



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG
SCHOOL OF GLOBAL STUDIES

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THE
The
INTANGIBLE MUSEUM
Intangible Museum



Diana and Actaeon 1556-1559 oil on canvas National Gallery of Scotland Accession no. NG 2839

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30HP

May, 2012

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The Bird with the most Beautiful Song:

A young boy one day heard such a beautiful song that he had to go and see who was singing. When he found it was a bird he brought it back to the camp to feed it. His father was annoyed at having to give food to the bird, but the son pleaded and the bird was fed. The next day the bird sang again, and sang the most beautiful song in the forest and again the boy went to listen to it, and brought it back to the camp to feed it. This time the father was even more angered, but once again he gave in and fed the Bird. The third day the same thing happened. But this time the father took the bird from the boy and told the boy to go away. When his son had left, the father killed the Bird, the Bird with the most beautiful Song in the Forest, and with the Bird he killed the Song, and with the Song he killed himself and dropped dead, completely dead, dead forever.

- Pygmy legend (Turnbull 1987 82-83)

Abstract

An exhibition can be more or less effective; however, museums today have to use other channels to address their communities and create other opportunities to activate the participation of their audiences. A successful museum will solicit the visitor's participation and engulf them in the experience. If museums are to meet their responsibility as places of learning then museums need to incorporate different ways of teaching their audience. They should also find new ways to incorporate creativity and human forms into the museum experience. One way to do this is through the use of storytelling and oral histories, which offer a personalized and very individualistic perspective by participants of events, like no other branch of science can.

There are innumerable museums across the globe, all with a different history, mission and story. One common trait; however, is that the museum itself is in the field of storytelling. The objects they select to display tell a particular story, individually or societal. More interesting is that, just as there is a new mathematics, new science, new biology, and new physics – there is a new museology that exists today.

Museums everywhere face the challenge of presenting these objects to an audience in an interesting and educational way. Storytelling provides a type of medium to achieve success in this process. Below I will examine and defend storytelling as a learning opportunity and explore the impact they may have as a pedagogy tool in museums, by creating relevance and learning through shared, personal experience.

Second, I'll look at why museums should use storytelling to reach learning objectives. Here I'll discuss the general reasons for choosing storytelling as a pedagogy tool and the impact it may have on learning in museums.

Following this discussion, I contrast the question of museum space with the pedagogy tool of storytelling in an effort to understand how storytelling can be envisioned to better educate the museum visitor and provide a more memorable experience. Third, I combine the strengths and difficulties of utilizing storytelling in a case study of the MythStories Museum in Shropshire, England. I'll examine just how an "Intangible Museum" functions and the benefits which storytelling provide. To support this case study and the preceding information I'll look at how storytelling has been used in and around Museums the past 20 or 30 years. I'll explore shared ideas and museum works with varying storytellers. I'll conclude my paper by arguing that storytelling should play a fundamental part of education in museums across the globe and how they can be packaged to raise awareness and ensure audience learning.

Acknowledgments

Let me start by thanking my advisor, Ewamarie Herklint, who helped guide me through the entire process and never turned away from my questions, no matter how minuscule, or moot.

I owe a great deal of thanks to many people, from whom I have drawn a great deal of expertise, inspiration and wonderment. I want to acknowledge the many museum professionals and storytellers who have lent me their time and offered me the chance to freely pick their brains during this process. I will always be grateful for your kindness, openness and all that you've shared with me on this journey. I will carry your stories with me always. It's necessary for me to extend a personal thanks to Ben Haggerty, Dez and Ali Quarrell, Jose Rivera, Dr. Erica Risberg, William Docherty, Mofidul Hoque, Lizzie Lincoln, Hamutal Guri and Robert House, without whom I never could have written this.

I'd also like to add a warm thanks to all my family, who have been supportive, patient and tolerant for so many years and for whom I strive to be a better person. Finally, to our Golden Retriever, whose countless hours of walks through the woods afforded me the time and quiet to run things through my head and simply unwind.

Introduction

"In ages past, our old ones were the storytellers. This was the way things were passed along to the generations that followed. For this reason the aged people made it a point to remember every detail so they could relate it at a later time. They were the word and picture carriers making history and spiritual values alive and important. In recent times we have made our old ones think they are not so important. We spoof their stories and make them feel foolish.
(Hifler 1995 99)

The need for and purpose of this thesis arose after I discovered only a few museums have previously attempted to produce an intangible museum, and then on a temporary basis only, usually with titles along the lines of the 'Museum of the Imagination' or 'The Imaginarium'. Most of these, as far as I can tell, are more conceptual art experiences than an attempt to really create a museum of intangibles.

The purpose is to examine Oral Histories and storytelling and how they can best be utilized in museums, specifically in reference to pedagogy in museums. I'll use the terms storytelling and oral history interchangeably throughout this paper.

The aim of which is to investigate whether using intangible history like oral histories, fairytales, fables and myths, etc., detailed above and 1st person narratives like dance, song and prose to tell the story of history, cultures and human kind is a wonderful way of engaging the imagination and creating a memorable museum experience. For example; storytelling is the traditional method of education among American Indians and many Indigenous people around the world and "most folk get the story idea within a few seconds of starting to explain it and the concept of intangible heritage is now really taking root in people's minds". (Haggerty, Ben. Personal Interview, 26 Oct. 2011)

It's these stories that contain much of our history - history that sciences like archaeology have missed and that have largely been ignored by museums, at least up to the modern era. Throughout this paper, to highlight its effectiveness I'll use examples of storytelling in and around the Museum's of London and other parts of the world and will explore the idea of "Living History", "which more and more museums have turned to and a term which refers particularly to first-person character interpreters". (Handler, R., and Gable, E. 1997 74) This term can mean things to many museums; but is an educational tool that really brings

storytelling alive, to reach this aim. Keeping this in mind know that this thesis will come across as broad and likely; more personal than analytical. But this approach highlights benefits of storytelling and reflects the personal touch that came from the various museum and storytelling professionals I spoke to during this process.

There are many people in America looking at the issues surrounding storytelling in museums as a pedagogy tool as well. In Washington the Native American Museum has a very large storytelling program. They've been trying to deal with many of the issues outlined in the abstract and that will be discussed throughout this thesis.

What's interesting is that the more we rely on and the more museums turn to technology, modernization and the more modern we're becoming there seems to be a greater desire from museums and visitors alike for intangible history and to learn more, through storytelling about these objects and the path they followed into the present. The intangibles, mentioned above are the stories behind the objects and the telling of these stories "provides a fantastical learning environment". (Johnsson, E. 2006 9)

I will not attempt to argue the accuracy or validity of these stories here to reach this aim-since many stories are difficult to connect with written documentation. Besides, in this case you will find tensions run high on both sides of the coin and merit their own considerations and paper. I will instead focus on the importance stories can play in teaching us about the past.

In the first two parts of my thesis I'll focus on defining storytelling as defined by the Education through Cultural & Historical Organizations and outline for you a list of different types of stories. Concentration here will be focused on its use as a form of communication.

In parts three and four I'll examine why more museums are utilizing storytelling and look at the general reasons for why they are doing so, as they relate to storytelling and education. The focus will be on the benefits storytelling provides as a pedagogy tool, such as its flexibility in relaying history and providing new perspectives, while creating a new museum experience. In order for museums to better utilize this practice as a pedagogy tool or to reach learning outcomes they will have to address the question of the object and the story and whether one carries a greater importance than the other.

In parts five and six I'll look at two key considerations around the use of storytelling in museums – the museum space itself and “Living History”; a key medium of storytelling in museums, according to the consensus opinion of those professionals interviewed for this thesis.

People in all parts of the world have used storytelling as a form of communication, in one form or another. Museums should consciously develop and utilize storytelling as a way to develop their exhibitions and programming. You may question here whether or not it's enough with a museum's usual piece of storytelling - text panels and object cards. The approach of this thesis is no. These are based solely on facts and therefore unflexible. It's my thought that sometimes museums put far too much emphasis on facts. Research shows that the average visitor spends very little time at any individual exhibition and seldom reads the descriptions. (Hein 1998) Besides, many are written in a very specific, professional manner, making it difficult for people to take in the information and retain it. It's much easier to learn and comprehend with the help of storytelling, where the information is more personable and reflective. This approach allows "listeners to relate the most vivid images from the stories they have heard or tell back a memory the story evokes in them". (NCTE, Guideline on Teaching Storytelling, 1992)

Focusing on too many facts, or winded explanations around an object prevents museum visitors from visualizing what they are seeing; therefore, preventing substantial learning. If the visitor is able to find common ground they will be more inclined to contemplate what they learning and formulate their own theories conducive to further learning. "Remember, a story is not owned by an individual but by a group of people". (Heijbel 2005 12 July) This is not to say that object itself is irrelevant, or replaceable. Down the road we'll look at how the history of an object can be better relayed verbally, through storytelling to visitors. We'll look here at this issue of the object and story and how they can function together, to create a more educational experience. This proves more effective in educating the individual, or group. More information can be relayed through storytelling than written text, alone or the visitor's attention span allows for.

I'll examine this pertinent question of the object and the story in part seven, in a complimentary way, followed with a general conversation about museum space and how museums can more effectively use and develop space and creatively elicit the maximum learning response from its audience.

There are a number of very interesting museums, often grouped under social museology that focus on the immaterial. One of the most exciting is the Museum of the Person in Brazil. The Ecomuseum movement (out of France) has also done some interesting work in this regard. UNESCO's recent attention to immaterial heritage has pushed these kinds of projects further. In Montreal, the Centre d'Histoire de Montreal, is pushing museum boundaries in creating storytelling spaces. Following these examples and the thesis's areas of focus we'll turn our attention to a case study of the MythStories Museum in Shropshire, England.

Here we'll look at what has been discussed throughout the paper in a practical practice and examine Museum operations built specially around these belief systems. Following this train of thought throughout the paper I'll carry this one step farther by delving into storytelling in Museums by examining practical examples, particularly in connection with storytelling in a more modern capacity.

What has been touched on here will be learned through further discussions and will be expounded on as a recurring theme pertaining to the benefits of storytelling as a pedagogy tool.

