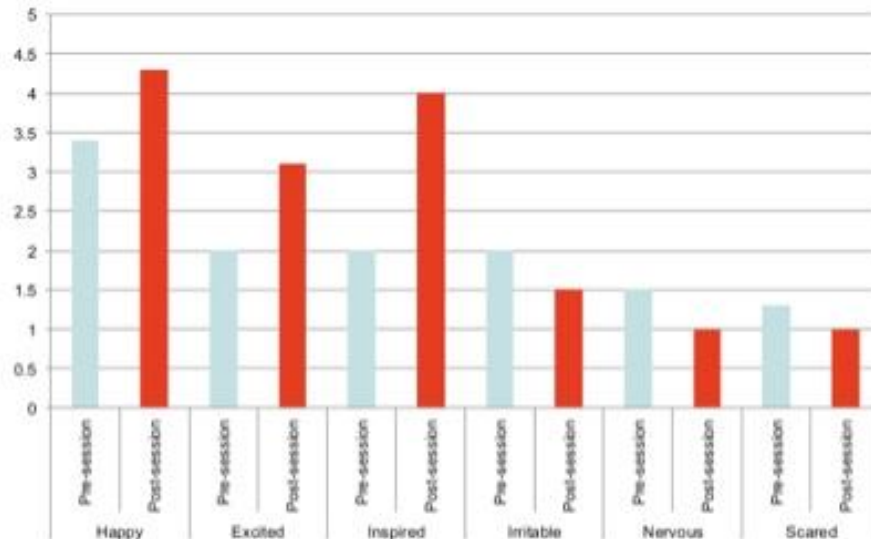


Figure 4 - Example of evaluation from *Body, Mind, Spirit*.

## Conclusion

While the long-term impact of this work is not clear, we do know that in their short interactions with New Walk Museum reflecting on the body, mind and spirit of its collections, pupils from Leicester Children's Hospital School generally 'felt better'. Yet of course, what this really means for the pupils is an unknown. Of course there are complex questions arising: how sustainable is such an approach and such a partnership? Are we in danger of instrumentalising the museum object as well as the museum visit by using it to fulfill health and wellbeing agendas? What happens if visitor engagements with objects lead them to have negative experiences, particularly in the case of these vulnerable young people? What if the body, mind and spirit of a museum object are disturbing? How might such projects enable reconsideration of the relationship of wellbeing and health?

That there is much more research to be done on many aspects of the *Body, Mind, Spirit* project is evident: this initial action research project was simply a testing of the waters. Yet what is clear is that to interpret museum objects as though they have body, mind and spirit within a health and wellbeing context adds to some of the discussions arising during *Museums Alive!* whereby not only is it useful to conceptualise the museum as a living being, but it might even be fruitful to reflect on individual objects as such.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all the project partners, in particular the young people from Leicester Children's Hospital School and George Sfougaras, Headteacher; Jocelyn Dodd and Ceri Jones from the Research Centre for Museums and Galleries at the University of Leicester, as well as Freelance Project Developer, Kate Travers; staff at New Walk Museum in Leicester including Imogen Cox, Lisa Jacques, Mark Evans, Laura Hadland, Simon Lake, Malika Kraamer and Jane May; and, in Manchester, staff at d2Digital and Kim May of Astafilms.

## Notes

- (1) A longer report on the whole project can be found in Dodd & Jones, 2014.
- (2) See <http://www.paintingsinhospitals.org.uk/about-us/arts-in-health>
- (3) See <http://www.happymuseumproject.org>
- (4) From <http://www.neweconomics.org/projects/entry/five-ways-to-well-being>
- (5) See <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/museums/research/touch>
- (6) See MLA Renaissance North West, 2011 and <http://www.healthandculture.org.uk>
- (7) See <http://www.childrenshospital.school.leicester.sch.uk/>

(8) Beyond the scope of this paper, but see <http://www.journeyintothemuseum.co.uk>

(9) <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/museums/research/touch/museumwellbeingmeasures/wellbeing-measures>

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# Analysing the Multicultural Pill as the renovation treatment of the European Ethnological and Colonial Museums

Dr Fabien Van Geert

Cultural and Heritage Management, University of Barcelona

fabien.vangeert@gmail.com

## Abstract

In the 1990s and 2000s, after a long sickness caused by a series of factors, ethnological museums in Europe were prescribed a Multicultural Pill so that they would recover and survive in the contemporary world which is marked by cultural encounters. This remedy had important museological effects, as seen by the changes in the way these museums presented the cultures of the world. This article will analyse the different components of this pill's effects, both museological and conceptual, in order to critically define the efficiency of the remedy that had been prescribed to these old institutions.

**Keywords:** ethnological museums, colonialism, multiculturalism, renovations

## Exhibits Considered

2004: Inauguration of the National Museum of World Cultures in Gothenburg from the collections of the Municipal Museum of Ethnology, to 'deal with globalisation and its effects in Sweden, particularly immigration, in order to develop cosmopolitan values within Swedish youth' (Lagerkvist, 2008). 2006: Inauguration of the Quai Branly Museum in Paris as the successor of the Museum of Man to 'make cultures dialogue' and to 'honour the people once humiliated and despised by exposing the beautiful objects they made' (1). 2010: Inauguration of the Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum in Cologne whose permanent exhibition 'Men in their world' wants to define 'What is the common link between us and other people and their life concepts?' (2). 2011: Inauguration of the MAS Museum, in Antwerp, to 'discover Antwerp in the world, and the world in the heart of Antwerp' (Heylen, 2011: 4). 2014: Project of the Milan Museum of Cultures, for the creation of an 'architectonic metaphor of the encounter. An open place. The Soul of the multiethnic Milan. The Symbol of plurality and participation' (3).

Over the past decade, as it has been widely reported in the literature, most ethnological and colonial museums that originated in the colonial context have been transformed consistent with a parallel consolidation of the field of anthropology. It could be said that these renovations are responses to what could be called a multicultural treatment through the administration of a pill and result from a widespread interest in cultural diversity and the development of national reflections on the possibility of living together in a context of worldwide immigration. These renovations served to give the museums new meanings by showing their collections in a new light. One of the effects of this pill administered to various museums seems to be, at first glance, the establishment of local branches of a 'meta-museum of multiculturalism', with similar names, collections and exhibitions. However, an analysis of these renovations, especially in the Dutch, French, German and Swedish contexts shows that the effectiveness of this pill is also linked to the particularity of the nation-specific reflections on multiculturalism for the nations in which these museums are located. As such, the effects of this pill are not always the ones expected. In fact, many of the renovations of the old ethnological and colonial institutions seem to have been replaced since the 2010s by a new phase of lethargy with the museum undergoing in a transition process or else being abandoned. Are the European Governments not interested anymore in the promotion of the multicultural? Did the renovations fail to produce the desired results, even though they have received a large number of visits over the last decades? Was the Multicultural Pill more discursive than effective? Was it just a placebo?

## 1. A Multicultural Pill for the Recovery of Ethnological and Colonial European Museums

The nineteenth century process of the modernisation and creation of modern European nation states combined with the creation of national art and history museums to contribute to the creation of national identities through the exhibition of a national common heritage (Macdonald and Fyfe, 1996). In a majority of European countries the creation of ethnological museums focused on the 'Others', seen as the opposite of the 'We' as expressed in the national museums (Iniesta, 1994). Apart from the first examples of these institutions originating

from the 1840s, the majority of European ethnological museums were created (Sturtevant, 1969) at the same time as the field of anthropology developed between the 1880s and the 1920s.

In Europe, the creation of these institutions was more ideological than in the English-speaking world, where Physical and then Social and Cultural Anthropology became consolidated within these museums, in what Sturtevant (1969) defined as the 'Museum-University Period'. This is particularly true in North America where the museological practice of Franz Boas shaped the Museum as a space of reflection and implementation of anthropological theories. In Europe on the other hand, this 'Golden Age of Ethnological Museums' (Arrieta Urtizberea, Fernandez de la Paz, Roigé i Ventura, 2008: 10) took place in the context of the colonisation process, ethnological museums and anthropology being used, firstly, for the scientific justification of colonial domination and the promotion of the colonial economy before being used, secondly to disseminate information about the colonised. It was especially the case of the colonial museums, created parallel to the ethnological museums (sometimes within the same institution) in order to present different aspects of the colonies, including the ethnological nature of its inhabitants. The Tropenmuseum as we know it today is, for example, the successor of the Colonial Museum of Haarlem which was created as a 'Museum of Commerce' in 1871 in order to familiarise the Dutch public with the colonies and their natural resources. These collections were then moved to Amsterdam, along with other collections, where they became integrated in the Royal Colonial Museum created in 1926 as part of the Colonial Institute. The frescoes and the whole iconographic programme of the building in which the museum is installed, illustrates its role in fulfilling what was then called the Colonial 'Ethical Policies' based on the idea of a collaborative development between colonisers and colonised.

Following this Golden Age, the majority of the European ethnological museums got sick in the 1960s, began losing their meaning over the 1970s and the 1980s due to a series of factors. Boas had pointed out the limits of the ethnographic practice in the museum in America, by the early twentieth century (Jacknis, 1985). There was an abandonment of the museum and a turning back to the university as a place for the production of the anthropological knowledge. This process, described by Sturtevant as the 'University Period' of anthropology spread to Europe in the 1960s, especially under the influence of structuralism, when the study of museum collections became secondary to the topics anthropologists were then interested in (Lévi-Strauss, 1958). As a consequence of this existential crisis, during the 1980s and the 1990s, the exhibition policy of the Paris' Museum of Man, created in 1937 as a place for the consolidation of the French anthropology as well as a great part of the French intellectual and political panorama, was limited to the commemoration of past glorious anthropological missions (Jamin, 1998), which contributed to the loss of interest from visitors, anthropologists and politicians.

