◆ 論　文

The Management of Museums
Basic Questions of What, How, and Why

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The museum is a recognizable feature of almost everyone's experience in a developed society, and yet itsdefinition and function are only dimly apprehended. For many people the concept conjures up associations of a dusty, worthy, vaguely imposing institution founded sometime in the 19th century by either an idealistic learned society or an equally idealistic and well-meaning civic philanthropist. In fact, 95% of the world's existing museums have been established since 1950 and their numbers are increasing significantly. This article explores the role of the museum in an interculturally competent society, demonstrating the importance of developing what may be termed museological literacy.

Most formal definitions of the museum, such as the 1974 version of the International Council of Museums, emphasize the functions of acquisition, conservation, research, and display of material evidence of humans and their environment, for the purposes of education and enjoyment. Unexceptional though this formulation seemed in the 1970s, it is challenged in almost every particular today. What should be acquired, and by whom? To what extent should material objects be preserved beyond their natural lifetimes? How can such objects, necessarily extracted from their original context, be meaningfully displayed? Is the museum primarily an educational institution or an entertainment facility? Is it a repository of knowledge or a forum for dialogue? Should its principal function revolve around objects, or visitor experiences? How should museums be differentiated from zoos, interactive science centers, heritage institutions, and theme parks? Such questions are essentially political in nature, and their investigation helps to uncover some of the assumptions that the term museum unthinkingly evokes.

The modern idea of the museum as a place for the display of material items has evolved from the medieval European idea of the curiosity cabinet, a collection of diverse objects, natural and artificial, valuable and worthless, assembled by a nobleman or his agents to display his (rarely her) wealth, taste, and travels: the world, in miniature, revolving around his potent person. Little attempt was made at classification or understanding, although the stories associated with the items' acquisition, related to impressed visitors by the owner, were a large part of the collection's appeal. Over time, the forces of democratization and rationalism influenced the conversion of these private collections into public institutions. The British Museum, arguably the world's first public museum, was founded on the collection of Sir Hans Sloane, just as the Smithsonian Institution was the bequest of James Smithson, who explicitly stated his desire that knowledge be diffused more widely. Such knowledge, however, was assumed to be entirely within the purview of the institution, the epistemological authority of the museum unquestioned. The fact that many people's first experience of a museum todayis in the context of a school visit tends to reinforce this enduring aura of educational omniscience. Clearly, museum visitors are not passive receptacles for curatorial manipulation, intended or not, coming instead with their own individual sets of experiences and expectations. Museums, however, through the selection and arrangement of the items on display, together with the narratives with which they are presented, can nevertheless exert significant influence over the propagation of meaning.Many state museums, particularly in newly-independent countries, have openly drawn on the authority of the institution as a component of an ideological agenda, designing their exhibits accordingly, with museum visits as a required part of the educational curriculum.

Exhibition strategies have evolved from the early, private, cabinet of curiosities model, which essentially shows an appropriative attitude toward other cultures, and while vestiges of it remain in the form of tourist souvenirs and 'exotic' markets, museums today have moved beyond this undifferentiated display approach. By the second half of the 19th century, the first public museums had come into being, with professional staff and systematized collections. Simultaneously, anthropology was emerging as a distinct discipline in universities, and collections were being divided into natural history specimens and ethnological artifacts. Since 'primitive' cultures, however, were still considered part of the natural world, close indeed to the animal kingdom, the classification principles underlying taxonomy and display were essentially comparative. Material culture objects were grouped and classified according to physical similarities or geographical origins and ranked on supposed scales of cultural evolution. A positivist, rationalist, teleological perspective on the part of the exhibitors assumed an absolute knowledge of where cultural objects belonged in the glorious story of human development, culminating of course in the civilization exemplified by the exhibiting institution. Although few serious museums today adhere openly to the old classificatory scheme by which societies evolve from savagery through barbarism to civilization, and mount their exhibits accordingly, hints of such attitudes persist. The British Museum, for instance, still features the 'great civilizations' of Mesopotamia, Greece, Rome, Egypt, China and Japan in its imposing Bloomsbury edifice, while the cultural legacies of other societies are displayed in the ethnological department, a much smaller building in a back street halfway across the city. And the Pitt Rivers Museum at the University of Oxford remains, as its statutes dictate, a perfectly preserved example of the comparative approach to ethnological display.