The underlying theme will be education, so before I begin, it would be wise for me to comment that storytelling doesn't have to be only an educational tool in museums. Many of the stories I've come across are intertwined with the oral tradition of cultures, which is also part of the intangible heritage of peoples. In this manner, stories can also be thought of as being a part of the collections found in museums across the globe.

Storytelling is dynamic; it's why I'm thinking about it and why everybody is bringing some sort of intelligence to the discussion; hopefully, in the name of trying to find a resolution, or a way forward that is constructive, as opposed to destructive. What's dynamic is how storytelling touches our person and enacts our senses.

Shannon Flattery has been doing this type of work with her Touchable Stories project, where she is thinking about how smell and touch also relate to memory and can be used within the experience of hearing stories to evoke memories and to enhance listener's experiences.

Following her work and considering I tell stories almost every night when I put my children to bed, not to mention the fact that we are all storytellers in some manner because we're all telling stories; we're just not conscious of them in many cases. It's obvious "we are stories.

We make sense of the world through stories and we make meaning out of stories and remember through stories”. (Johnsson 2006, 1) It occurred to me that storytelling is a most effective tool in education and that this tool can create a very effective exhibition.

Because of this revelation I wanted to examine storytelling, and how it can best be utilized in museums to achieve determined learning outcomes.

Try keeping these themes – education, imagination, senses, dynamic in mind, as well as these three enduring understandings as you read through the following pages of this paper; they will turn up repeatedly. “First; everyone is a storyteller and has a story to tell. Second; stories are to this day a universal form of communication through various social medias. Third; stories are dynamic in the hearing and telling, adapting to reflect the cultural communities in which they are told, heard, and seen”. (Education through Cultural & Historical Organizations, 2006 2)

Museums have always been seen as places of learning. Most famously noted, by Jacques-Jacques David; shortly after The Louvre opened, who stated that: “the museum is not supposed to be a vain assemblage of frivolous luxury objects that serve only to satisfy idle curiosity. What it must be is an imposing school”. (Vartanian 2009, 3) The relevance between the topic of storytelling and museums is that moving forward; museums are once again on their way to accomplishing just this.

New Museology dictates that museums once again become schools and social meeting places, that they become a place that “encourages social interaction” (Simon 2006, 2), where narratives are exchanged and communication rampant. Storytelling and other forms of non-verbal communication have been in place since there has been human development. Current trends show that museums are moving towards a far more personalized and individualistic experience – this refers to every visitor, not just academia. Museums everywhere face the challenge of presenting objects to an audience in an interesting and educational way. Storytelling provides the type of medium to achieve success in this process.

“Since the earliest times, people of all cultures have used stories to help explain a practice, belief, or natural phenomenon”. (ECHO, article 279 sections 683) Stories have been passed along from generation to generation, “predating the written word and people have been telling stories for as long as we have had speech”, (Amalia 2009 1) with and without our knowledge of them.

It was written that:

A need to tell and hear stories is essential to the species *Homo sapiens* – second in necessity apparently after nourishment and before love and shelter. Millions survive without love or home, almost none in silence; the opposite of silence leads quickly to narrative, and the sound of story is the dominant sound of our lives, from the small accounts of our day's events to the vast incommunicable constructs of psychopaths. (Price 1978, 3)

Why then should we continue to force museum visitors to enter and stroll through our galleries in utter silence?

Chapter 1

What is Storytelling?

“Storytelling has been used as a way of “Inducting young people into the life of his world”.
(Campbell 1988, p.87)

1.1 Background

This isn't; however, the only reason why storytelling is important, nor does it define storytelling. Storytelling is more than simply a local phenomenon and it's not relegated to only indigenous peoples across the globe, or solely in the annals of history as might be thought. These stories we'll talk about, these are the stories and lessons that have been passed down to us, to help teach and provide values to us and the next generation.

Mirrorlike to this thread of thought is:

Eder's (2007) examination of Navajo storytelling practices revealed that in the Navajo culture, stories are used to help construct important concepts and as the instrument through which knowledge is passed from one generation to the next. She also learned that the stories seemed to focus on key concepts such as respect and moral responsibility to oneself, others, and the environment and that the stories were primarily told by the elders. Eder notes that families who have used stories to help their children learn important life lessons are considered to have raised their children properly. As part of the study, Eder interviewed David Martinez, a Navajo storyteller. (Miller, S., and Pennycuff, L. 2008 38)

Storytelling does not have to be set in the past; there are new stories coming along every day. There are stories coming along in the news and even from Hollywood.

Steve Denning explains that while:

The ancestral stories of an oral culture are recounted again and again - the mythic creation stories of these cultures are not, like Western biblical accounts of the world's creation, descriptions of events assumed to have happened only once in the far-off past. Rather, the very telling of these stories actively participates in a creative process that is felt to be happening right now, an ongoing emergence whose periodic renewal actually requires participation. (Denning 2009 2)

1.2 Participation and Communication

Storytelling is about participation and because of this storytelling is a very valuable tool in empowering people and helping them become agents of positive change in and outside the halls of museums. More specifically, storytelling is about using stories from culture and heritage; second, storytelling is a tool which encourages both museum professionals and individuals to tell their life story in a way that highlights their achievements and the things they take pride in. Third, storytelling is a form of communication that celebrates personal qualities such as courage, resilience, persistence, faith, etc, in overcoming real life challenges. The moment one understands that she or he can create a new and different path to their own is a very powerful one. A story told through the eyes of an appreciative listener, is a great way to "break the spell" of long held negative beliefs.

Understanding what storytelling is and creating narratives is a fundamental literacy skill. It's also a universal human activity. The Education through Cultural & Historical Organizations gives a most comprehensive definition to support this statement.

They are quoted as saying:

Storytelling is a universal means of communicating cultural traditions, values, and beliefs, as well as a vehicle for passing on information about history, science, government, and politics. Some stories are new; others have been handed down from the ancients. Regardless of the origin of stories, storytelling is a unique, participatory and dynamic interaction between the teller and the listener. The storyteller uses voice and movement to tell a story. The listeners create mental images of the story's events. They smile or frown, the storyteller responds, and the story evolves. The storyteller and listeners bring their own experiences and prior knowledge to the storytelling event and each takes away a unique interpretation of a story. (ECHO 2006)

1.3 Storytelling as a Voice of History

Storytelling is a medium which provides an array of voices around a singular event or object. This has been the case since the evolution of mankind, in one form or another. "Oral tradition is by far the oldest form of communicating, and is vital to the pursuit of knowledge. In a sense it is a living and ongoing account of history. Like life, history will grow and continue, so what better way to store historical information than within the oral tradition". (Deer 2002)

However; storytelling is not something that needs to be relegated only to past events, there are new stories coming along, with staying power every day. In 'this way, accounts will be derived from those who have experienced firsthand the subject matter, and can relate their

stories with a human emotion and compassion that cannot be felt by looking at objects.’ (Deer 2002)

Storytelling is a way forward, instead of a way backward or simply standing still. It’s radical and it’s certainly not a creation of the developed, comfortable west. As museums consider storytelling it will be important for those doing so not to jumble genres together, because the differences are huge. According to Ben Haggerty these differences include “story reading as a literacy tool, story reciting as a form of acting out behaviors and learning things by heart and storytelling as the spoken word and the narrative”. (Haggerty, Ben. Personal Interview, 26 Oct. 2011) Storytelling is the action of telling and is a function of our brains. It’s what we have always done; all the way back to our Stone Age ancestors and it’s what we will always do. “The early communities were bonded together by shared rituals. Stories were as important to their identity as they still are today”. (Bates 2002 12)

As a medium of relaying information and a way of teaching; storytelling is a not without its detractors, authenticity, manipulation and corruption of the story itself can be in question over the course of decades and centuries. As I mentioned earlier I will not attempt to argue these points; however, I should point out to the reader that this is really no different than cautioning people about accepting the written word as truth. Many historical writings are inaccurate, or simply fabricated. On more than one occasion Colonialism has dictated what we have been able to learn about peoples and their customs and don’t forget the derogatory religious tones we have been subjected to countless times. Indeed as learners we must use our own intelligence when using either written or oral history as a learning tool. However my trust goes foremost into oral histories as they are more an extension of a specific peoples account and offer a different and truer perspective.

1.4 The Power of Storytelling

Despite these possible issues storytelling works so well because we all come from storytelling traditions and we all have stories to tell. We normally do so more intensely and unabated. In an attributed quote author Lawrence Nault says, quite compellingly that "the point of a story can penetrate far deeper than the point of any bullet."

That’s the power of storytelling! Star Wars, the feeling I get now is the same feeling I had as a boy, sitting in a movie theatre and witnessing this spectacle for the first time. Storytelling is

an event where adults can take part in children's stories and be transported to a more personal and positive time, or memory.

It's a safe zone. It's an inner orientation and there's a relaxation that happens when we hear a familiar story. Ben Haggerty's organization, the Crick Crack Club puts on events for adults at museums, called "Fairy tales for grownups". Ben says that "when you get 90 or 100 adults in a museum, in a more personalized setting, by the end of a story their faces have completely relaxed and they've completely internalized what they've heard and seen. They've found a zone where they can personalize what they've heard or seen. (Haggerty, Ben. Personal Interview, 26 Oct. 2011) In this description we see what storytelling is in a nutshell. At its essence storytelling is – a tradition and a stimulant.

Chapter 2

Types of Stories

“Stories are the creative conversion of life itself into a more powerful, clearer, more meaningful experience. They are the currency of human contact.” — Robert McKee

2.1 Background

This is the really interesting thing! The definition of a traditional story is in the word tradition. Tradition means that you pass it on. Tangible, cultural heritage is passed on, so how does something become a story passed along – a tradition? I was told that “if a story is strong enough to go through 3 sets of ears, then it’s strong enough to go through 3,000 sets of ears”. (Haggerty, Ben. Personal Interview, 26 Oct. 2011) It’s at that time, when the types of stories listed below will be launched in a sea of tradition and become just that.

Since this paper is about why museums should utilize storytelling and how they can be used as a pedagogy tool it might help to know a little about the different kinds of stories out there to be used. The types of stories listed below were taken from a handbook written by Emily Johnsson, for the London Museums Hub and adapted from a book by T. Grainger. But they give you just a small sample of the broad variations of stories in an academic discussion, around the usage of storytelling in museums worldwide. The important thing to remember is that each provides a museum with the chance to communicate more effectively and personally with their visitors, while better educating them about the objects in their collections.