Externally, decolonisation over the 1950s and 1960s very strongly affected the missions of both ethnological and colonial museums, some of which attempted to adapt to the new geopolitical order. In France, the Colonial Museum of Paris, inaugurated in 1931 in the context of the Universal Exhibition, was renamed the French Overseas Museum in 1935 before radically changing its institutional policy in 1960, under Malraux, through an aesthetic presentation of the African and Oceanic collections symbolized in its new name, the Museum of African and Oceanic Arts. In the Netherlands, the Royal Colonial Museum was renamed in 1945 as the Indian Museum at the dawn of Indonesian Independence before its transformation into the Tropenmuseum (Museum of the Tropics) in the 1950s under the new supervision of the Dutch Ministry of External Affairs with the mission of presenting to the public the cultures living in the tropical and subtropical regions of the World.

While most ethnological institutions were struggling during the 1980s, European debates on immigration influenced the creation of National Research Centres on immigration as well as the development of new exhibitions, activities and policies within these museums to focus on immigration. The new exhibitions, activities and policies each assert and share a commitment to peoples' right to be different. This is in order to, according Jelen (2005), incorporate immigrants and their descendants into the national history through the acknowledging of their origins as well as to make non-immigrant populations aware of the cultural specificities of the new immigrants so that they would be encouraged to develop a more positive and less stereotyped representation of these communities in order to fight xenophobia. In France, the National Museum of African and Oceanic Arts which in 1990 transitioned from the Museum of African and Oceanic Arts used its exhibitions as a way of showing their cultural roots to a second generation immigrants. Since 1985, the Association for the Development of Intercultural Exchanges at the Museum of Africa and Oceania Arts (ADEIAO) implemented activities of this kind in which,

'[...] Children from all backgrounds discover at the same time the museum's collections as well as the significance of the objects that cannot speak for themselves; for young people of immigrant origin, for whom they are the natural heritage, these collections are a point of reference and identification' (Kleiber-Schwartz, 1992: 138).

In the Netherlands, the focus of the Tropenmuseum was changed in the 1970s, due to the influence of new moral and social values on museology (known as the 'New Museology'). Through an intensive complete renovation of the permanent exhibitions between 1974 and 1979, the museum progressively represented what was then called the 'Third World', and the issues of social and cultural underdevelopment through new collections and exhibitions. Furthermore, in the context of the emergence of a multicultural reflection in the Netherlands, the museum presented within its exhibitions, and most particularly in the Tropenmuseum Junior, the lifestyle of migrant cultures in the Netherlands, in order to present them to the 'autochthonous' population. This part of the museum dedicated to children was in fact created as a multicultural space, holding exhibitions with suggestive titles like 'Many people live in the Netherlands' (1981-82) or 'Home and Away' (1983-1985), dealing with the new Dutch from Turkey, Surinam and Morocco, or 'The hour of the Dragon' (1985-86) on the Asian presence in the Netherlands.

During the 1990s and especially the 2000s, the desire to promote multiculturalism as a political way of dealing with cultural differences led to a strong representation of immigration within the museological institution that would acquire at that time a prominent role in the political agenda (Watson, 2007: 6). The context was indeed marked by a growing interest in cultural diversity, conceived as a wealth for Mankind to be protected (as indicated by the various statements of UNESCO), as well as by the intense reflections on the possibility of living together in a context of immigration (Hall, 1993; Touraine, 1997). A Multicultural Pill was then prescribed to the old colonial and ethnological institutions in order to readapt the presentation of their collections to a postcolonial world where 'it is no longer possible to represent the other remote as we are now exposing ourselves, this group of multicultural people who inhabit cities' (Arrieta Urtizberrea; Fernandez de la Paz; Roigé i Ventura, 2008: 11).

The first full renovation of an ethnological museum from this perspective was probably Gallery 33 of Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, opened in 1991 featuring contemporary artefacts of the city's immigrants, juxtaposed with historical collections of the museum in order to represent the city's multicultural reality (Wingfield, 2006). In continental Europe, this idea would be found in the 'World's Esplanade' reform project of the Geneva Ethnographic Museum developed beginning in 1995 but finally rejected by a referendum. Apart from improving the exhibitions and the interdisciplinisation within the museum practices, this renovation attempted to be a major influence in this city characterised by openness due to the presence of international organizations and a large number of migrants (Crettaz; Gros; Delecraz, 2000). In Basel in 1996, the Museum of Ethnology began an institutional change aimed at promoting intercultural dialogue. This was completed in 2008 as part of its transformation to the Basel Museum of Cultures. In Paris, the collections intended to be represented in the future Quai Branly Museum were exhibited in the '*Pavillon des Sessions*' of the Louvre Museum in 1995, with the objective, 'to affirm symbolically and strongly the equality of cultures and the rebirth of this equality for France in its most prestigious institution' (Pomian, 2000: 80). Finally, this was also the case between 1995 and 2008 at the Tropenmuseum, which would see a new renovation of its permanent exhibitions under the effects of the Multicultural Pill.

## 2. The Components of the Multicultural Pill and the Effects of the Treatment

Next one should question the components associated with the Multicultural Pill as a remedy. One of its most important components was the influence of a new museological paradigm, as illustrated by the 'Museum of Civilisation' begun in the late 1980s as the institutionalisation of a formal recognition of Canadian cultural diversity. This comprised the inauguration of the Quebec Museum of Civilisation in 1988 and of the Museum of Civilisations of Ottawa-Gatineau in 1989. This new paradigm preferred temporary or semi-permanent interdisciplinary exhibitions to permanent exhibitions, a choice that allows a constant updating of the contents and the subjects of societies covered by the museums (Roigé, 2007). These redefinitions introduced by this new museological paradigm very quickly influenced a large number of institutions. Segalen (2003: 54) counted over 1,100 institutions influenced by this paradigm in the late twentieth century, especially in North America where ethnological museums constitute the largest number of museums in contrast to Europe where art museums remain the most common. This museum paradigm was also adopted on the old continent under the form of

'Museum of Society' (Barroso and Vaillant, 1993), giving rise to numerous renovations of local and national institutions (Duclos, 2001).

The second important component of the Multicultural Pill was conceptual. The goal was to show the richness of cultural diversity through the deconstruction of older representations of the world that ethnological and colonial Museums helped shape. Despite the differences in each of these new approaches each shares a goal to try to overcome old colonial discourses, by deconstructing their representations of human diversity and by converting colonial museums to postcolonial institutions that would inaugurate new perceptions of and perspectives on the world's cultural diversity.

The combination of these two components of the Multicultural Pill had a series of effects on museums. The first effect was on the name of the institution itself in that many of them were renamed as 'World Culture Museums', to illustrate their decision to interpret intercultural contacts between world cultures, juxtaposing in their exhibitions collections from different times and places, including Europe. Another effect of this combination was to construct new buildings to house these museums that visually and architecturally departed from the neoclassical architecture of the old ethnological museums. Sometimes these were constructed as a part of larger urban renovation projects, as was the case of Antwerp harbour where the Mas Museum was installed in 2011 right next to the future Red Star Line Museum that has been focusing, since 2014, on the history of emigration from Antwerp.

A third effect of the Multicultural Pill has been museological, leading to new strategies of representation of world cultures. Some museums started to focus on the formal qualities of their collections, transforming ethnological museums into fine arts museums (De L'Estoile, 2007), aesthetising the ethnological objects and their 'aura' to highlight a universal aesthetic value rather than privileging their historical and cultural relevance. The reopening of the Rockefeller collection at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1982 began this practice, which has since been followed by a majority of ethnological institutions (Dias, 2001). One of the most famous renovation of this kind is the Quai Branly Museum in Paris inaugurated in 2006 within a Jean Nouvel building with the combined collections of many French institutions, including the Museum of Man. According to Taylor, the aesthetic dimension of the exhibit objects served to stimulate the visitors' imagination and desire for knowledge (Taylor, 2008), through the arts as symbols of the cultures presented as equals without any hierarchy.

Within this perspective, under the influence of the new museum paradigm, these renovations would be extended to contemporary collections, by installing worldwide contemporary artistic productions, at the time described as 'Global Art'. In addition to the 'Magicians the Earth' exhibition in 1989 at the Pompidou Centre where this type of art was firstly presented, following the British festival 'Africa 95', the renovation in 2001 of the Sainsbury African Galleries of the British Museum for the first time included contemporary art with its older collections. Following this first reorganization of the exhibition rooms, contemporary art was collected and presented in many exhibitions at the old ethnological museums, especially when they visually and explicitly illustrated hybridity and the 'indigenization of modernity' (Sahlins, 1994).

Apart from this aesthetic perspective, in a more global context of reflexion about the history of museums (Ballé; Poulot, 2004), ethnological institutions would begin to represent themselves to the public in their exhibitions as socio-cultural productions as ways to break the bonds formerly maintained between the institution and a colonial worldview. This deconstructive approach was developed in North America in the late 1980s, especially over the stereotypes on First Nations such as the exhibition 'Fluffs and Feathers: an exhibit on the symbols of Indianness' held at the Woodland Cultural Centre of Brantford in 1988. This approach can now be found in many institutions that use their exhibitions to show the way anthropology helped shape a certain image of the 'Other'. The Tropenmuseum exhibited 'White on Black' between 1989 and 1990 to illustrate the way anthropology had helped create Western culture's popular stereotypes about Africans. It is however especially during its renovation between 1995 and 2008 that this institution addressed this through describing a gradual exploration of the national interest in the colonial history of the Netherlands. In its exhibition 'The Netherlands Indies', opened in 2003, the museum presented itself as party to the construction of the Colonial worldview explored in the exhibition as a history, a culture and a heritage. Museologists realized that this exhibition, the museum's collections and their origin, the way they were collected and presented were in fact unique sources of knowledge about Dutch attitudes, actions and references to colonialism and decolonization (Van Dijk; Legêne, 2010: 14).