The anthropologist Franz Boas, who had a great influence over museum development in the late 19th Century, stressed the importance of contextualizing objects to give them more of the meaning they held for the society of origin. That is, objects should be placed in fabricated settings and groupings that replicated their use in the cultures they were from in order to communicate effectively their meaning in that context. Part of the mission of anthropology, for Boas, was to render other cultures accessible to museum visitors, and to present those cultures from the native point of view. Thiscontextualist approach seems on the face of it more respectful of the integrity of other cultures, and is still very widely adopted in ethnology museums around the world. By means of artful dioramas and, more recently, increasingly sophisticated audio-visual and computerized media, museums attempt to give a broader, more inclusive cultural frame of reference to material artifacts, thus leading, it is hoped, to a fuller understanding of or insight into the culture as a whole.

A fourth approach to exhibiting cultural artifacts, formalism, also owes its inspiration to Boas, although in many respects it is in direct opposition to the contextualist approach. Boas had argued that many objects from other cultures were not merely interesting or exotic, but showed the same level of craftsmanship and aesthetic sensibility as items exhibited in fine arts museums. While this was a necessary corrective to the elitist attitudes then prevailing, it resulted in decontextualized objects being exhibited for their aesthetic qualities, irrespective of their original function. In Stephen Greenblatt's terms, the item is exhibited to evoke wonder rather than resonance, with the attendant risk of at least simplification, if not Disneyfication.

All four of these approaches to exhibiting cultural material, in spite of their obvious differences, share characteristic weaknesses. First, they are all based on a comparative, evaluative outlook in which individual objects are placed in a specific context with its attendant set of taxonomic assumptions and expectations. A second, related characteristic shared by all four approaches is that of incompleteness. If the ethnology exhibition is essentially a metonymic or synecdochic conception, in that it attempts to represent a complex whole by means of constituent parts, then it is necessarily flawed, since no selection can ever successfully replicate the totality of the represented culture. The third shared characteristic, and the most ideologically pertinent, is that all the above perspectives are those of outsiders to the culture being represented. Even contextualism, which would seem to be the most respectful to the culture of origin, can be criticized for its assumption that a non-indigenous curator can successfully communicate the nature of a different cultural reality - or indeed is justified in attempting such an undertaking. The display of other cultures, no matter how skillfully done or how well intentioned, is in essence a demonstration of a power relationship. And while the use of cultural insiders has mitigated the last of these criticisms, it does little to address the issue of incompleteness, since the totality of a culture cannot possibly be fully replicated or represented. This, however, is a failing inherent in the ethnographic enterprise itself. All exhibition strategies are inherently artificial, in that they take objects out of their original setting and attempt to make them carry and convey modified meanings. That is to say, curators and museum authorities have a definite aim in mind when mounting an exhibition and conceiveof an ideal interpretation on the part of their visitors. At best, this may be a naive expectation.

In an interculturally competent society, museums ideally function as contact zones where different cultural communities can meet and interact, exhibited objects serving as a focus and an opportunity for the exchange of interpretations and the generation of new meaning - meaning that is the synergistic result of collegial collaboration, rather than the univocally imposed truth of a self-appointed authority. So how might this goal be accomplished?

I chose the subtitle for this paper after visiting a large number of museums and exhibits and suspecting that what I thought of as basic questions might not be the same ones as the curator had in mind when he or she designed the particular display I was considering. It seemed to me in many cases that what I would have thought of as secondary questions - questions of numbers, of budgets, of scheduling - had been dominant in the preparation of the exhibition. To a large extent, this is inevitable. Curators nowadays must have sophisticated managerial skills to go along with their academic specialisations, and those who cannot keep within budgets, mount an exhibition on time and attract large crowds will not be considered to be doing their job.