A museum must first consider why they should use storytelling and then consider the objects they want to tell stories about. These stories may help museums do so in a way that binds the visitor to the object in an educational, positive and personal way.

2.2 The Different Types of Stories

- *Folk tales* emerged from the need that communities have for sharing their wisdom and experience in a memorable manner. They are tales about the wise and the foolish, the rich and the poor, men and women, the old and the young, the brave and the cowardly. They are often humorous involving trickery or foolishness. They can also be serious tales of heartbreak and romance.

– *Urban Legends* – the most popular living oral tradition; humorous or grim tales that play upon the neurosis of modern life.

– *Tall tales or lies* – extravagant stories which become increasingly nonsensical but highly entertaining – for example the exploits of Baron Munchausen.

– *Fairy tales* open up the world of magic, of kings, queens, little people and the supernatural and includes many tales collected by historians, scholars and folklorists such as the Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen.

- *Nursery tales* are specifically for very young children, and often have cumulative runs that become almost like verses or songs – they build on very strong repeated patterns, demonstrating language and causality for example ‘The House that Jack built’ or ‘The Gingerbread Man’.

- *Teaching tales* are from the religious traditions of the world and include Zen stories, Sufi stories, Saint’s tales, Jataka tales etc. They impart specific values, attitudes and ethics according to specific mythological and religious world-views.

- *Legends* are fantastical stories attributed to actual places or figures from history. They have a toehold in time and place and can range from local Fairy Legends and Ghost Tales to legends of kings and great heroes such as King Arthur, Robin Hood and Dr Faustus.

- *Myths* tend to refer to stories which explain the origins of natural and supernatural phenomena, human and superhuman characteristics. The dominant characters are deities, they may interact with humans, but the Gods are definitely the central focus of the tale. Examples include the Yoruba Orisha stories, Scandinavian Eddas and Norse Myths, most of the Greek stories and the Hindu myths.

- *Fables* are often very short tales with few characters and a strong element of the fabulous. These are stories about humanized (anthropomorphic) animals and are often didactic in nature, imparting values, morals and ethics.

- *Epics and Sagas* are stories, which were composed as poetry. They are extended episodic narratives in which the lives of mortal heroes and heroines interact with the Gods and other world beings – for example Beowulf, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Old Testament and the Iliad.

- *Ballads* are closely related to tales of heroes and epics and are sung or chanted to recount heroic deeds. (Johnsson 2006 14)

After discussing why they should use storytelling and deciding on which types of stories will best suit the museums learning objectives; a museum must then determine the best way to incorporate storytelling into their museums and the pros and cons of doing so.

Chapter 3

Why use Storytelling in museums

“Stories knit together the realities of the past and future, of dreamed and intended moments. They teach us how we perceive and why we wonder.” - Joan Halifax

3.1 A New Perspective

The first thing to ask ourselves here is why are more and more museums incorporating storytelling in the first place? Storytelling makes history personal and gives us a sense of understanding and belonging to something older; that we cannot get through tangible history – which is more detached and impersonal. Storytelling brings things to life and offers a new perspective to the tangible. “Because storytelling has been a part of human culture since the formation of language, perhaps museums recognizing this appreciate its power to engage diverse audience”, (Docherty, William Personal Interview Jan 24, 2012) while at the same time having the power and universal appeal to attract these new, diverse audiences into the museum.

While museums have been slow to realize, up to recently that interaction is essential in building knowledge - stories or language as William states above have the power to engage and promote interaction between the visitor and the museum. More essentially it offers a new perception to what the visitor is learning about. Vygotsky wrote, “the child begins to perceive the world not only through its eyes but also through its speech. And later it is not just seeing but acting that becomes informed by words.” (Ritchhart 2007 147) Museums must provide a new perspective and alternate views of history to its visitors and not simply a single voice, using storytelling offers them the chance to succeed at doing this.

3.2 Heightening the Senses

So what attracts visitors? In “Back to Basics” authors Arnold, Ken and Söderqvist give us their opinion on the qualities of a good exhibition. Their idea is to embrace the fact that putting on an exhibition is like putting on a show.

They suggest that:

Audiences come to exhibitions in their leisure time and deserve to be lifted out of themselves. Visitors will respond to the design, lighting, displays and writing and this will enhance the presence of the objects and the impact of the ideas. Secondly; always involve more than one sense –by trying to find ways to enhance the audio and olfactory qualities of the original objects. (Arnold, Ken and Söderqvist, 2011 26)

Storytelling creates a stronger bond between the visitor and the display/object, while also triggering emotion through the heightening of the senses. This makes the stories more memorable; therefore, creating a better understanding of what the visitor is seeing.

“Some of the most interesting aspects of contemporary thought concern the impact that things have on people through our sensory experience of them”. (Gosden 2006 427) To ensure they engage these thoughts museums must present the visitor with an array of sensory experiences during their visit, including storytelling. When visitors pause and engage their senses they can better soak up the life line attached to what they are viewing and draw their own conclusions about what is real or possible. Museums, in this way; must give the audience the opportunity to engage their imaginations and senses when interpreting objects or historical figures.

3.3 The Flexibility of the Story

How museums incorporate these philosophies; however, varies from museum to museum and educator to educator. Therein lays the beauty of storytelling in museums – its flexibility. If we look at the flexibility offered by storytelling, compared to the object on display, throughout museums everywhere - then oral histories are more powerful and give a more flexible account of history than the object itself. Once a story is written down and placed on a card or panel and shelved in the case of objects; it becomes as static and inadaptably as the objects sitting there. It cannot be explained further or even proven as true.

Many times these stories have been documented by a person or groups of persons outside a particular community; making these types of written accounts disconnected from the peoples about whom they are written. This issue has given rise to a great deal of politics within museums. “Post-modernist writers have diagnosed the problem and suggested that, in written documents, "authorship is dead", because: the author is not available for study, since what we

usually have before us is the text, not the author.’ (Scarry 1999) Storytelling provides us with a more flexible, direct line to the source of information – the story teller.

The story, while adaptable might not have an impact on as large a number of visitors as the written text will over a period of years; but what a story does to that object is put it in greater context, personify and change the way the visitor looks at that particular object. By using “storytelling for the purpose of helping people to ‘read’ objects you give them meaning, purpose and context. This is particularly relevant for storytelling in museums, galleries and historic houses”. (Johnsson, 2006 6) The discussion about whether to use storytelling or text is a heated one. I’m in no way calling for an eraser of text in museums, instead suggesting here that they can be better utilized; together with stories for the common good of educating museum visitors around the world.

Ben Haggerty told me a story about one of his projects in which:

He told one of the academics of a museum a version of a story and it did not conform to the version that individual had studied, nor could it be seen in the version used by the museum in its text, accompanying the object. This confronted and challenged her academic integrity and she reacted in a very negative way. As a storyteller I know that yes, you may have a written down version from another century; but there is a folk narrative, on which that is based, that adjusts and changes, that is still being told. (Haggerty, Ben. Personal Interview, 26 Oct. 2011)

You can see there is a sort of contested status and this can be quite a hot topic between groups.

3.4 Storytelling and the Museum Experience

There must be compromise in our museums. Both the tangible and intangible can be given a voice through storytelling to create a better, more educational visit. To create a better museum experience; museums should avoid the comfortable crutch of relying too heavily on the objects, when trying to educate museum goers.

The often quoted, smooth-spoken, mythologist Joseph Campbell says:

We of the West have come to believe that the proper aim of education is the inculcation of information about the world in which we live. This, however, was not the aim in the past. The aim of education in the primitive and archaic spheres has always been and will no doubt continue to be, for many centuries, not primarily to enlighten the mind concerning the objects of the universe, but to create communities of

shared experience/stories for the engagement of the sentiments of the growing individual in the matters of chief concern to the local group. (Campbell 1959 466)

A museum is also a community, it's a place for engagement and meeting; but it requires good conferences and it needs to be well curated, with not too much dry academia and not too much fear. This thing of the presence of the storyteller, or of the story in the museum is provocative. The museum as a venue for a personal visit or experience is provocative; but involves us all.

Using storytelling and other eye-witness accounts, which are based on human factors can help bring a museum to life and create those kinds of personal experiences. Storytelling usually involves a person, a family and also a community. It is the account of a single person regarding the collective experience of a group. (Hoque, Mofidul Personal Interview, 12 Aug 2011) Every story is told differently and every storytelling project is different. Using storytelling in museums helps the museum visitor make an emotional journey into the past with personal memories. By tying together the past and the present storytelling creates both a human experience and a more comprehensive educational experience.

Museums are always looking for ways to positively affect their visitors and promote learning about their collections. And people crave stories - narratives- with which they can identify and see themselves in the context of the past, present and future.

Kathryn Boardman, adjunct instructor at Cooperstown Graduate Program in History Museum Studies relayed to me in an email that:

Good storytelling, like good historical writing, relates to a person through the lens of universal human experiences across time, space and place. Topics and themes are finer lenses on the narratives. Emotions are a part of the expression of and hearing of stories. Whether it is formal storytelling by a person in front of you, or audios, videos, text, graphic murals, exhibit texts, object theatre, theatrical presentations or puppet shows- the narrative is key to the experience. (Boardman, K. Personal Communication 12 Dec. 2011)

Museums have the capability of establishing these formal storytelling methods. Kathryn has a history of presenting formal storytelling, first person role playing and in-person interpretation in museums. She's skilled and well practiced and she states that all methods of storytelling "are effective at the right time and place when they match audience needs and interests". (Boardman, K. Personal Communication 12 Dec. 2011) It's necessary to add here that any

museum considering using storytelling to enliven the visitor experience, that it's imperative these methods should also match a museum's mission statement.

The function of the story is again about engaging a visitor and the awakening of emotional interest, so that when a visitor looks at an object they have a sense of ownership of the object. A story happens right inside you and if it awakens a positive experience a visitor can better connect with an object on display. It engages you. The Wenham Museum in Boston does a lot of storytelling. Education Director Mary McDonald says that like many of the museums adopting storytelling as a pedagogy tool they "strive to have a narrative that runs through many of their exhibits, especially ones that are engaging and targeted to the family audience". (McDonald 2012 Personal Interview, 3 Feb. 2012) Perhaps the true challenge isn't whether or not to use storytelling – rather finding the engaging, affecting story is the challenge. Testing your story, through whatever channel, on a variety of different audiences can be a valuable if jarring experience. Remember though not everyone will be equally receptive.