The last and perhaps the most important components of the Multicultural Pill was discursive, in that it explicitly addressed the immigration process. Indeed, while the subject of immigration could always be found at the foundation of these renovations, it had rarely been presented in museum exhibits. In most cases, influenced by the musealisation of immigration found in the Civilisation and Society Museums and in the National Immigration Museums established in the late 1980s (the Ellis Island Immigration Museum being certainly the paradigm), these representations tried to offer immigration in a positive light. This was the case of the 'Urban Islam' exhibition carried out in 2003-2004 at the Tropenmuseum and then in 2006 in Basel that explored and compared the contemporary urban forms of Muslim identities in order to offer a more complex perspective on the religion than the one presented by the media. This was also the case of the Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum in Cologne and its permanent exhibition 'Men in their world' that opened in 2011. In the first room, the visitor is confronted with an animated projection of the way people from different cultures greet each other while the last display of the exhibition indicates that each of these people now lives in Cologne.

Within this representation of immigration, the components of the Multicultural Pill had profound effects on the methodologies implemented by these institutions. While museums were perceived as privileged instruments of dialogue, Clifford (1997) speaks of the need to create 'contact zones' to facilitate contacts between culturally diverse groups in order to offer a reinterpretation of historical colonial collections. In Europe, this methodology has been used as a synonym for participative museology (Crooke, 2006) engaging immigrant communities, strongly influenced by the 'Object-Subject' approach developed in Canada by Michael Ames in the early 1970s. In the context of the recognition of autochthonous populations within the definition of the Multicultural Nation, Canadian Civilisation Museums popularised this methodology as a way to insert new multicultural meanings to interpret the collections resulting from the participation of the autochthonous communities in the creation of the exhibits (Dubuc, 2002). In Europe, the will to integrate immigration within the exhibitions of the renovated institutions would result in the use of participatory collaborative museology that privileged the information from the source communities of the world cultures collections. The will to implement this kind of practice became institutionalized at the European level within the network 'Ethnography Museums & World Cultures-RIME' that gathered between 2008 and 2013 through which ten major European ethnological institutions agreed to partner together, mediate, and promote a 'dialogue of cultures' and a respect for diversity, through collaborative programs with scientists and intellectuals from the various communities whose works are preserved in the museums (Bouttiaux, 2008: 21). This interest was then investigated in two research projects funded by the program 'Culture' of the European Commission; READ-ME I (European network of Diasporas Associations and Ethnological museums) between 2007 and 2009, and its continuation READ-ME II, between 2010 and 2012. Both projects culminated in a temporary exhibition that explored different perspectives within the collections.

This type of practice was implemented during the project 'Advantage Göteborg', whose results were displayed in the 'Voices from the Horn of Africa in Sweden' space of the 'Horizons Voice of a Global Africa' exhibition conducted in 2005 at the Museum of World Cultures in Gothenburg. During this project, about thirty people who were originally from the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia) now living in the city were invited to work with the collections to present personal and individual memories. Through their participation, this project explored the way the access to institutional visibility combined with the consideration of the changing reality of identities could contribute to enriching the interpretation spectra of the collections (Rinçon, 2005). This idea of enriching the perspectives on collections through an 'insight point of view' can also be found in the exhibition 'Urban Islam' of the Tropenmuseum, achieved through the implementation of participatory museological practices with Muslims living in Amsterdam. By positioning itself as a mediator between the Muslim and the non-Muslim perspectives on Islam, the museum could locate itself in the heart of conflicting models of representation, transforming itself into a social instrument that permits showing an ambivalent and more complex perspective on cultural diversity (Shatanawi, 2012).

### 3. The Results of the Treatment

More than ten years after the ingestion of the Multicultural Pill, in one of the deepest economic and social crises the European continent has known in recent years, it is intriguing to note that some European conservative governments are reusing the 'Clash of Civilization' myth, and have begun to advocate the death of multiculturalism as a national policy. Many of these renovations have also been criticized from a museologic and academic point of view for not having the desired effects on their attempt to decolonize the general population's perception of World cultures, as it was commented in the case of the Quai Branly Museum. Besides

reviving through its presentation the classical anthropological debate on the necessary complementarity of the aesthetic and the cultural perspectives on material culture, this museum was much criticized for what has been seen as the Eurocentric nature of its aesthetic perspective. For Price (2007). The museum had in fact not reached its postcolonial goal as the division between European and non-European art is based on a Eurocentric logic. Jamin complained as such that the model the renovation of the most famous French institution was a 'Museum of Whites', where the choice of works is determined by the notion of masterpiece. Hainard states that:

'When I saw in France that they were moving objects from the Museum of Man to put them in the Louvre with the argument that there were going to expose there more than 120 masterpieces, I said to my colleagues: "you're amazing, you have completed the full circle of colonialism, because you decide which are the masterpieces of other cultures"' (Hainard, 2007: 4).

Must we conclude that the Multicultural Pill did not produce its intended results on the function of museums in spite of the large number of visits received over the last decades? Could the museological patients not have been healed? Was the treatment a mere placebo? Indeed, it is interesting to note that more than ten years after the first renovations, a great number of the museums which undertook them are currently in crisis, marked by an uncertainty about their future and by policy shifts at the administrative and museological level that renew concentrations on collections. This is the case of the Tropenmuseum that survived a deep crisis about its future, before being opened in 2013 as part of the Royal Museum of World Cultures along with other two institutions. This is also the case of the Museum of the World Cultures in Gothenburg stuck in an unclear transition phase since the 2010s.

In addition to the internal complications in decolonising the museum, it seems that there is an additional discursive and political problem, epitomized in a gap between the discourse of the global institution on the promotion of multiculturalism and its political application at the local level. While the museums respond to the global promotion of cultural diversity, these renovations are in fact situated within different local and national debates on multicultural policies. However, while the treatment of the colonial history and the implementation of political regulations and interpretation of immigration intrinsically compose this reflection, these issues don't often appear in museum exhibits. Their representation of multiculturalism often neglects the complexities created by the multiculturalisation of societies and which are often manipulated for political purposes.

From the beginning, the issues have been complicated by the term "multiculturalism" which has multiple meanings. For our purposes, the term should be understood as it was used in the late 1990s. It became part of what Bourdieu and Wacquant (2000) defined as the 'new planetary vulgate' recurrent among Western intellectuals, and which would correspond to the appearance of a new neoliberal vocabulary born from a desire to depoliticise social relations. According to Gordon and Newfield,

'Multiculturalism has become one of the major frameworks for the analysis of relations between groups in the United States (...). However, while the term "multiculturalism" has appeared more frequently in the current social and cultural debates, its meanings have become less and less clear' (Gordon; Newfield 1996: 1).

Stanley (1996: 353) asserts that 'multiculturalism is a term whose boundaries are not easy to establish' while Grillo (1998: 8) describes it as a 'catch-all concept'. The confusion is such that Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997: 1) conclude that 'multiculturalism means both everything and nothing'. For example, the declarations about the death of multiculturalism actually refer to a 'semantic nebula that groups immigration, terrorism, crime, delinquency, insecurity and above all, Islam, that is to say, a religion' (Wieviorka 2011).

In this sense, according to Parsanoglou (2004), the 'multicultural issue, born in the North American academic context of the early 1990s, is part of the 'culturalising paradigm' that has been marking the social sciences since the 1970s'. The latter, dominated by the idea of culture, delegitimized the analysis based on social classes. Within this new paradigm, the structure of Western societies wouldn't be determined anymore by economic relations of production but, instead, by the cultural relations, conceived by most multicultural researchers as ethnic. This reflection had an impact on the implementation of immigration management policies and integration, leading to a certain 'culturalisation' of social policies in which museum started to become places for the resolution of social conflicts through cultural activities. Following this paradigm shift, the immigration process formed the background for all these museum renovations that became discussed from a cultural perspective. The assumption was that making knowledge about immigrant cultures would enable the

acceptance of the new immigrants by the local population and thus facilitate their integration within the community. This practice was intended to minimize social prejudices and resistance to immigration even though most national immigration policies implemented in Europe after the Second World War corresponded to a need for cheap labour, opening the frontiers to the ethnicisation of the European working class.

This is particularly the case of the creation of museum 'contact zones' (Clifford, 1997) as applied in Europe. Besides the fact that 'new voices can be as biased as the old ones' (Crooke, 2006) in the museological participatory methods with immigrant communities, the adaptation of this concept first explored in the educational analyses of Pratt (1991) has gradually eliminated the idea of unequal relations between the people put in contact. While for Pratt this concept was used to understand the educational context as a social space where 'cultures meet, clash, fight each other, often in contexts of large asymmetric power relations' (Pratt, 1991: 34), this concept has gradually become synonymous of participatory museology which, from a conceptual shift, made immigrants the source communities for the interpretation of the extra-European collections held by the old ethnological and colonial museums. One consequence of this type of postmodern practice may be the 'self-exoticization' of participants, questioning the relevance of the information obtained, often influenced by emotion, remembrance and nostalgia, certainly unconsciously wanted by the museums, in a former institution dedicated to an anthropological perspective on World cultures. Moreover, this practice reinforced the 'transnational' identity of the 'source communities', in constant transit between a 'here' and a 'there', neither of which is reachable, that complicates their integration and their recognition as ordinary citizens.