Increasingly, therefore, exhibitions must be planned and mounted by teams of individuals with different backgrounds and skills. And while a team may work smoothly and efficiently together, there is no guarantee that all its members share the same vision as to basic questions - although this is almost always tacitly assumed. Many curators have responded to my interviews with them on fundamental exhibition philosophy with the ICOM mantra of collecting, conserving, researching and displaying, or some variant thereof, but even these activities, admirable though they may be, are not what I mean by basic questions. Perhaps some institutions have the luxury of always being able to discuss such matters with all members of a team prior to developing an exhibition, but time pressures often prevent such an opportunity and team meetings tend to focus on logistical issues - what I have called secondary questions.

I should therefore to take this opportunity to discuss briefly three of the questions I consider essential to the design of a successful exhibition. Although I have put them in the traditional order, I shall discuss them in reverse, since if we do not start with a very clear idea of why we are doing something, subsequent questions are likely to be irrelevant.

I believe that the purpose of museum education, the 'why' of all museum activities, in fact, is to create the conditions for what University of Chicago psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi calls a flow experience. Csikszentmihalyi is certainly known to many museum professionals, but mainly to those working in art museums, through his work on the aesthetic encounter. His theories, though, have wider applications within the museum world, and these have not perhaps been sufficiently exploited. I certainly do not have the space here to do justice to the sophistication and scope of Csikszentmihalyi's writings on what he has also termed optimal experiences, and I would refer you to the bibliography, but I do want to review briefly the characteristics of flow and then consider how we can apply this concept to museum education.

Csikszentmihalyi's first criterion for flow is the merging of action and awareness, in which attention is undistractedly focused completely on the activity. This is a shared characteristic of such seemingly different activities as playing chess and rock climbing. The second criterion is similar in that the stimulus field of the participant is limited to the extent that there seems to be no awareness of past and future: the present moment of activity/attention is all that exists. Then there is a loss of ego, in which self-consciousness disappears and ego boundaries are transcended - the Yeatsian moment, in which the dancer is indistinguishable from the dance.

An important aspect of the flow experience is that of controlled action; challenges are posed by the situation, which are adequately met by the participant's skills. Neither anxiety nor boredom is part of the experience. The similarity between chess and rock climbing becomes clearer with regard to this criterion, and Csikszentmihalyi distinguishes between enjoyment and pleasure by means of this characteristic. For him, pleasure is the passive experience of a hot bath or a massage, whereas enjoyment involves a sense of achievement through contributing actively to the result. Clear goals and clear feedback are important to the flow experience. The participant knows what needs to be done and how well it is being done.

Finally, Csikszentmihalyi stresses the autotelic nature of the flow experience. The activity is neither compelled nor motivated externally, but rather the experience itself is intrinsically satisfying as an end in itself. Few of us play chess or rock climb because we have to, or because we are rewarded for it; the activity is its own reward. This aspect of flow is, to me, the most exciting of Csikszentmihalyi's criteria in the context of museum education; if we can create the conditions for an experience that a visitor feels to be valuable in and for itself - that is, not because we are going to be tested on it, or because the newspaper says it is important - then many other benefits will follow naturally.

So our discussion of the basic 'why' question has glided imperceptibly into a consideration of the 'how' question. How, specifically, can we manipulate the museum environment so as to encourage or facilitate the experience of flow? Of course, this question is not just for curators and museum educators; visitors have a vital and complex role to play in co-creating their own optimal experiences. And while few museum professionals nowadays would openly admit to following it, the old linear communication model - by which a source (the curator) uses a channel (the display) to send a message (educational content) to a receiver (the visitor) - still seems to be the unacknowledged guiding principle behind a great many museum exhibitions. It is, after all, simple; and it also represents the assumptions of many visitors. Eilean Hooper-Greenhill has written elegantly on the need to adopt a more sophisticated communication model for museums, but her suggestions are still too little heeded.

Visitors are not of course the passive receivers implied by the linear model; they contribute dynamically to the interaction by responding to exhibits in at least five identifiably different ways: attitudinally, perceptually, cognitively, emotionally and communicatively. A visitor's attitude to the exhibition at the outset will to a large extent affect his or her other responses, and the greatest range of responses will be available to the visitor who comes with the open attitude that is a prerequisite for the autotelic experience. This openness can only be achieved if visitors, educators and curators work together to change the still-dominant associations the museum has for many people with didacticism and authority.