3.5 Creating a Dialogue

We're seeing these methods of telling stories used more because museums are beginning to see a world around them that's interactive: that when we approach anything, we need to try to bring a sort of personal relevance to it. These methods are, traditionally, not the approach taken by museums and that's why we're discussing it here.

Pertaining to dialogue, upon entering into a museum; you're normally told what the museum wants you to know. Using storytelling is about letting the visitor come to their own conclusions; it's about communication and providing a continuing dialogue between all parties involved. Storytelling has been used since humans could communicate (or a way of communication); story telling has been a part of all cultures and to an extent is considered a part of survival for some. "Stories and storytelling are Universal aspects of human communication: connecting people through time and across cultures. (Johnsson, 2006 6)

As a constant form of dialogue, why not use it to connect the museum to its community. As you've seen it's a form of communication we're all familiar with and that provides us with a better sense of understanding and is attractive to museum visitors. My advocacy is to allow the audience's voice to be heard and acknowledged by the museum to foster a continuing dialogue. Not to simply use post-its or comment cards (do museums really pay any attention to these?); but to give them something to do and to create a conversation between the museum

itself and the audience. Jennifer Miller, Exhibition Assistant at the Oakland Museum of California supported this idea when she relayed the idea to me that “storytelling is not a one-way conversation where the museum provides a question and sits back to give the audience *something to do*”. (Miller Jennifer. 2012 Personal Interview, 20 Feb. 2012) The museum has to be involved on a personal level with the dialog.

By allowing your story or their story to be told, the traditional authority of the museum is removed and allows the content and context to become accessible. I don't want to give an impression that academia or curators have no place - but rather that museums can strive for the creation of a balance of both methodologies. This is paramount to establishing dialogue and creating an engulfing, real life experience.

3.6 The Response to the Sensory Experience of Storytelling

On an interpretive basis, storytelling is crucial; because it extends social learning and as Brian Bates was quoted in chapter 1 “stories were as important to the identity of our early communities as they still are today”. We are an oral history kind of species, no matter how that's conveyed, whether through a Facebook status update, twitter feed, talking to friends in a cafe or around an object, we learn and respond by hearing what others say. But how can storytelling bring museums to life? Museums are rapidly becoming acceptable places of social meeting and stories can be used to bring life and excitement to museums by way of social and sensory interaction.

Storytelling gives the visitor a sensual, personal experience of what the museum is trying to display, more so than a set of words and facts which are left up to the visitor to figure out. (I.e. considering an American Civil War scene; a typical Henry rifle that soldiers carried weighed 9lbs 4oz) Most times, children and adults alike don't know what 9lbs 4oz looks like and how heavy the gun gets from carrying it, day after day - marching, on average 15 miles a day. Including storytelling, which plays on sensory experience in the process of conveying information, for visitors to see, smell, hear, touch and become involved in; the impressions and lessons learned will grab hold stronger and last longer.

Acting as Museum Educator, during my internship at the National Civil War Museum in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania it was my practice to illicit volunteers during my educational presentations to dress in civil war era uniforms and march continually for the duration of our educational discussion – none managed to complete this feat (a mere 1hr). The response to

this experience was overwhelmingly positive and eye opening. The use of storytelling in a museum forum, simply put provides a new way of seeing things for the visitor.

Chapter 4

Storytelling as a pedagogy tool

”They seek experiences in their museum visits, and they rate the success of their visit according to the quality of their experiences. And these experiences go beyond viewing objects, acquiring information, and being on site. Experiencing connotes active engagement (direct observation of or participation in an event), immediacy (knowing something through sensory stimuli), individuality (something that is lived through), and intense, memorable, or unusual encounters”. (Kotler 1999)

4.1 Creating a Memorable Museum Experience

One should always ask what kinds of experiences we can offer at our museums that are unique and not offered by our rivals, or competing attractions. As more museums lean more towards the practice of storytelling and seek to increase interactivity when considering space for a new exhibition, or display they have to ask themselves what are the general reasons for choosing storytelling as a pedagogy tool? What are the benefits and difficulties of creating a memorable museum experience?

While it may be a difficult question to answer since my own role as a museum professional only involves exhibition planning and installation on a minimal basis. I have, during these experiences worked with curators and museum educators to develop learning programs for a specific exhibition or theme, some of which included the concept of storytelling as defined earlier. As a pedagogy tool “storytelling is a creative method of introducing characters and places; an imaginative way to instill hope and resourceful thinking. Stories help us understand who we are and show us what legacies to transmit to future generations”. (Coulter, Michael, Poynor 2007 104)

In attempting to present this information in a creative and imaginable way, as a method of learning; stories are engaging and memorable. We know that museums want their visitors to remember what they’ve seen and heard - so they can tell Mom and Dad what they learned. But museum professionals should also want visitors to think for themselves, so following a line of inquiry is also useful. Having said that; museums provide opportunities to learn how to approach something, that people, as visitors; don't know about - the unknown. What

questions do museums need to ask? What do they want to know about it? Then museums can work on answering these questions through stories and effectively reach their learning objectives.

4.2 The Story Fountain

The questions above will need to be altered to reflect the age and life experience of the visitors, or participants, especially if we're talking about a workshop. My opinion is that people will not listen to something that's not fundamentally about their own experience. Endorsing this thought, to effectively use storytelling as a pedagogy tool Robert House, Director of Possibilities at Story Fountain, in London relayed this advice to me in an email. "Museums need to harvest what's out there and find out what the real concerns of the room/group are before they begin to speak, building in those issues to their own stories to enhance the experience". (House, Robert. Personal Interview 7 Feb 2012)

One of the techniques they're developing at the Story Fountain is the use of "Appreciative Inquiry to further this harvesting skill and capture aspirations and personal experiences during group workshop". (House, Robert. Personal Interview 7 Feb 2012) A museum may ask visitors to share personal stories; but why not also include movies and comic book stories, among others? Any technique that inspires the visitor to learn and stimulates positive results is worth consideration. How's this useful as a pedagogy tool? These are experiences that are "more energized and sustained interactions, more meaningful, relevant, firmly rooted in personal experiences and better participation. (Yballe and O'Connor 2000 9)

In this context, at The Story Fountain; storytelling is more likely to be planned within a supporting program of public events and take place in a separate space from the exhibition using reference to relevant objects. This highlights one of the difficulties confronting museums trying to utilize storytelling, that being the issue of irrelevance between the story and the object. Storytelling can combat this problem and help visitor's look at an exhibition in a new way and encourage them to look into the object, to try and read what narrative is there.

4.3 Appreciation of Storytelling as a Pedagogy Tool

Take, for example the story of Diana and Actaeon by Titian, held at The National Museum in London. The panel at the museum, alongside the painting gives a short excerpt from Ovid but

doesn't give you any of the ambiguities. In Greek and Roman mythology Diana is associated with anything from goddess of the moon, the hunt, and the protector of women and at the same time the killer of women during childbirth. In short the story goes that Diana, while out bathing was viewed by the young man Actaeon, who was out hunting. He stumbled upon her accidentally and was awestruck with her beauty. However; this naïve voyeurism cost him his life. Diana turned, saw him and in anger turned him into a deer – in turn his hunting dogs tore him apart. “The story of Actaeon seems to be based on an older West Asian version in the Epic of Gilgamesh” (Carr, K. 2012 5) When you hear versions of the story then you can look at the painting and it all resonates much more. The whole appreciation of the object is not only of the object itself – it now becomes an appreciation of the story and the situation of the story.

If we look back to the second of our three enduring understandings and you look at classical arts, for example; in the east and west and north and south very large amounts of objects are connected to myth and story and to the narratives that holds the value of that particular society. Even now if we were to take time out and look at the movies being shown we would be able to say – we can find the values of our society by studying Spielberg's Tin Tin or Lucas Star War's. You can find the same Gods, the same cosmology in Sumerian to Assyrian culture, you can see the same narratives for about 3,000 years or so gradually shifting and it's easier to grasp what's behind all that with storytelling, because history is a continually evolving thing, so must museums also be. When considering why museums should use storytelling as a pedagogy tool this example shows three of the benefits of storytelling – it's challenging, interesting and imaginative.

Museum educators can appreciate and use these benefits to:

Build rewarding experiences for students that activate their natural love for and interest in stories. They can do this in a way that expands children's fluency and confidence with language. As students experience narratives from different cultures, they gain an appreciation and perspective on people and stories in worlds that may be unfamiliar to them. This will be valuable to students in many ways, for example by helping them bring a sense of perspective to their own culture and stories. (ECHO 2006)

As you've seen by now this practice and appreciation of storytelling as a pedagogy tool is certainly not new. “The telling of stories is an old practice, so old, in fact that it seems almost as natural as using oral language”. (Coulter, Michael, Poynor, 2007 105) To many groups of people around the world oral history and storytelling are extremely important, not just from a

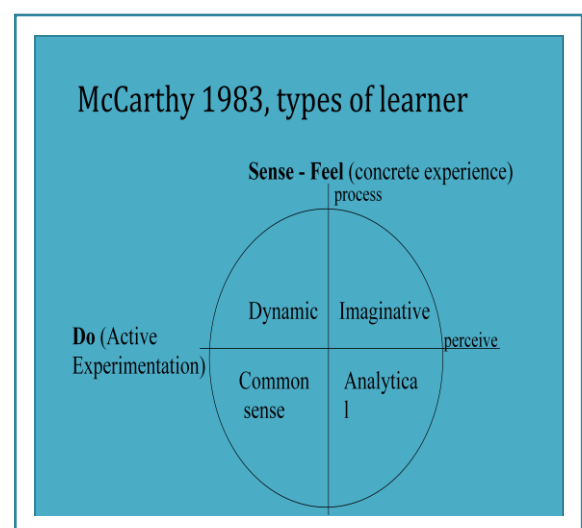
historical aspect, but the stories are used to teach children and adults alike social interaction, family ancestry, culture, art and the very essence of who they are as members of a particular community.