The Multicultural Pill could then be understood as a discursive remedy for the museum which fits into a new definition of identities conceived as open, conscious and somehow proud of the cultural diversity they contain as an illustration of their modernity. The representation of cultural diversity that is found in the renovation of ethnological and colonial museums could be conceived thus as depoliticized, reproducing the ideology (and thus the social order) which makes its existence possible, ignoring the conflicts generated by cultural difference, celebrated or trivialized in exhibitions, while ignoring, as Yazgi indicates (2005: 596) all those for whom this difference is synonymous with suffering and stigmatisation. Turgeon (2003: 196) states that the way multiculturalism, understood as cosmopolitanism, is presented in museums is implicitly discriminatory. Indeed, it is adorned with the aesthetics of the heterogeneous, elitist lifestyle of the middle classes, who only consider intercultural exchanges on the condition that they do not alter their values. This perspective is also found in the commercialisation of difference of 'world food', 'world music' and in the tourism industry and is probably part of the 'ludic multiculturalism' (Matušík, 1998), where 'diversity is celebrated while "the real difference" is evaded and a kind of diversity 'wellness' is established' (Kurkiala, 2002: 22-25).

Faced with these arguments, and thanks to the adoption of new museological practices, it seems that this Multicultural Pill may have produced a profound (post)modern but perhaps temporary effect in the patient. From this particularly disappointing perception of the remedy and its effects, it may be time for an in-depth re-evaluation of the diagnosis of these institutions' disease that was made more than forty years ago, to determine if the causes of the disease may not be actually much deeper than we thought at first. The question remains open...

## Notes

(1) See <http://www.quaibranly.fr/fr/actualites/actualites-par-rubriques/archives-des-actualites/m-jacques-chirac-president-de-larepublique-a-inaugure-le-musee-du-quai-branly/allocution-de-m-jacques-chirac-president-de-la-republique.html>. Accessed May 2014.

(2) See <http://www.museenkoeln.de/rautenstrauch-joest-museum/default.aspx?s=2023>. Accessed March 2015.

(3) See <http://www.linkiesta.it/blogs/citta-invisibili/milano-nell-area-ex-ansaldo-nascera-il-museo-delle-culture>. Accessed March 2015.

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## Museums and Oil Sponsorship; forming (un)ethical identities

Jessica Holtaway

PhD Researcher in Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths College, University of London

jessicaholtaway@gmail.com

### Abstract

Despite increased awareness of climate change, advertising for oil companies remains a conspicuous presence within our cultural landscape: 'BP Portrait Award' at the National Portrait Gallery, 'BP Walk through British Art' at Tate and 'BP Big Screens' at the Royal Opera House, to name a few.

The paper discusses oil sponsorship of the arts with reference to Jean-Luc Nancy's writings on 'spacing' and subjectivity, and the art collective Liberate Tate. It considers how cultural institutions create identities, and argues that by refusing to promote oil companies, museums and galleries can retain cultural autonomy and sustain a space that perpetuates openness and plurality.

**Keywords:** Liberate Tate, oil sponsorship, Jean-Luc Nancy

### Introduction

This paper spotlights the creative interventions of Liberate Tate, an art collective that asks Tate to decline BP's sponsorship of the arts. As a member of Liberate Tate, my aim is to develop critical discourses around oil sponsorship of the arts. Consequently, this paper will look at how institutions form identities and why ethics is a central concern.

The theoretical focus of this paper is on the writings of philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, and his founding philosophy of 'being singular plural' which provides an important conceptual break that allows us to understand and articulate the contingent nature of both identity and ethics (1). I will develop this idea with reference to cultural institutions and explore how galleries and museums might respond to ethical discourses introduced by their audiences and stakeholders.

I will look at how current critical discourses around the Anthropocene can elicit innovative policies within museums and galleries. Finally, with reference to contemporary ideas within museum theory and political theory, I will discuss examples of institutions that have taken steps to create ethical identities.

### Art and Oil Sponsorship

In 2010, Tate commissioned a workshop exploring art and activism. The gallery invited the Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination to lead the workshop (2). The workshop was to focus on the question 'What is the most appropriate way to approach political issues within a publicly funded institution?' The participants collectively decided to address the issue of sponsorship - specifically BP's (3) sponsorship of Tate. Many of the participants in the workshop felt that by accepting sponsorship from BP, Tate were in fact providing an ethical mask for BP, giving the oil company a social license to operate.

Tate responded to the participants by attempting to censor the workshop, a gesture that intensified the oppositional energy within the group. A majority of the participants then decided to continue the creative collaboration independently, ending the workshop by placing the words 'ART NOT OIL' in the windows of the top floor of the gallery (Figure 1). This was the starting point for Liberate Tate, who six months later performed an 'oil spill' at the Tate Britain Summer Party. The performance featured two performers 'spilling' bags of oil-like molasses, hidden under their flowery dresses (Figure 2), as well as a larger 'spill' at the visitor entrance, undertaken by other members of the group.

Five years later, Liberate Tate has over 100 active members. It has produced thirteen public performances and regularly participates in other oppositional actions within institutions throughout London. Liberate Tate is part of the 'Art Not Oil Coalition' (4) and has worked in collaboration with political arts group Platform. These organisations and collectives campaign to free the arts from oil sponsorship and to encourage institutions to develop more ethical identities.



Figure 1 - Liberate Tate established, 2010. Photo © Sam Trotman.



Figure 2- *License to Spill*, Liberate Tate, Tate Britain, June 2010. Film Still © You and I Films.

But what does it mean for a gallery to have an 'ethical' identity? And why is corporate sponsorship a problem, when increased funding might allow galleries such as Tate to function better and to reach out to a wider audience, perhaps through maintaining or increasing free exhibitions and resources?

## Forming Identities

Before directly considering these concerns, let us consider from a philosophical perspective, *how* we form identities. With reference to philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, the following paragraphs will consider how identities are created and communicated, and what significance this might have for museums and galleries.

Nancy writes extensively on subjects including communication, politics, community, globalisation and art. Although he does not specifically write about museum ethics, his philosophical stance allows us to consider core conceptual issues within museum theory and examine the way these issues converge within institutions. His texts are distinguished by his ontological theory of 'being singular plural', from which he develops further social and political concepts. In essence, 'being singular plural' refers to the idea that being is never entirely reducible to a singularity and that our existence is necessarily interconnected. For Nancy, 'being singular plural' is first philosophy - it is the very foundation for philosophy and politics (Nancy, 2000: 25).

One of the characteristic demonstrations of 'being singular plural' is the continual motion of 'spacing'. 'Spacing' refers to self-awareness; it is the moment in which I say 'I am', the moment of perceiving oneself. It is at this moment an individual looks at themselves as if from beyond. In Nancy's words: 'The Self *comes from* "relating to oneself"... in order for the relation-to-self to take place, in order for it to articulate itself, what is necessary is the moment of the outside-oneself' (Nancy, 1993: 53).

Another way of explaining this is that we produce our identity, but during the process of 'producing' this identity, we transcend the identity itself (Nancy, 1993: 53). In other words, production exceeds the subject as it creates the subject. Nancy often uses the word 'spacing' to articulate this process and for him it is an ontological gesture because it concerns the very nature of 'being' (Nancy, 1993: 57, 102). Because we are self-aware and able to produce our identity through the choices we make, we are, in a sense always 'with' ourselves. And our awareness of ourselves is always linked with our awareness of others. We are always 'together' *with* ourselves and *with* others. 'Being' is always *with* other things and beings, and it is *with* itself, concurrently singular and plural (Nancy, 2000: 29, 38).

However, by producing a particular identity, we are also producing something that can be assimilated, something that can be understood by others. But because we continue to be self-aware, we continually reproduce and reform our identity, and those perceiving us interpret and reinterpret this identity. In other words, identity forming is responsive and perpetual; we assimilate identities, but in doing so we alter them.

## Institutional Identities

This idea becomes even more important when we start to think of collective identities and particularly the identity of cultural institutions. As soon as a gallery such as Tate becomes invested in, or dependent on, a commercially productive external enterprise, they have a responsibility towards their financial sponsor who then, to a greater or lesser extent, has a bearing on the art exhibited within the sponsored gallery spaces and the way in which exhibitions are marketed to audiences. One example of this is that BP has a representative on the board of judges for the BP Portrait Award. It has a direct impact on the choice of work exhibited. As such, the appropriateness of an artwork with relation to BP and its corporate agenda becomes a concern for those judging the competition.

In the case of Tate, by accepting sponsorship from BP, the gallery is under pressure to ensure that the company is represented as an ethical, engaged and people-oriented organisation. The very fact that the exhibition is providing a platform for BP and giving it a seemingly ethical face shows that there is an agenda at play. There is a reason that BP wants to sponsor the gallery. Their sponsorship points to long-term financial benefits for BP. And because the gallery chooses to prioritise the interests of the financial sponsor above the ethical concerns of many of their members, capitalist values are prioritised over social values, and critical discourses around climate change become muffled.