The perceptual response will be determined by the look of the display: its visual appeal and, perhaps most importantly, its susceptibility to the undistracted focus of attention. It is understandable that curators wish to put as much of their collections on display as possible, but the result may be a visual stimulus overload precluding the intense engagement with the exhibit that is part of the flow experience. Aesthetic considerations are obviously important, and imaginative juxtaposition can, as Barbara Stafford has shown, lead to unexpected discoveries and connections. However, the determining principle for encouraging positive perceptual response should probably be that of enabling the visitor to focus.

The cognitive response refers to the intellectual curiosity inspired in the visitor by the display; an effective exhibit will present challenges to the visitor but encourage him or her to meet them - a characteristic of flow experiences, as noted above. Visitors have different learning styles, and the exhibit should try to appeal to a wide range of cognitive approaches. Howard Gardner's work on multiple intelligences is a useful reminder of the main ways that people process information differently.

Reactions to the emotional content of an exhibit will depend to a large extent on the personal associations that the visitor finds. Community museums are perhaps best placed to evoke memory and emotion in visitors, many of whom will respond to scenes and objects they recognise and remember; but John Mack's recent British Museum exhibition on memory in different cultural contexts is an impressive example of how complex emotions can be triggered by the use of unfamiliar objects. Perhaps the greatest need is for visitors to understand that emotion is appropriate; the lingering institutional authority of the museum is such that visitors tend not to ask themselves whether they like something, but whether they should like it.

Finally, the communicative response refers to the desire for human or cultural contact that the display engenders or inspires. This response can take the simple form of discussing an aspect of the exhibit with friends - or strangers, or museum staff. It can also lead to a desire to learn more about the cultural and personal context of the display. Who made the object? What part did it play in their lives? What was their society like? While these questions are similar in type to those that would stem from the cognitive response described above, they are differentiated by their originating impulse: a desire for some form of communication with whatever the object or display represents.

Obviously these five responses are not in any way separate or sequential; they are listed here only to serve as a guide, or a structure for thinking about how exhibitions, curators and visitors communicate with each other - which is already a more dynamic, energising way of thinking about museum communication than the linear model described above. And such a consideration of how exhibitions work leads to the final basic question in my triad: what should curators use in exhibitions to accomplish the goal of facilitating flow?

As I see it, one of the main problems museums have in selecting objects for display (and national museums are perhaps the most susceptible to this) is the understandable desire to use the best and most valuable pieces in the collection. While these objects may be beautiful and impressive however, they may not in fact be the most suitable for an exhibition in terms of helping to create the conditions for a full and open engagement with the display as a whole. To the extent that visitors approach an exhibit with preconceptions about what they are to experience, that is, the opportunity for flow is reduced. Blockbuster exhibitions are no doubt rewarding in terms of publicity and revenue, but they rarely provide the conditions for autotelic experience.

The above is not to say, of course, that museums should not use wonderful objects. The historian Stephen Greenblatt once wrote an insightful essay on what he termed resonance and wonder in museum displays. His point was that some exhibits seem to evoke instant, unreflective admiration, while others resonate with the visitor's experience in some deep way that can be cognitive, emotional or both, and that these responses were engendered by different objects. It should be possible, however, with reference to the different modes of visitor response described above, to design exhibits that are both wonderful and resonant - that excite and absorb the visitor in a manner characteristic of flow.

A related issue is that of what can be termed a confusion between Culture (with a big C) and culture (with a small c). Museums, especially but not exclusively national institutions, have traditionally concentrated on the products of high culture rather than the artefacts of everyday life, relegating such things to the anthropological department. (The British Museum is a case in point.) This tendency to represent cultures by their (often decontextualised) art objects is disappearing in many museums, but vestiges of the practice remain. Such exhibits may well evoke wonder, but little resonance, and confine the visitor to only one or two modes of response. The selection of objects for display necessarily depends on the purpose of the exhibition, forcing again a consideration of the why question, and returning us, appropriately, back to the beginning of this discussion. For I hope it has become clear that the basic questions I have been discussing are neither basic, nor separate; and there is no point at which they should be considered fully answered.

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