4.4 Storytelling and the Collection

When developing programs for 'Formal Education', aimed specifically at school groups, including storytelling is sometimes difficult. The most obvious reason for this is funding or a negative impression of storytelling as non-interactive and un-stimulating. “The new Scottish Curriculum for Excellence encourages interactivity and is averse to pupils sitting passively listening. The erroneous perception that oral storytelling is always passive means that my managers see it as irrelevant and beyond preschool provisions struggle to integrate it meaningfully”. (Docherty, William. Personal Interview Jan 24, 2012)

Stories stimulate interest in the collection; frankly, I think adults appreciate this approach just as much! Referring back to my educational presentations at the National Civil War Museum – I received many positive responses from the teachers and chaperones, along with the kids for my interactive storytelling and how it related to the Museums objects. One teacher said to me “that he had been coming to the Museum for similar activities, every year for almost 20 years and mine had been the most interesting and educational one he had attended”.

“It is key to keep the relation between storytelling and the collection, because in the context of museums and galleries, storytelling is an interpretative tool to support a richer understanding of the display”. (Ferrer 2007 59) Following this advice the Metropolitan Museum of Art has, for several years produced "Story Time at the Met", for families, where each story is aimed at early learners and relates to a work of art in the collection.



Golding, V., Learning Theory (presentation) Göteborg University, Day 1. Dec. 2010

In this manner of thinking oral histories and storytelling provide a more educational and interactive version of history than do simple objects on display. But why? There are many ways to learn and many different ways of perceiving things.

The Radial Venn, shown on the previous page, devised by Bernice McCarthy, to highlight her 4Mat “Learning System” can shed some light on the reasons for the effectiveness of storytelling as a pedagogy tool.

While perhaps not analytical; storytelling does play to the strengths of the 3 other learning styles involved – it’s dynamic ‘as earlier quoted on pp.8’, it engages the imagination of the viewer and it heightens the senses of the learner.

Oral histories provide a sense of emotional connection to an object or a collection, more than opening up a book and reading from a text can. The person listening to the stories can gather a sense of truth from the story teller and while, details may get lost with any oral story being passed down from generation to generation and this may detract from its authenticity; it has nothing to do with its impact as a pedagogy tool. Consider the story of the Native Americans, compared to the written word as a pedagogy tool. Their culture was considered worse off by Europeans; because they had oral traditions rather than written ones and once they started dying off, those oral cultures were lost forever. While this of course is no fault of their own; it’s an example of an interpretation of the frailty of oral histories.

Remember, as mentioned in the introduction; storytelling is the traditional method of education among many American Indians and many Indigenous people around the world and because history tends to change when new evidence is found; storytelling as a pedagogy tool allows you to adapt with it, regardless of the supposed suspect reliability by some. Ideally museums will have both - the capability of portraying a character or event and have factual documentation and details of the events that occurred.

So how can museums package storytelling, along with objects in a more dramatic, educational way in a museum space? To do so storytelling needs to be imaginatively woven into a seamless experience which includes other interactive elements supporting the museums aims.

According to Ben Haggerty:

Typically, events marketed as storytelling may not be well attended: however when museums and their staff really learn how to utilize and present stories, by bringing feeling into them, then storytelling supports every learning aspect of what the museum has already brought to the visitor through the objects and accompanying text. (Haggerty, Ben. Personal Interview 26 Oct. 2011)

By “bringing feeling into” stories and by personalizing the objects museums enhance the presence of the objects in their collections and increase dialogue and the impact of the educational lesson attached to them.

In the proper forum, with the proper storyteller storytelling can connect personally with the visitor and can teach them what is behind the collections in a museum. It can even teach them what is behind the museum itself.

As a storyteller and facilitator Hamutal Guri often works with stories in dialogue and collections workshops. He stated to me that he often “finds the most compelling stories and educational lessons, those that resonates the most with participants are the personal stories that they share, and the inspiration they draw from identifying the similarities in their stories”. (Guri, Hamutal. Personal Interview 6 Feb. 2012)

One way museums can improve in this area is by providing tours and presenting their collections in an oratorical manner to the public. The benefit of this is that it creates social objects out of a collection the audience may otherwise feel detached of. Tours and oral histories help visitors see collections in a different and unique way and may provide hints as to why and how these objects were chosen for collection in the first place. This creates a more personal relationship between the visitor and the object. It also enables them to engage with it on a more personal level and improves comprehension, while making the collection itself more accessible.

4.5 The Asian Art Museum

At the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco, according to Lizzie Lincoln, Assistant to the Director of Education at Asian Art Museum they “have grown their storytelling program considerably in recent years”. They’ve found that it’s very appealing to younger school groups and family groups. According to Lizzie “it’s a great way for early learners to engage in the museum space in a familiar, personal way”. They’ve focused on employing several different techniques for engagement in their educational department, in cooperation with storytelling - “we continue to find ways to build on the storytelling program, such as a three-

part tour for our "Maharaja" exhibition where school groups hear a story, look closely at artwork with an inquiry component, and do a movement/dance exercise. It's great fun and it's been very popular"! (Lincoln, Lizzie. Personal Interview 24 Feb. 2012)

4.6 The Alaska Native Heritage Center

Much of what has been discussed up to this point, regarding the idea behind a museum focused on using storytelling and what we will read hereafter happens at the Alaska Native Heritage Center all year round. In fact the museum I envision as I write this could be said to be very close to what happens there.

In a conversation with Steven Alvarez, Director of Strategic Initiatives & Media Production at the Alaska Native Heritage Center; he so eloquently described storytelling's social and educational importance:

While we do have collections and exhibits, our programs center around live storytelling, dance, arctic Inuit athletic demonstrations, live tours, interaction with artists and oral presentations at our traditional village sites. Storytelling's importance with indigenous cultures is due to its use as a means for teaching values, lessons as well as family, clan and tribal history. It also provides a means for intergenerational teaching giving Elders an elevated status within the community. In western cultures it has become too common place that the young leave the home, leaving their parents disconnected with grandchildren. When they get too old to care for themselves, often they are put away in a place where they are taken care of by non family members. This is so foreign to indigenous cultures, where the extended family remains close throughout the lifetimes of each generation. Through this tradition the stories, life's lessons and wisdom of those who have lived a long and fruitful life stay alive. I have heard from many people, both Elders and the young that writing down a story takes away from the fluidness of the story. When a story is told orally, it is never told the same way twice. I believe that the story is alive, an entity that changes, evolves and grows each time it is said. While the main points of the story don't change, even the slightest change in a vocal inflection can give the story a fresh meaning. It can be molded to address whatever lesson, object, moral or value that needs to be conveyed. On the other hand, writing a story down can preserve it from getting lost and enable others to exercise this traditional practice. Stories can be brought to life in both a traditional format, with one person sharing the story to another. It can also be brought to life theatrically, through a film or in a song. There are many ways to convey stories. Any time there is active engagement and inter-activity, a story will be more alive. (Alvarez, Steven. Personal Interview 12 July. 2011)

The description above gives a firsthand account of the prominence storytelling still plays in our communities as a pedagogy tool. It also reinforces several of the positive suggestions proposed in this paper, up to this point, concerning the benefits of storytelling; including

flexibility, interaction and the stark contrast between text and the story. To this end museums should consider developing live theatrical programming for the public and school groups as a pedagogy tool as opposed to relying on standard methods of text.

4.7 Storytelling, Museum Text and Passion for Learning

“When students work with written texts, combined with the recitation or listening to stories, or present narratives through related, non-verbal means, such as art or dance, they are learning to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate their world”. (ECHO 2009 2) Text panels alone are inadequate. They do not properly challenge a viewer or effectively aid in reaching the museums intended learning outcome for a specific objet or exhibit.

Remember the idea authors Arnold, Ken and Söderqvist in “Back to Basics”, put forth in the last chapter? In order to better educate their visitor’s museums need to embrace the philosophy that “an exhibition is like putting on a show” and that “audiences come to exhibitions in their leisure time and deserve to be lifted out of themselves”. This important consideration, which connects the past and present, is reinforced by Ian Tattersall with the American Museum.

As Ian Tattersall at the American Museum pointed out:

People come to museums to see stuff—real things. Stories lie in the eye and mind of the beholder, whether in three-dimensional real time or a teacher’s verbal account. So stories—well-crafted stories—are an important way to bridge the gap between children and the content of histories. (Eldredge 2009 10-11)

The real stiff test here is how museums should best present stories to better teach the history behind their objects, in contrast with, or in cooperation with museum text. This dialogue is vital to storytelling fulfilling its pedagogy responsibilities. “Engaging in this ongoing dialogic through narratives turns storytelling into pedagogy”. (Coulter, Michael, Poynor 2007 121) Most storytellers I’ve talked to have scoffed at this upcoming idea. But these stories, in a museum space could be better presented by trained museum docents. Museum docents can generally be defined as community volunteers, trained to give educational walkthroughs of a museum’s collections and exhibitions. General expectations of docents, partly adapted from a newspaper article by Stephen Murdoch are that they “are passionate, required at many museums to make a two-three year commitment in order to be trained properly and are subjected to regular evaluation”. (Murdoch 2000 N36) Docents are just another way museums

can interpret objects and increase the learning of their visitors between the communication of a trained educator and the audience. This also personalizes the experience and creates relevance, in a way museum text can't.

To reach this end what museums should be asking their staff and volunteers to be are not only servants to the authority of the museum; but actually to be themselves. The reason most of us are doing what we're doing is because we love doing it, regardless of our profession.

However research shows that most people who visit museums do so, not because of passion; but to learn something:

Following up the statement from Ian Tattersall (p.33):

The primary reason most people attend museums, whether by themselves or with their children, is in order to learn and are likely to see museums as places that provide opportunities for them to expand their own and their children's learning horizons. (Falk 1998 40)

We just happen to be passionate about museums; therefore we should be trying to create a personality in the museum and provide opportunities, so the visitor can engage with the object, learn and have a positive experience during their time there.

Storytelling as a pedagogy tool is about passion! Ben Haggerty pointed me to an educational theme in educational circles, "which has been prominent for the last 15 years or so, called Emotional intelligence". I will not delve into this topic here; but the simple explanation of emotional intelligence is "how to awaken emotional interest and think more creatively. (Mayer, Salovey 1993) How that relates to storytelling and pedagogy in museums and how we can relay these stories. I will address in the next two paragraphs.