Rather than providing a space for people to come together to address art and culture in an open and discursive way, Tate prescribes and curates the content of the gallery based on financial discourses outside of the cultural sphere as-such. By doing this, institutions are in fact recasting the cultural sphere altogether, so that economics is an increasingly powerful core. Subsequently, by creating a fixed agenda, rooted in a capitalist value system, cultural institutions risk becoming restricted in their ability to 'space' themselves and produce their own identity.



Instead, their identity becomes swept up into the identity of the capitalist organisations that sponsor them and, whilst they enable these institutions to 'space' *themselves* and produce *their* identity, the cultural, civic value of the gallery or museum is absorbed into the discourses of the capitalist organisation. At this point, the very cultural values that set them apart become re-produced and distorted, in effect re-positioning culture as a means to a financial goal, rather than a means in and of itself.

This leads to a questioning of corporate sponsorship as a whole, and opens up a much larger set of ethical questions, which are often situationally specific. Corporate funding has played, and continues to play, a huge role in the production of culture. However, there have been cases where sponsorship has been refused on ethical grounds. In 2014, organisers of the Sydney Biennale cut ties with one of their previous sponsors, Transfield Services, because the corporation runs mandatory detention centres for immigrants. The organisers of the Biennale responded to the ethical concerns of their audiences and participating artists.

In the 1980s, it was common for cigarette companies to sponsor cultural projects and sports events, and even arms manufacturers have in the past, sponsored cultural events. In 2012, the arms manufacturer Finmeccanica terminated its sponsorship of the National Gallery following public protests. These sources of sponsorship were widely deemed socially unacceptable, because audiences recognised the power that these sponsors had over public perceptions of their products and politics.

Liberate Tate, Art Not Oil and Platform are focusing on the ethical question of oil sponsorship, and are asking galleries and museums to make oil sponsorship a thing of the past, along with arms sponsorship and tobacco sponsorship. This is even more important now than ever before, primarily because climate change is becoming an increasingly urgent concern.

### Critical discourses as a springboard for innovation

Geological societies are currently reviewing the idea that we might be entering a new geological era, the Anthropocene. The current geological era is officially the Holocene, which is an interglacial time period characterised by warmer climates that have allowed for relatively stable environmental conditions. The Anthropocene would mark 'the age of man' - an era in which humans are the predominant force in the shaping of the natural environment, and are generating environmental instability.

Some theorists (notably Paul Crutzen) believe that the first stages of the Anthropocene began with the advent of the steam engine and the subsequent use of fossil fuel (Crutzen and Stoermer: 2000). Although we cannot immediately change the development of this era, the acknowledgment of the environmental shift through renaming our geological era 'the Anthropocene' could have a huge impact on socio-political discourses, and our responses to environmental issues. Jill Bennett, Professor of Experimental Arts at UNSW Australia, explains that the new terminology is 'a framing concept for what its proponents represent as a paradigm shift' and that climate change discourses, which up until now have often been rejected in the interest of market logics, could open up a 'big window for innovation.' (Bennett, 2012: 6, 9) Bennett asks the question; 'What happens when a shift of magnitude ripples through the relatively unfettered, heterogeneous cultural sphere; how are the already receptive, differentiated, and politicised practices of the arts jolted and redirected?' (Bennett, 2012: 9) In other words, cultural institutions can greatly impact the way in which we understand and respond to environmental issues. Liberate Tate is an example of an art group that is advocating new ways to address climate change, initially by dismantling social norms that undermine new and innovative climate policies, such as BP sponsorship of the arts.

Liberate Tate, Platform and Art Not Oil accept that climate change is a crucial issue and endeavour to create spaces and platforms that allow for new discourses and approaches. Incumbent in this is the need to re-calibrate current social and cultural attitudes to climate change. As already outlined, the main concern for the Art Not Oil Coalition is to prevent the increasing tendency for cultural institutions to provide an 'ethical' face to the organisations that rely on denial and indifference to climate change to increase their capital. Liberate Tate's focus is the Tate, and although it does not claim to be able to solve climate change, it introduces a critical presence that challenges the relationship between the Tate and BP. In a statement expressing solidarity with the Boycott group who campaigned against the sponsorship of the 2014 Sydney Biennale by Transfield Services, Liberate Tate stated:

'Liberate Tate's artworks challenge Tate's association with BP because we feel the company's global impacts are a stain on the collection, and the presence of BP limits creativity in how visitors engage with

art at Tate, and in how audiences imagine a world without the devastating impacts of oil.’  
(<https://liberatetate.wordpress.com>)

Whilst the creation of a greater oppositional force towards Tate’s relationship with BP is a core aim of the group, it is also an instrumental opposition that is needed in order to allow for new discourses that address the issue of climate change. Therefore, the group’s objective is to highlight how we are each connected and implicated in this issue. Through performances they demonstrate ways in which individuals (especially Tate members) can create a critical distance from the prevailing support of BP, ‘imagine a world without the devastating impacts of oil’ and in turn encourage Tate to be a more ethical institution.

Liberate Tate is not trying to renounce Tate; they want to ‘liberate’ Tate, to free it from becoming subject to ethically unprincipled corporations. Their aim is to ‘re-form’ Tate and, along with the Art Not Oil coalition, to end oil sponsorship of cultural institutions. For Liberate Tate ecological loss is something that needs to be addressed differently, something that requires new discourses.

But also, beyond the immediate issue of oil sponsorship, if we consider the power that market forces have over cultural institutions, and if we are concerned about the advanced capitalist environment we are living in, it is important to begin to develop alternative approaches to creating institutional identities. In an increasingly globalised world, economic flows and currents are becoming more consuming and are diffusing chains of responsibility.

This means that it is vital for museums and galleries to reassert their cultural values - for institutions to ‘space’ themselves and produce their own identities *with* the public, and *with* their audiences, and to actively resist privatisation and colonisation by market logics.

### Institutional Ethics

Referring to sponsorship, Tate director Nicholas Serota stated, ‘There’s no money that is completely pure’ ([www.tateatate.org](http://www.tateatate.org)). This may be the case, however some funding is much less ethical than others. Cultural institutions have an impact on how we understand and respond to contemporary issues. In the face of the complex issues surrounding corporate sponsorship, museums and galleries need to acknowledge their social responsibilities.

Speaking of BP’s relationship with Tate, head of press at BP, David Nicholas told the Guardian: ‘As far as we’re concerned, it’s a commercial relationship.... a relationship we’ve had over the long-term, and we believe it helps them carry out their work. We believe it’s a benefit to us and to them and to the public who visit the Tate’ (Guardian; 8/10/14). It has recently been disclosed that BP’s contribution to Tate amounts to an average sum of £240,000 a year between 1990 and 2006. This is a considerable amount, however it is the equivalent to approximately 0.5% of Tate’s overall annual budget ([www.platformlondon.com](http://www.platformlondon.com)). Tate does not *rely* on BPs sponsorship, but nevertheless chooses to maintain this relationship despite increasing opposition from its members. For Tate to create a more ethical identity, it needs to actively respond to critical discourses and to reconsider long-term relationships that position the gallery in a pre-determined political framework.

Founding director of Seton Hall’s Institute of Museum Ethics, Janet Marstine, argues that museums need to transform into sites of critical enquiry rather than simply providing a fixed cultural model (Marstine, 2006: x). In her essay *The Contingent Nature of Museum Ethics*, she states that ‘activism opens up debate in the museum around social justice issues’ (Marstine, 2011: 13). For Marstine, a contemporary ethical institution is one in which ethics is a social praxis that responds to mutual concerns and is open to changes led by its staff and its public (Marstine, 2011: 8, 11). This requires strong discursive relationships between institutions and audiences to facilitate engagement and social praxis.

This importance of ‘engaging with’ audiences (and audiences engaging with institutions) is also advocated by political theorist Chantal Mouffe, known for her writings on agonistics (the concept that conflicting ideas and values are necessary for a democracy and can be accepted and channelled positively). Mouffe states that ‘far from being condemned to play the role of conservative organisations dedicated to the maintenance and reproduction of the existing hegemony, museums and institutions could be transformed into agonistic public spaces where this hegemony is openly contested’ (Mouffe, 2013: 70).

For Tate to create a more ethical identity, it first needs to reconsider its policies around sponsorship. But beyond this initial decision, the key question we need to ask, and continue to ask, is ‘*how* can museums and galleries

retain cultural autonomy and sustain a space that perpetuates openness and plurality?' And to answer this question I'd like to consider how institutions might 'space themselves', and thereby sustain open, discursive spaces. Are there any institutions that Tate could perhaps learn from?

The following three examples highlight ways in which institutions can create discursive, responsive exhibitions, affectively 'spacing' themselves independently from corporate identities. These are not necessarily 'perfect' models, but each example outlines an institution that has taken steps to develop more responsive and socially engaged discourses. The examples show how cultural institutions can actively demonstrate a sense of ethical responsibility in the way in which it approaches the formation of its cultural identity.

The first example is MACBA in Barcelona (Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona). The gallery encourages debate, by providing a space for conflicting ideas to be expressed and addressed. For example, the 2014 exhibition entitled *nonument* featured 28 artists who each responded to the idea of the monument and its significance within the city. The exhibition was described as an 'open laboratory' and a 'discursive platform' which explored how artists can engage with debates around the governance of public space and the formation of collective memories. The exhibition encourages critical engagement with social and political issues and how they are represented.

One of the notable things about MACBA's curatorial approach is that it endeavours to reach beyond its immediate audience and establish communicative channels throughout the city and beyond, to people who are not necessarily gallery-goers, as well as providing a platform for artistic practices that fall outside mainstream cultural discourses (Figure 3). It 'spaces' itself with its audiences, and by communicating with people throughout the city. Its identity is formed through socially responsive exhibitions, rather than complying to a set agenda.



Figure 3 - Skateboarding at MACBA. Photo © Un ragazzo chiamato Bi Foter CC BY-SA, [www.todobarcelona.org](http://www.todobarcelona.org)

Another example, which might have particular relevance with regard to Tate, is the 2014/2015 *Disobedient Objects* exhibition at London's Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A). This exhibition explores how objects created for grassroots political action became powerful tools for social changes. The V&A is an institution that is deeply part of the cultural establishment, but it nevertheless provides a discursive space that allows for audience participation and institutional critique.

An example of this is that the exhibition features 'how-to' instructions, which explain how to make things such as makeshift teargas masks and bucket pamphlet bombs, which audiences can take away or download when they get home. At the same time as the exhibition ran in London, there were pro-democracy demonstrations in

Hong Kong. Documentary footage showed that participants had used the V&A's 'how to' guides to construct teargas masks during the demonstrations (Figure 4).



Figure 4 - How to Guide- Makeshift Tear-Gas Mask. Illustrated by Marwan Kaabour, at Barnbrook - [www.vam.ac.uk](http://www.vam.ac.uk)

*Disobedient Objects* reinforces the social, political significance of galleries and cultural institutions, but opens up a discursive space that stimulates informal responses outside of the institution. This exhibition is an example of how institutions can create spaces independent from market agendas, and support social concerns and artistic practices that are often sidelined in dominant artistic discourses.

Another example is The Silk Mill in Derbyshire (Figure 5), which is part of Derby Museums. The Silk Mill is the site of the world's first factory. For its recent scheme entitled Re: Make, the public were invited to co-produce the gallery and to actively participate in the rebuilding and curating process.



Figure 5 - Derby Silk Mill. Photo © [www.derbymuseums.org](http://www.derbymuseums.org)

One of the current projects at the Silk Mill is to establish 'art' as one of the core academic disciplines. The widely known concept of STEM disciplines (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) does not include art, but by adding 'Arts' to the acronym, making it 'STEAM' - The Silk Mill acknowledge the importance of creativity in educational and technological innovation. The Silk Mill is partly funded by the Happy Museums Project that focuses on creating environmentally sustainable cultural spaces.

Such institutions continue to 'space' themselves, to create their identity and to have power and agency over the way in which their identity is formed. What might Tate learn from these examples?

- 1) By creating a neutral space, free from BP advertising, Tate could become an 'open laboratory' for ideas, provide greater support for new artistic practices and connect with wider audiences.
- 2) By listening and responding to the ethical concerns of its audiences, Tate could become an exemplary institution that acknowledges its social and cultural responsibilities.
- 3) Tate has the opportunity to become a leading cultural institution that pioneers environmentally sustainable practices. Tate can help kick-start innovative projects and cultural practices that are independent from the fossil fuel industry.

## Conclusion

Part of the gesture of spacing, is that it can allow for openness and self-critique, which can be empowering for a cultural institution. Galleries and museums *can* sustain their autonomy as public institutions, rather than becoming tools in the creation of privatised corporate identities. They can do this by developing democratic, responsive policies that consider current ethical issues, for example oil sponsorship. For larger institutions, developing sustainable policies 'with' the public will demand fundamental shifts in how exhibitions and events are structured and presented. It is not only a matter of turning down unethical sources of funding, although this is a vital initial step in creating an ethical identity. Temporary exhibitions currently provide opportunities to trial new models of curating objects, disseminating knowledge and fundraising. But more research is needed to develop longer-term strategies of institutional engagement.

The creation of an identity is a continual process of 'spacing'. Through 'spacing' themselves with self-awareness, institutions can respond with greater discernment to their social and cultural responsibilities and retain greater freedom from financial agendas that ultimately reduce freedom of expression within cultural spaces.

## Notes

(1) Nancy's key texts include: *The Inoperative Community* (1991) which highlights the need for responsive social behavior, and considers the dangers of attempting to install pre-formed ideas into social communities; *Being Singular Plural* (2000) which rethinks the concept of the 'social' by articulating the shared nature of our

consciousness; *The Creation of the World or Globalization* (2007) which address how we collectively form the world based on an understanding of our shared consciousness.

(2) A few months previously the Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination had been recently been dropped by Nikolaj Contemporary Art Centre in Copenhagen, because they had encouraged ‘mass disobedience’ during the Copenhagen Climate Summit. The ‘Lab of ii’ describe themselves as existing ‘somewhere between art and activism, poetry and politics’. Rather than considering themselves to be a ‘group’ they define themselves as ‘an affinity of friends’. (<http://labofii.net/about/>)

(3) Formerly ‘British Petroleum’.

(4) ANO includes other activist, art and performance collectives including Platform, Shell Out Sounds, Greenpeace, Reclaim Shakespeare Company, Rising Tide and the UK Tar Sands Network.

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The Lab of II: [www.labofii.net](http://www.labofii.net)

# Distant Presence and Bodily Interfaces: “Digital-Beings” and Google Art Project

Dr Cristiano Agostino

Recent PhD Graduate, History of Art, University of Edinburgh

christonurpc@gmail.com

## Abstract

This brief article, continuing and expanding upon the author's presentation given at the *Museums Alive!* Conference in 2014, seeks to engage the ways in which the contemporary museum, more and more digitised and remotely accessed, can present its collections and artefacts in a remote context by taking advantage of recontextualised human perception – in particular haptics and proprioception – rather than the perceptive overhaul that Virtual Reality (VR) entails. By reconfiguring digital replicas of artworks and their interfaces and affordances as 'digital beings' we can generate a philosophical background that puts at the centre the human body's basic and widely underrated affordances, as well as help defining digital artefacts as valuable agents *per se* rather than degraded, second-hand copies. The article will present one of the first academic analyses of *Google Art Project*, presented as an interesting reframing of the digital interface in an exhibiting context.

**Keywords:** artefacts, digital-being, *Google Art Project*, ontology

It is fairly safe to assume that one of the dominant, if not the dominant debate currently raging within the museum community is the role that the idea of 'object' should play in an increasingly digitised and remotely distributed museum economy; a debate carried along with varying degrees of conservatism and iconoclasm, from unabashed technopositivism to the lamenting of museums as 'spectacular immersion' (Chan in Levent et al, 2014). Surely, as museums and galleries of art create identities for themselves in the World Wide Web, they must face the problem of how to translate their accumulated heritage and collections into a format that is both meaningful to the Web environment, and representative of the tradition that characterised their *modus operandi* in the physical context; all the while contending with a culture that, while heavily reliant on reproductions as carriers of meaning, still puts a premium into the auratic value of the 'real thing'.

This article sets out to explore, through close analysis of a single emergent practice, an interesting facet of the Web user's interaction with digital copies of art works – in order to show how new 'ways of seeing' might be encouraged by the digital, and this in turn might have an impact on the fruition of digital museum content. Specifically, I will present an in-depth discussion of the digital platform *Google Art Project*, which I will frame by re-evoking one of the most interesting ideas to emerged from Object-oriented Ontology as applied to the digital: Joohan Kim's notion of virtual, digital items as 'digital-beings' (2001). My underlying thesis will be that, in the midst of a resurgence of interest into Virtual Reality and mimetic environments for the user to navigate visually, there is still lots to be explored in the ways our bodily 'being there' – especially in the form of haptic and proprioceptive affordances and interfacing – can give form to an 'augmented reality' that is bodily and organic, and perhaps more meaningful and engaged than mimetic reconstructions.

## Digital Beings

The ontological, interactive and affective 'qualities' of the digital object (including digital reproductions of artworks) that make it a prime field of contention with regard to notions of materiality, perception, interfacing and ontology are explored in detail in a paper by communications researcher Joohan Kim (2001). He presents us with a fundamental, yet complex and multi-faceted question that encapsulates the conundrum that the image, the digital, and their coexistence pose to those who have to understand them, and work with them:

'Are these computer files and programs another sort of "thingly beings," since we can perceive, interact with, work on, use as a tool, and even touch them? Or, are they merely "non-things" ... because they are not "real" and do not have material basis nor specific places in objective time and space? Or, rather, are they close to Plato's "idea" (or "eidos") [?] ... Can we say computer programs are a kind of "tools" and can consist of "equipmental contexture" even though they are not "thingly beings"? When we are reading the Web page with our computer, can we say that the Web page is here and now?... Can "being-in-the-World-Wide-Web" be another way of becoming a "being-in-the-world"? (Kim, 2001, p.88)'

This quote expresses well the problem that lies at the core of the museum debate around objects in a digital age: how does technological re-mediation impinge, and modify, the ontological status of reproductions *as agents*? The problem is not merely philosophical or semantic: it has fundamental practical ramifications, since the status of the digital item, and therefore the relationships with individuals and the cultural *milieu* at large that such item entertains - in other words, the *cultural relevance* of the digital item, determines how it might be included or excluded from certain cultural discourses, such as museums.