Once you have a fire, learning with a passion, when something interests you and you want to find out more, then you can do self directed learning. The Silk Road Project did a year long residency at the Art Institute of Chicago and it worked with a lot of schools there. Ben Haggerty went there 5 times to do storytelling in the Museum. He also worked with the docents and other members of the staff during his time there.

He shared this story with me during our interview:

One of the heads of the South Chicago Educational Department who had come there introduced, what he called “Passion Thursdays” to all the schools he was connected with. This incorporated a session on Thursday mornings, where all members of the staff, from the janitors to the cooks to the head teacher were involved. These individuals would go to different classrooms and talk about; not what they taught; but what they were passionate about. So if the cook was passionate about vintage star wars action figures, nothing to do with cooking he could discuss this passion with the class. They could show their personal collections, so the kids could experience a human being revealing what it is that makes them tick. This type of constant exposure to people with a note of passion and love in their voice for a particular subject, or object can make the museum visitor think more creatively, like in this case the children ask themselves what are they excited about. (Haggerty, Ben. Personal Interview 26 Oct. 2011)

What do you become excited about? When we’re talking about museums there are lots of volunteers. It would be wonderful to train these individuals to better reveal the stories behind the objects there. “We are all storytellers. We all live in a network of stories. There isn’t a stronger connection between people than storytelling.” (Dietz 2011 2) I’m a storyteller each night when I put my children to bed. We’re all storytellers. “When someone asks you how your day went, that’s an invitation for a story. We allow the listener to participate in our lives by sharing interesting highlights of events we experience”. (Gere 2002 13)

If museums think about their volunteers and their likely stories - there is so much untapped experience and potential in this resource. How can museums teach their staff to be more passionate and better storytellers, to provide a more memorable and educational experience? I think museums would be wise to ask themselves this question moving forward.

A museum must look to bring their exhibitions to life, so that they become relatable to the visitor. One way they can do this is through living history which we will look at in the next chapter. A story needs to relate to an object, character or a display in a way that the individual visitor, or group can find similarities in and be passionate about. As mentioned above, this needs to be done in a way that encapsulates the child and adult alike and holds their attention for a longer period of time.

To this end museums can use storytelling to grab the visitor’s attention and get directly to the point. Rather than overwhelming the visitor with too many facts and small details the museum can instead focus on behaviors and emotions – these are easier to understand, learn from and sympathize with. When museums present information through stories as a

pedagogy tool the information contained within them can be more easily altered than text, to make them more colorful and better engage the museums visitors.

Chapter 5

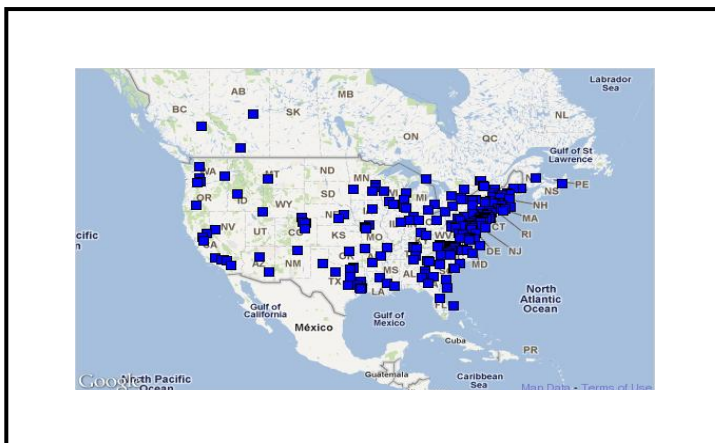
Living History

”In the coming years, museums will have to design a broad array of offerings, identify and respond to needs of different visitor segments, get visitors to spend more time and visit more often, and build durable relationships with their audiences and communities”. (Kotler 1999)

5.1 Building Relationships and Relevance

As a pedagogy tool storytelling accomplishes each of these - by changing the routine of exhibitions you provide a new, pro-active experience for the visitor each time they come back, giving them a reason to come more often. “Engaging visitors in an interactive experience is much more likely to result in a positive museums experience and visitors come back for more”. (Waltl 2006 5) By utilizing storytellers you build new relationships within the community and expand the museums borders. Implementing a new proponent such as Living History; described by Handler and Gable (p6-7) as “first-person character interpreters” allows museums to explore new ways of educating visitors and building relationships with them.

You can see from the chart below that numerous museums are already implementing this tool. Offering Living History experiences makes the intangible tangible for its visitors. Some might feel, because of this that Living History is the best way to incorporate story telling as a pedagogy tool - talk about interactive.



Jose Rivera, Museums and Institutions Professional and Director of Education at Marin Museum of the American Indian has developed three California Indian Vaquero Living History programs for the California Council of the Humanities (CCH).

Living History Museums, Photo by: MapUse.com

During one of our online correspondences he stated that living history “really brings storytelling alive. When people get a chance to hear and speak to historical characters in an educational format it inspires transformative moments”. (Rivera, Jose Personal Interview 9 Feb. 2012) This is one of the strengths of Living History. It’s more powerful and it better links history to contemporary events and minds than other mediums. Museums can fulfill a very important educational role by emphasizing this and drawing connections between the past and present for the audience. Doing so enables the museum to create similarities between groups and provide the audience a chance to identify with others. Therefore, bridging the gap between themselves and those characters portrayed. It’s important to have first-hand accounts in this way to make the exhibits more immediate and hopefully relevant to visitors.

So how do museums build this relevance and these relationships and how do they best relay these stories to an audience? Museums could employ live actors/actresses to act out certain events from an event in a particular era, or something as simple as a daily routine for the culture such as hunting or cooking, to achieve this. There are also festivals that can be held (i.e. Renaissance Faire; Manheim, Pennsylvania); obviously a museum has to be able to do this with their own flare, keeping with their mission statement or what it is they are trying to accomplish for a specific learning activity.

5.2 Building a Culture of Interaction

Through these endeavors, what’s developed then is a culture of interaction, imploring the audience to become involved – this involvement and interaction should have a lasting impact on visitors, something akin to meeting a celebrity or hero. In such a way Living History provides an amazing learning opportunity.

Interactivity in museums may be a relatively new practice; but the practice of storytelling as a pedagogy tool is certainly not new. “Living History has been done in parks, classrooms and museums around the world, as it is flexible enough of a format”. (Rivera, Jose. Personal Interview 9 Feb. 2012) To many groups of people around the world oral history and storytelling are extremely important, not just from a historical aspect, but stories are used to teach children and adults alike social interaction, family ancestry, culture, art and the very essence of who they are as members of a particular community. “The telling of stories is an old practice, so old, in fact that it seems almost as natural as using oral language”. (Coulter, Michael, Poynor, 2007 105) Living Histories can provide an opportunity to create an

authentic interaction between peoples and between the museum and its community, in my opinion.

Besides these positives Living History and stories are, according to a position statement from the National Council of Teachers of English "the best vehicle for passing on factual information. Historical figures and events linger in children's minds when communicated by way of a narrative". (NCTE 1992) While many museums struggle trying to create text for a wide range of readers, from children to teens to adults, from novices to academics people at all levels can interact with and feel comfortable listening to and telling stories. Attaching Living History to other educational missions in museums can increase a visitors comfort level, add to their positive experience at the museum and make the information they obtain more memorable. Isn't this what museums should be striving for?

It has been noted already that stories are most effective because they are more personal to visitors. They allow more than one voice to be used to tell a story and different voices, or narratives provide different points of view, which highlight areas of history overlooked by traditional text. Using Living History to help people contemplate events and historic figures creates a continuous, interactive activity, which educates visitors.

Living History can be factual; however, the storyteller can also omit the facts, or at least part of the facts. The facts, like the text mentioned before are less important in using storytelling as a pedagogy tool, than the clarity, relevance and tone of the information. What is ensues from the interaction and dialogue between the storyteller and visitor; is that when the visitor goes home they retain more information than they would have from reading museum text and can then pass on what they have learned. It should be warned here; however, that the "closer you get to the contemporary the more the question of authenticity and the truth has to be". (Haggerty, Ben. Personal Interview, 26 Oct 2011) It has to be believable.

5.3 The Effectiveness of Living History

Obviously museum professionals can learn a lot from other disciplines, about more evocative and effective ways to present and transmit stories. Whether that makes the information relayed any more authentic or believable is up to the individual to decide – it's still a reconstruction that reflects the interpretation and perspective of the creator. But it may make it more meaningful for listeners.

The effectiveness of Living History, especially in its role as a pedagogy tool is in its describing events, characters or objects to visitors in a different and sensual perspective. Description encourages attentiveness and attentiveness increases learning. Why is paying attention important? In a psychological study centered on attentiveness, learning and memory it was determined that “attention, learning, and memory is highly integrated, dynamically interactive processes”. (Sarter, Lustig 2009 4) As facilities of education a museums desire to hold their audience’s attention longer and enliven the learning experience - Living History supplies the necessary interactive and effective format to accomplish these objectives.

By using Living History the museum is encouraging visitors to join in the exhibition and tell their own stories about what they are seeing. The museum can invite visitors behind the glass, or rope to obtain a different perspective of what they are learning about, or by using a forum of Living History bring the item or topic of discussion out to the visitor. The visitor stops being simply an observer when this happens and becomes an active participant. By being both, the observer and the participant the visitor can more easily find a reflection of themselves in the story or event the museum is putting forth. Now the visitor becomes intermingled in the story and an extension of the museum outside of its normal borders. The visitor takes the story home with them and more effectively passes it on in some form or another, or retains it. The emotion created in storytelling is what’s vital - to encourage feeling and empathy in a visitor and create a connection, otherwise unlikely with text.

While effective there are several questions to consider before putting this method into practice. If using a character witness should the person be a professional actor, a scholar, staff person or volunteer? If so does this affect the believability of the information or the lesson? Many of the people I’ve spoken to during this process have frowned at the idea of using actors, or third person roles and admittedly everyone that I’ve talked to recommends using real life people, because; “there is simply a better connectedness that comes from personal experience and knowledge”. (Haggerty, Ben. Personal Interview, 26 Oct 2011)

It may not matter as long as the performer can relay authenticity and accurately portray the event or period. This authenticity can be attained by proper training and practice. If a museum doesn’t have access to a living witness then when choosing a performer they must ask how well does the performer know the material, the time period, the historical character, how accurate is the period attire and finally how convincing is that person in that role or character. Answering these questions will allow the museum to create an effective display.