The solution proposed by Kim is, essentially, a new categorisation. He suggests 'digital-being' as a new ontological (and, consequently, epistemologically defining) class of beings, which includes 'all kinds of digitized information that is, a series of bi-nary dig-its or bits that can be ultimately perceived by the human body' – reproductions of artworks included (Kim, 2001, p.89). How does Kim's re-definition help us in making the case for a digital object that is apprehended not as a mere textual referent to an existing 'real' object but as an agent that, through digital interfaces, both facilitates and defines modes of communication that are embodied and 'presence'-based? One clue is in the central role that Kim gives to the digital-being's quasi-physical manipulability through interfaces. According to him,

'digital-beings are not physical objects; however, they can have several "thing-like features" that have long been regarded as unique to the nature of physical things. Digital-beings have certain degrees of durability, substantiality [length, height, surface properties] and extensions': digital-beings, which include for example images, but also non-physical interfaces (for example, a Windows desktop, or a framing device for an image), are not completely akin to the physical, and possess novel qualities – such as the possibility to be stored indefinitely. Yet, in final analysis, they also possess fundamental and engendering similarities to physical objects when it comes to interaction, interfacing, apprehending and, generally speaking, 'experiencing'; essentially, the digital-being is 'a kind of "thing" with quasi-bodily presence' (Kim, 2001, p.92).

Another characteristic that make digital-beings notable is their 'usefulness': which is to say, the possibilities for manipulation, interaction and affective engagement that they afford. While Kim uses this observation to argue for digital-beings' similarity to physical-beings, I think that the issue does not resolve itself so easily. This 'usefulness', which it seems to me is another word for the impact that digital-being's embodied features potentially have, is logically something that is shared between digital-beings and physical-beings; yet, it is also a marker of difference. Part of the reason why we call of a 'digital revolution' is that digital-beings, and the physical supports they inhabit, allow us to do also *more* and *different* things, compared to what exclusively physical-beings afford: they open up relationships, interfacing and operations that are, somewhat counter-intuitively, not unlike what physical-beings permit; yet, very unlike both quantitatively, and qualitatively.

I would argue that it is the interface – in its multiplicity of forms and levels, and not all of them digital – that makes this empowering paradox possible, while at the same time making digital-beings a cultural point of contention. In the museum context, digital-beings (for example, reconstructions of objects/spaces; interactive artworks; or simply just reproductions) are extensively used as teaching tools, both in a pedagogical context and through less structured interactions, as in online galleries. Such digital beings can, however, be experienced exclusively through some kind of interface, be it physical (a kiosk or interactive station) or digital in itself (objects within a reconstruction of a room). Digital-beings, in the museum and otherwise, hold therefore great experiential potential, which is controlled by the means of fruition – the interface. As suggested by Manovich's research into digital interfaces and software affordances (2001; 2013); or Mark Hansen's explorations of 'the iconic turn' and haptics against machinic vision (2004), the digital interface is an agent – or actor – in and for itself, which mediates but also sensuously shapes, through visual but also tactile and proprioceptive interaction, the relationship between the user and other 'digital beings'. Finally our apprehending is filtered by one last interface: our body, and its sensuous and proprioceptive apparatus, which interfaces with reality (be it digital or otherwise) in order to generate, in the best case scenario, engagement and affectivity.

The interplay between digital and bodily interfaces is at the core of our relationship with new technologies of perception and interaction. It should be noted, to this end, that there seems to be a convergence of interests between these novel ways of experiencing digital content, and the collective, user-oriented, 'humanised' digital experience that is Web 2.0, the paradigm that most museums follow in shaping their digital presences (O'Reilly, 2005). This makes the philosophical turn toward digital objects as actors all the more relevant, considering the



museum is a cultural institution that, for better or worse, largely relies on the ontological identity of objects as currency.

In order to ground into a practical example this 'cloud' of interfaces and engendered relationships, I will now discuss in depth one of the most hotly debated recent platforms for remote fruition of museum content: the Google Cultural Institute's *Google Art Project*. While the context and debate around the platform constitute valuable discourse, I will particularly focus on contextualisation of the actual, tangible interface affordances according to the theoretical guidelines suggested so far.

## Google Art Project

In February 2011 the Google Cultural Institute launched a new digital venture: the online art-viewing platform *Google Art Project*. Relying upon a partnership between the Web company and (originally) seventeen Western museums, the enterprise was developed from a side project initiated by Google's Group Marketing Manager Amit Sood, and aims at providing, on a Web platform, a number of digital reproductions of works from participating museum institutions, which can then be visualised in high resolution and explored through a drag-and-drop, zoom-in-and-out interface. Each participating institution also commits to having one iconic work photographed in 'gigapixel' format (about seven billion pixels) with Picasa technology, generating a digital reproduction of resolution hundreds of times higher than other large resolution images commonly found online. These 'super-reproductions' enable the user, for example, to "zoom in to see Van Gogh's famous brushwork down to the tiniest stroke, or watch how previously hard-to-see elements of an artwork suddenly become fully visible – such as the tiny Latin couplet which appears in Hans Holbein the Younger's *The Merchant Georg Gizse*."

*Google Art Project's* user interface and overall look is designed by Schematic, a WPP Digital company, and does not follow the predominantly white, stripped-down 'Google template' established by the company's search engine, mail service, or scholarly articles portal (WPP Digital 2013). Upon opening the front page <http://www.googleartproject.com/en-gb/> in Google Chrome, we are presented with a gigapixel reproduction of a randomly chosen artwork, for example Carl Hofverberg's *Trompe L'Oeil* (1737).

By dragging with the cursor, the gigapixel reproduction can be moved around the workspace, as well as beyond the frame of the browser's window. In a previous iteration of the platform, the gigapixel image could be explored through a sort of 'magnifying glass': by dragging this square section of the interface across the reproduction, as one would do with an actual magnifying glass, one can enlarge specific sections of the reproduction itself against the smaller whole. More recently, gigapixel reproductions can be explored by manipulating a thumbnail, superimposed to the workspace: in this case, the magnified section comes to occupy most of the workspace, while it is the thumbnail that remains static. This last interface iteration is, arguably, more in line with other well-established interfaces for the observation and manipulation of images in a digital environment, as it recalls, for example, 'explore' tools used by many photomanipulation programs.

The platform is also wired for Web 2.0. A selected image can then also be added to one's personal gallery, which is then visible to other visitors and open to comments; it can be shared through a number of social interfaces, such as Facebook, Twitter or Google+. Finally, each artwork constitutes an entry point for exploration of the galleries themselves: a number of participating institutions have provided QuickTime-style panoramas of their physical environments, which the user can navigate in a fashion rather similar to Google's own *Street View* tool.

## Debate around Google Art Project

Google's ambitious project has been the object of a great deal of discussion in the professional museum field. Common lines of argument are rather consonant with the concerns explored in the first part of the article: digital-beings in relation to museum collections, and the new paradigms of 'aura', presence and interaction the relationship between the two hemispheres entails; the perceptual 'user experience' as central to apprehending, interfacing and, eventually, constructively learning from museum materials; the complex dynamics by which the existence and deployment of digital-beings rediscusses established notions of curatorship, heritage, and the museum's cultural status and authority in general. Some discussions have had, of course, more resonance than others.

In 'Is Google Bringing Us Too Close To Art?', art historian James Elkins argues that the immense scope for visually deep, detail-oriented exploration of artworks that *Google Art Project* allows is not necessarily a unambiguously empowering, or 'just a useful tool or a simple diversion': it is, instead, a symptom of a new 'way of seeing' that is

pervasive on the Web, and that profoundly destabilises established ways of apprehending, understanding and 'reading' works of art – raising, in the process, 'an entirely new set of problems' (Elkins, 2011a). According to Elkins, there exists a traditionally 'proper' way of *looking* at an artwork, implied to be largely defined by the visual and discursive position, relative to the artefact, that the art historical and museum apparatus has implicitly assumed and enforced throughout the past century. This proper way can be described, in a nutshell, as fairly distanced and eminently textual. Commenting on the visually disconcerting effects that *Google Art Project's* magnification has on Seraut's *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of the Grand Jatte*, Elkins states:

'What a strange face this is. The woman seems to have eight or ten lavender-colored eyes, a bit like a spider. Clearly Seraut did not expect people to see this. But what, exactly, did he want people to see? That is not at all a simple question; in fact, it's one of the oldest and most important tenets of art criticism. For consideration of a piece of art in these terms, Google Art Project doesn't help at all. You cannot tell what the limits of ordinary vision are. For that, you have to go to the original (Elkins, 2011).

According to Elkins, 'vision' is a modality that grants access to what the picture is actually about – meaning, content, and context. We should remember that, in spite of vision being a sense, Elkins' position is essentially well within the bounds of the linguistic, pre-iconic turn: (visual) texts are merely windows into content rather than significant actors in their own right, and therefore reproductions of them hold less and less ontological value the more they are removed in interface and affordances from the 'real thing' (Mitchell, 1995).

It then should not be surprising that *Google Art Project* might seem to Elkins 'a zoo of oddities', and that the 'endless seeing of the Internet' that the platform represents 'a kind of cultural illness' (Elkins, 2011): the great degree of perceptual magnification allowed by the platform privileges that range of perceptions, experiences and ways of interfacing that Moxey and other succinctly synthesized as 'encounter', which transcends machinic vision and the 'object' as a window into meaning typical of the pre-iconic turn (Moxey, 2008).

Aside from the inherent manipulability of Google's reproductions through peripheric or a touchscreen, in itself a break away from the reproduction as text, we can also consider the premium that *Google Art Project* puts on first-hand encounter and exploration of an iconic kind with the digital-being over educational, informative interpretation and meaning-making. Adopting a rhetoric that frames the active, bodily engaged, praxis-oriented exploration of canonical works as the desirable mode of interfacing, the *Google Art Project* provides a theoretical framing device for the viewing of art that discounts tenets of traditional visual analysis such as artist intentionality; social positioning, both physical and metaphorical, of the viewer with relation to the work of art; and historical framing as essential to apprehending (Sood, 2011). The result is what could be synthesised as a 'interface-mediated encounter with a digital-being' that, in the end, offers very little to those – like Elkins – who conceptualise the 'right vision' as a respectfully distant, historically aware gazing into and through a frame, onto meaning and content. Elkins' own use of *Google Art Project* in his article 'Exploring Famous Unfinished Paintings in *Google Art Project*' is meaningful to this regard. References to the platform itself are spare and overall somewhat scathing: Elkins' rather traditionally-minded visual analysis only occasionally takes advantage of the tools for extreme magnification available, and arguably the same analysis could have been done with large prints at disposal (Elkins, 2011b).

Another significant discussion of *Google Art Project* was started in April 2013 by Henning Wettendorff of CELLA Production, and was open to all members of the group 'Museum in the Digital Age' on the professional networking platform *LinkedIn* (Wettendorff et al, 2013). Wettendorff's post simply linked Elkins' article for *DailyDot*, with the clear intent of eliciting responses from the group's sizeable membership (5,957 members as of May 2013). While eliciting a thought provoking debate, conversation soon died down and little agreement was found on the issues the thread, or Elkins' article raised: nonetheless, many points raised by Wettendorff and the other participants meaningfully bridge the distance between Elkins' concerns with vision, perception and contextualisation; and more pressing issues within the museum field, such as visitor engagement, outreach, the hurdles of technological deployment, and the ways in which new platforms recontextualise the museum's own cultural place and ongoing relevance.

The contemporary constructivist museum actively seeks new technological instruments, digital ones included, that might facilitate amelioration of audiences and constant re-mediation of the means by which museums might fulfil their educational mandate; and *Google Art Project* is no exception. In this sense, it could be said that Google's technology driven re-mediation of digital audiences' relationships to famous works of art is consonant, in ideology if not in deployment, with the constructivist museum's emancipatory utopian drive for constant

remediation of its own educational strategies. Arif Saeed of the Qatar Museum Authority quite clearly positions this remedial project as trumping over Elkins' concerns:

'I think this a great project – it exposes art to a larger audience that might not have the opportunity to experience art pieces in museums... the gigapixel view of specific objects from each museum is another excellent feature which brings you closer than even curators and preservation specialist are able to see' (Saeed in Wettendorff, 2013).

A position that is also embraced by Adam Mikos:

'It seems the crux of the discussion is whether or not to provide the “general public” with these viewing options. I believe in making it available and encouraging the exploration. Allowing “experts” to determine if the public should be breathing the rarefied air of inclusion is a throwback to museum theory long departed. Let's keep it there' (Mikos in Wettendorff, 2013).

It can be seen from these reactions that the value of Google's enterprise, to at least a portion of museum professionals, seems to lie again in the non-textual, bodily engagement that the platform affords – perhaps a reshaping not as radical as VR, but still far more sensuously engaged than many visits to a brick-and-mortar museum could ever hope to be.

Pre-dating by nearly two years the *LinkedIn* discussion, another fundamental moment of *Google Art Project's* discursive 'domestication' by museum professionals happened when Nancy Proctor of the Smithsonian Institution produced for the trade magazine *Curator* a blog entry commenting on the opening to the public of Google's platform (Proctor, 2011). The blog entry takes an opinion piece format, outlining most immediate pro and con reactions to the platform, some of them echoing moments in our discussion so far. For example, one could find support for *Google Art Project* as an iconic platform for rapport in the included comment by Julian Raby:

'the gigapixel scans enable a kind of encounter with art that is not even possible in the galleries... the ability to engage with the work of art in this way transforms the web experience from an informational one to an emotive one' (Raby in Proctor, 2011).

Without addressing specifically digital-beings, Raby's words well define the new kind of 'encounter' that, potentially, *Google Art Project* allows for; and, at the same time, underscores the remedial power of the platform itself, as it allows the viewer to see more and better than she could in the physical gallery. This enthusiasm is counterbalanced by Proctor's assertion that:

'What I'm most intrigued by is the way that the gigapixel images underscore the importance and centrality of the original object. Yes, you can find some high resolution images of many of these artworks online already, but if not taken by the museum, they have been scanned from catalogues and other print reproductions. As such they are inherently limited: ultimately you will zoom in to paper textures or simply stop. Without access to the painting, the level of detail presented in the Google Art Project can't be achieved' (Proctor, 2011).

As in the case of Elkins' article and the subsequent thread on *LinkedIn*, most meaningful discussion happened subsequently in the comments to the blog entry. In particular, comments to Proctor's post explore one aspect that, beyond basic appreciation, has been explored seldom by professional commentators: the qualities and limits of *Google Art Project* as an interface. James Davis of Tate Gallery states:

“Online the interface in effect plays a similar role to the frame, the glass, the label, the map, the wall and so on in gallery. These can either support or distract from an artwork, and many of our existing collection websites do not support the display of artwork very well because we only consider these digital reproductions as mere references to the real thing. I would humbly suggest that if it is possible to be moved to tears by a photograph online then the same could be true of a painting. This in no way dents our agreement that the real thing is by far the richest, most visceral and emotional experience, it more suggests that there is a space between the two that Google's interface takes a couple of steps into.” (Davis in Proctor, 2011)

It is easy to see Kim's digital-being as meaningfully fitting into the experiential space between physical and digital that Davis refers to: an entity that can be interacted with in a way that can be as meaningful as one could in a gallery – the difference being in the kind of interaction rather than its inherent quality, or its experiential

value (Kim, 2011). This does not preclude positions that emphasise the limitations of the technology behind *Google Art Project*, as when Daniel Garcia underlines how certain kinds of media (sculpture, process-based art, unusually large or small art) are necessarily marginal or excluded by a platform that relies on screens, and therefore remain the precinct of museums (Garcia in Proctor, 2011).

Davis also addresses another controversial element of *Google Art Project*: the Street View-style tours of participating galleries, in which works can be seen in the context of their hang as the users navigate the halls of the museums from a first-person point of view. This tool has been met, overall, less than positively by museum professionals and commentators: Will Brand tempers excitement over the feature by admitting that 'the reason this works, though, is that I'm an art nerd. Relatively few people are going to gain anything from seeing the works in their museum context other than a renewed appreciation for how important these museums are' – this is due, according to him, to an array of factors, including the contextual 'maiming' that the blurring of unlicensed artworks causes; implicit enforcement of canon, since access and contextualisation of the gallery tour hinges upon few canonical works as 'entry points'; and the perceptually underwhelming experience that the (by gigapixel technology standards) low tech of the virtual tour offers (Brand, 2011). *ArtPrize's* Kevin Buist specifically contextualised the experience of navigating these virtual galleries, rife with blurred painting and impossible to cross archways, with reference to Masahiro Mori's 'uncanny' (1970):

'But as I started clicking around various virtual museums I found myself dwelling on the limits of the experience, despite the fact that it does so much to expand access to these museums. Running up against virtual barriers eventually became more intriguing than the art itself... Technology often creates this effect. The closer a virtual experience gets to a genuine experience, its deficiencies become more apparent, not less.' (Buist, 2011)

Buist's perception only apparently runs counter my conceptualisation of digital-beings as valuable actors in their own right, rather than copies that must measure up to the original's affordances and interactivity. His criticism, directed not at the reproductions of artwork but at the reproductions of *environments*, merely highlight that certain kinds of digital-beings might be more successful, given the current state of the art, in emerging as self-standing experiential actors. In *Google Art Project's* case, the gigapixel artworks' soundness as digital-beings decidedly trumps the museum environment reproductions' ability to convincingly stand on their own.

The statement that best encapsulates this difficult, work-in-progress status of the domestication of digital-beings in a museum context is Beth Harris':

'The question that interests me is why we all feel compelled – when we talk about what's we like about the google art project – to say "but of course it's not as good and important as seeing the real thing." I'm not as interested in the truth of that statement, as I am in our need to keep saying it. I noticed it at the press preview, and now here, on this discussion thread. After all – these are two entirely different experiences.' (Harris in Proctor, 2011)

While the contemporary constructivist museum might be on the constant lookout for instruments that might remediate its mandate, relevance and educational scope, the process comes at a cost: the constant redefinition of the cultural, social and political boundaries that the evolving digital context enforces upon cultural agents. Overall, the plurality of positions and arguments brought to the table, as museum professionals argue over the merits of *Google Art Project* (and, implicitly, other similar projects to come) is expressive of the multiple remediations that are taking place within the museum: on a macro-level, remediation of the visitor's ways of relating, on a variety of levels, to cultural media; on a micro-level, the impact that evolving 'ways of seeing' have on cultural stakeholders – of which the museum is one.

## Conclusion

One of the main points this article insisted upon, clashing with the academic necessity of crystallising knowledge at a certain moment in time, is the necessarily ever-evolving technological and interactive relationships engendered among given actors – in this case museums; their multifarious visitors; and the many digital and non-digital layers of interfaces and interfacing that stand and act in-between. Like any other cultural agent, the museum tends to 'domesticate' technologies over time, often just as the next 'round' of paradigm shifts comes along; no analysis or case study, including my discussion of *Google Art Project*, can therefore ever aspire to be the state of the art in digital museum discourse; or hope to generate a rock solid ontology of digital-beings. Nonetheless, I hope the notes above will encourage us to think past physical-digital dualities, realising instead

that the two ontologically distinct yet parallel identities offer different sets of affordances, which evolve through praxis as much as through technological innovation. Classes of ontological actors such as 'digital-being' remind us of, and make tangible to us, the very bodily and sensuous relationship we endure - often without realising it - with that *alter ego* of all that is the digital.

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