5.4 The California Council of the Humanities: Chautauqua program

This last point is very important because of the interaction involved in this method of teaching. I'll use the Chautauqua program, mentioned previously on pp.30, as an example of how Living History can be presented in an effective way, to foster interaction, learning and build positive relationships.

In this format, when using a historical character, according to Jose Rivera:

The performer comes out and does a monologue as the historical person, in complete historical attire. The second part of the program is a question and answer session while the performer is still in character, although he was obviously a modern person, putting modern references into the stories, the fact that he wears traditionally-based shoes and other clothing helps the viewer to find his or her way into the story. The performer can only answer questions that the historical character would know. The third and last portion is a question and answer session, this time as the contemporary scholar. Now they can answer questions the historical person would not know. (Rivera, Jose. Personal Interview 1 Mar. 2012)

What's important to point out here, as it pertains to the education of the museum visitor; is that in this manner a first and third person role is crafted, allowing a broad, wide reaching educational demonstration.

This kind of format, compared especially to the traditional methods of relaying information (text) has the potential to really educate and entertain the museum visitor. "Since the audience gets to talk to a historical character and learn about the time period and events of the historical person of interests they are far more attentive and engaged with the lesson". (Rivera, Jose. Personal Interview 1 Mar. 2012)

Museums can even take this format a step further, by combining this approach with specific period projects too; from crafts, storytelling (from the audience's own experience), poetry and even dance. There are many ways to engage the audience through Living History or other illustrative methods.

Jose Rivera once did a Living History show on Angel Island in the San Francisco Bay. He was joined by other Living History characters and had an old Mexican picnic circa 1850's. There were Russian fur traders, French travelers, Spanish Missionaries, U.S. Yankees and Native Americans. This exhibition also included music and dance performances and even food, common for the period; for the audience.

In this particular case Jose says:

All the performers were scholars in the field, and had done a lot of research before hand on the character they wanted to portray. The stories and living history characters were modified according to the audience and the interaction was most certainly a rich and full experience for all involved. (Rivera, Jose. Personal Interview 1 Mar. 2012)

The flexibility of storytelling here, led to a more memorable, lasting experience and learning outcome. Typically; as it pertains to living history characters:

In an oral performance, the speaker or character is not only available for study. He or she is present and interacting with the audience so that the interpretation of the performance is necessarily a joint product of the speaker and listeners. Neither author nor audience can claim sole authorship of the meaning. (Denning 2009 5)

You can easily see, by visiting a few museums that this approach is very popular throughout the world and is used in presentations and displays in museums, cultural centers, schools, states and national parks around the globe. Living History is a valuable format and is worth consideration when thinking of using storytelling in museums to relate museum objects to an audience. Speak with any professional like Jose Rivera, or child who has interacted with a famous historical character and they will most likely confess that their experience with Living History was a great success.

Chapter 6

The Museum Space and Environment

The reasons for visiting a museum are strongly linked to a sense of space –
Amy Levine

6.1 The Consideration of Space

One of the biggest concerns museum professionals are faced with, when considering the use of storytelling in museums is the problem of space. One of the most influential and successful storytellers in Britain, Ben Haggerty, suggests that “participation in a successful storytelling event involves a different sensory experience from reading or listening to the radio or even a live recitation in adequate space to elicit an unmediated response”. (Haggerty, Ben. Personal Interview 26 Oct. 2011) Each telling of a story is uniquely re-created for each fresh audience, meaning that the audience becomes aware that their communal and individual listening has a direct effect on the way the story and its protagonists develop and take shape. In “Telling Tales” Emily Johnsson reinforces Ben’s thinking by saying that this is why “so much consideration needs to be put into creating the optimum spatial conditions for good storytelling– the possibility of silence and focus”. (Johnsson 2006 3)

It’s evident from what we’ve seen so far; that the concept of intangible heritage and storytelling in museums is taking hold, precisely because it provides such an environment. It’s about re-creating that environment, that intimacy that Ben Haggerty is speaking of, in the provided space.

6.2 Creating the Right Environment

Creating the right environment is the key to creating the proper experience for the visitor and reaching intended learning outcomes.

It’s worthy of remark here:

That research in the US and UK shows that it is not the quality of the collection which is the main factor for potential visitors when deciding to visit a museum or gallery, it is much more the environment as a

whole and the interaction with the collection that proves to be the key factor. It is very much about offering opportunities for engagement. (Waltl 2006 2)

With this focus in mind the priority is still that the space needs to be conducive to learning. It needs to be an acoustically friendly empty space. Either a black box or a white cube — the black box is the theatre convention (and I think my preferred choice) the white cube is more the gallery convention. But sound quality and neutrality of visual focus are the essential considerations. The walls would probably need to be partly covered in fabric (hangings, drapes - there are many tried and tested options) so that any reverberation were dampened - the aim should be uninterrupted silence.

A story is more effective in an environment of focus and relative quiet, if not absolute silence - ask my children. Anything that intrudes takes you out of your imagination and back to where you are. Creating this environment in a museum is one of the problems behind using storytelling in museums – there are crowds of people pushing by, there are announcements going on – these can interrupt the most sensitive part of the story or Living History recreation. When this happens the illusion that has been so delicately built and maintained by the storyteller is lost. A young storyteller, named Jen, who pops in and out of the MythStories Museum; which we'll look at in Chapter 8, feels that “the lack of focus in such a room is disturbing, she says “that you don't know where to put your attention”.

Watching a storyteller work in an open space allows greater insight into artistic techniques and history than simply looking at an object in a museum, or reading the accompanying text. Once they're written down everything changes about them. They lose a lot of their life. So again to create a space that is really a story house museums must create an environment in which they keep these stories going, because there are pools of people who are interested in hearing these stories. For museums to keep the story going this will entail using museum space to separate and replicate the necessary environments and acoustics – as mentioned before; it's important to prevent sound from interfering.

6.3 The Benefits of Ample Space

Museums already generally use this concept; however instead of stories they're using objects. Whether museums are using tangible history, intangible history or both; if they are combined with storytelling, in an ample space; it expands creativity and provides learning outcomes that are far greater than merely viewing a finished piece mounted on the wall.

Enlivening the space with storytelling and filling it with experimentation, change and the unexpected will kindle creativity. Some visitors may stay for hours and some for a few minutes; regardless of their reaction, it makes an impact and challenges visitors' preconceived notions of what a museum is.

“There's an immense advantage to be gained by ample space and appropriate surroundings; nothing detracts so much from the enjoyment ... from a visit to a museum as the overcrowding of the specimens exhibited”. (Flower 1898 33)

It is here, in these “ample spaces”, without confines that public forums are bred. These ample spaces facilitate empathy and open-mindedness about our past, as well as the past of others.

“Museums should be concerned with promoting a sense of place”. (Walsh 1992 155) But how can museums duplicate the atmosphere and intimacy of these stories in their respective museums? One example is at the British Museum.

They don't do it anymore; but:

There used to be sleepovers at the British Museum. In the early days storytellers and the audiences were allowed to just wonder through the Museum alone, at night. That's one of the happiest things that have ever happened to me in my life. The experience in the museum as an individual is different than the experience of the museum in the thrall. (Haggerty, Ben. Personal Interview 26 Oct. 2011)

Unfortunately; museums utilizing the approaches proposed in this paper are faced with the daunting task of creating isolation and social engagement – most likely during operating hours. The task is even greater the smaller the museum.

The big museums and institutions have the budgets and space that allow them to work with storytellers; but the best events are most likely in smaller museums, because there's obviously; “much less conflict of interests about space”. (Haggerty, Ben. Personal Interview 26, Oct. 2011)

6.4 Storytelling in Museums around London

When we're talking about the role of storytelling in museums:

Collaboration between the heritage sector and storytellers can be extremely fruitful and inspiring. The fabulous variation between museums, their exhibits, their interpretative approaches, their resources and

the event programs they run, means that there are endless variations in the ways in which storytellers can work in these environments. After which the audience may be able to explore the venues collections and reinforce the imagined narrative experience. (Crick Crack Club 1999)

In terms of museum space being allocated for work London and the surrounding areas have; particularly, got a very long history of storytellers working in museums. Ben Haggerty stresses that this has been the case for the past 30 years or so, of which he has been collaborating with museums. Every single museum in London has an education outreach team and more or less every single museum works with storytellers.



BenHaggert, Photoby:CrickCrackClub

They work with storytellers at the Imperial War Museum, particularly in connection with the Holocaust exhibits that they have. During my time here last fall I worked alongside cast members from the play “War Horse”, for a Museum workshop. I saw firsthand the benefits of paying attention to the space being used, while using storytelling to produce a more personal and emotional museum experience.

The British Museum also has all sorts of storytelling. As I was meeting with Ben Haggerty, in a café, up the street from The London Museum he was currently in the middle of a 3 day run at the National Gallery and was one of about 10 different storytelling activities going on there simultaneously.

Many of the Museums in and around London, who focus on utilizing space for storytelling “have been concept art, installations; but the thing they’ve all shared; is basically the idea that it’s an empty space and in this empty space some form of narrative is told and performed in some sort of a way and you engage with it through your imagination from the stimulus of words”. (Haggerty, Ben. Personal Interview 26, Oct. 2011)

To reach their intended learning outcomes and fulfill their role as educators, “as has been recognized since at least the early nineteenth century, museums, by their very nature, are educational institutions” (Hein 2011 340) museums will have to provide ample space that allows for interaction and reflection. And “through this process of reflection, allow visitors to make connections between past and present events/objects”. (Coulter, Michael, Poynor 2007

107) But first; if Museums are going to arrive at these goals, they must consider and create a personal space where the object and the story behind it can be told in its entirety.

Chapter 7

The Object and the Story

"When we hear a powerful story, we have the feeling that it is somehow unique, somehow without precedent. We perceive a sense of the "newbornness" of the entire world, as if there has been nothing like this, ever, anywhere. It is the same feeling that we get when we perceive a beautiful object that "fills the mind and ... gives the 'never before in the history of the world' feeling." (Denning 2007 31)

7.1 Different Perspectives

One has to be very clear that there are arguments between the use of the object and the story that could kick off that actually have been well rehearsed. Let's approach this chapter as more like - let's accept these positions and let's try and find what's new and where we can bring the best of what we got to bear on a situation which is really about how can we use the story behind our objects to better present our collections. Let's also admit that each provides a different perspective. Museums are about stories, stories about people's lives and about the things people make and use. Stories are about nature, the universe and all living things. Objects offer the visitor one perspective; but "in comparison to other modes of interpretation, storytelling is unique in that both the tangible and the intangible can be explored simultaneously". (Johnsson, 2006, p.8)

The argument between using tangible and intangible heritage in museums and whether one outweighs the other is one that's already been beaten to death. Whether one outweighs the other in museums can't be, or shouldn't be determined too much, as history is a combination of tangibles and intangibles. "Tangibles are the objects, the documents; but the intangible – the stories that spark imagination - are integral to making visitors connect". (Risberg, Erica Dr. Personal Interview 1 Feb. 2012)

Anchoring narratives in real objects with provenance, which tell stories evoking a period or historical episode, is preferable – in this manner "narratives are validated in the conversations/stories though the visitors acts of sharing, embellishing and explaining their own personal reactions and their perceptions of the significance of the objects" (Leinhardt,

Crowley, Knutson 2002 419) The idea of telling stories without tangible support could also be attractive, particularly where abstract concepts are being articulated i.e. presenting the work of contemporary artists. One approach doesn't need to outweigh the other; each offer a learning perspective and both have merit: context and content would dictate which approach is preferable.

Looking at the object itself, in contrast to the narrative or story in a museum and whether one perspective has a larger impact on pedagogy is different from the traditional perspective. Museums should strive to use storytelling as a means of providing a bit of context to what the object was used for. Normally, when I go to a museum, I see an object with a text card describing what it is, maybe what it was made of, and when it was created. Okay. That's nice. But why should I care?

My guess is, that you and I do care because we love museums, we love stories and objects and the process of discerning what they are used for and by whom; but I don't think many people have the same depth of curiosity. My thought is that if the visitor sees, let's say, a sword, they'd be more interested in it if they were able to hear a story of how it was used, and the context in which it was used so they could relate to it more. Stories and objects are a good combination for this exact reason— a story can give an object a context and purpose and an object provides a concrete perspective. Besides this “an object can be the focus for listening, aiding the imagination to create the world of the story and stories are ‘artifacts’: they are preserved in people’s memories and shared with others through time”. (Emily Johnsson, 2006, p.6)

7.2 The Story as an Immersive Agent

“The object by itself doesn't serve much purpose without the visitor being able to know what it was used for. Storytelling lends itself really well to providing the stories that make the objects more meaningful”. (Risberg, Erica Dr. Personal Interview 4 Feb. 2012) There's only so much one can find about an object. Anchoring narratives in the objects is a helpful, immersing way to go. Incorporating storytelling lends more authenticity to it since it brings a first person perspective to whatever is being described.

England's foremost Storytelling Group the Crick Crack Club enthusiastically supports this idea by saying:

Stories can immerse an object - be it a tiny shard of pottery, a painting, a statue, or an entire building - in our imagination, allowing it to be perceived in a completely new light. In addition, any given object gives rise to many stories - for example there might be a narrative behind the iconography that decorates the object, the object itself might play a part in another story (historical or imagined) and then there's the story of how the object came to be created, and the story of how it came to be in the collection, and so on. (CrickCrackClub 1999)

Immersion is pretty integral to getting people interested. There are a great many advantages to the written word (remember this is a western invention); but the stories provide a more immersive, educational, sensory experience for the visitor and a more dynamic version of history. “Whenever men have looked for something solid on which to found their lives, they have chosen not the facts in which the world abounds in words, but the ‘stories’ of an immemorial imagination” (Campbell 1959 4) and oral histories provide a more engaging experience right now. Sadly, when it comes to the written word our culture, at the moment isn't all that great about spending a lot of time reading and I think storytelling lends itself well to this shift. Let's also suggest though, as an extension of this that making audio recordings of the written word might provide visitors with a more engaging, immersive experience as well.

Another question to ponder here, although it too has been well discussed is if we compare the object itself to the narrative, or story in a museum space can one be judged to have a greater impact than the other? Judging whether the object or the personal story attached to it has a greater impact than another is difficult and could be as simple as the difference between the written word and the spoken word.

To achieve the proposed learning outcome stories tied to objects are the best solution - one isn't necessarily better than the other as they both function better together.

Dr. Erica Risberg reinforced to me the importance of this joint relationship, by saying:

If a child sees an object and all it has is one of those text cards, they'll probably walk away and not give it another thought. But, if that object has a story to it, then they may see the relevance of the object in a much more meaningful way. Conversely, if a child hears a story without an object, they probably won't have a frame of reference to tie the story to. (Risberg, Erica Dr. Personal Interview 9 Feb. 2012)

What this means is that that piece of information – the story; is coloring the way the visitor perceives a particular object. There are many layers of stories in every object and this is

where storytellers like those mentioned and referenced throughout this paper here have been working, in many different ways with the idea of the story and object.

Going back to the Museum of Psychic Artifacts and the Imaginarium and how they differ from traditional, object driven museums is that the museum, or more specifically,

According to Ben:

The storyteller is presenting the narrative and the visitor has no object to trigger their response, except whatever they've experienced in their personal life. That's the huge difference between the tangible and intangible, the object and the story and the written and the spoken word. (Haggerty, Ben. Personal Interview 26 Oct. 2011)

The object is the glue, while the story and the space discussed in the last chapter allow the visitors imagination to roam free. This is the imaginative participation museums should be striving for.

Storytelling is central to our history and like our senses offers us a personal way of interpreting our past. These stories, like objects are passed down over generations and are essential in stimulating imagination. They have been used as a form of communication throughout the history of mankind; they came before the written word and are a way of interpreting objects and history through personal reflection.

7.3 The Social Object

In extension of this storytelling encompasses human relationships and helps create a kind of personal connection with the object being viewed. "Stories seem to help visitors to connect to an exhibition by means of recollections about objects they owned, people they knew, places they had been, or events in which they had participated". (Leinhardt, Crowley, Knutson 2002 195) When visitors make this connection they themselves have a story to tell, which integrates itself with that of the object. One of the most effective ways to engage visitors is through storytelling. Storytelling does not just encourage the visitor to focus on an object; but directs the visitor into new ways of interpretation and makes for a more social encounter with the object.

In creating this social object; oral histories and storytelling allow visitors to see objects in a different and unique way – through the eyes of the person who utilized these objects. Together the object and the story create a connection between the visitor and the object,

allowing them to interact or associate with it on a more personal level, while learning more about it. A museum's responsibility is to tell the story of their objects and the people they are displaying. Storytelling helps bring to life these objects and characters, through personal interpretations.

In order for visitors' to fully understand or relate to a museum's collection and the objects on display; they should be brought to life and made relevant to the daily lives and experiences of those viewing the objects. Doing so, through storytelling, in my opinion more effectively helps museums reach their self-imposed intended learning outcomes. "Meanings do not reside within objects and objects cannot speak for themselves". (Del Carmen 2007 6) Museums need to tell the story about how individual objects came to the museum and just as important; tell the hidden story behind the objects. Storytelling helps bring to life the past of objects and opens our minds to new social ways of interpreting an object and thinking about the past and the present.

7.4 Storytelling, the Object and the Imagination

Storytelling presents a way of interpreting an object that creates wonderment, while building up personal and meaningful connections between a viewer and the object, through the activation of the imagination. In this manner of learning (imaginative) we find a way to experience personally the history we're witness to, reinvent it and apply it to the present day. Learning becomes relevant and what the visitor is seeing becomes personal. The argument against imagination as a legitimate learning tool can be found in the reluctance of some, despite the many advantages of storytelling highlighted throughout this thesis; to take advantage of the imagination as a legitimate learning tool. Egan echoes this belief by saying "imagination is a powerful and neglected tool of learning". (Egan 1986 18) Ask yourself; however, what your life would be like without imagination? What would our society have cultivated without the use of this powerful tool?

Objects and the accompanying text help visitors view history - oral histories and storytelling allows visitors to see objects in a different and unique way – through the eyes of the people who used these things. Together they create a connection between the visitor and the object, otherwise unknown, allowing them to connect more with it and learn more about it. How was it created? Why? This prevents objects on display from being stagnant, or uninspiring.

Museums are already using objects to tell stories; but are these enough? “It’s not just about passing on information; it’s actually about activating an imaginative response and provoking questioning about the narrative”. (Haggerty, Ben. Personal Interview 26 Oct. 2011) By “activating an imaginative response” what it really does is help the visitor understand one thing or another about the object, or culture they are viewing. With storytelling, in cooperation with objects a visitor can now look at the object and resonate with it.

7.5 Creating a Personalized Experience

Ultimately Homo sapiens have been the contemporary modern human being for the last 40,000 years. We’ve only had bright artificial light for the last 132 years, we’ve only had mass literacy for the last century, or so and we’ve only had literacy for the last 3,000 years, give or take. By far the majority of human experience has been, quite naturally listening to stories in the dark. Museums are more capable and more willing today to capture the sensation of the partnership of the object and the story.

According to storyteller Yvonne Healy:

Today’s museums are wonderful for recognizing the historic and artistic value of storytelling as a traditional and living folk-art’. She says ‘storytelling can return the favor by deepening the audience’s awareness of exhibits and objects and by using story to create an emotional and personal relationship with the museum’s content. (Healy, Y. Personal Communication 2012)

By encouraging personal relationships museums encourage different interpretations; stories better utilize different voices. Our views are filled by things we’ve seen on television, photographs we’ve seen, things we’ve read - we have a general picture of things happening around us in the world. Stories function in the general world far better than objects do. “Stories have to function in the general world; because stories are not actually about the specific details of the material world – the point of interest is emotional life”. (Haggerty, Ben. Personal Interview 26 Oct. 2011) Objects represent more of the specific details and the more specific you are the more difficult it is to see the general view, while the vast majority of stories, can touch a visitor, child and adult alike, or the child in the adult and create an emotional resonance not found in solitary objects. The story rings of personal knowledge and experience.

As discussed in Chapter 2 “Why Use Storytelling in Museums” many people learn through the use of their senses, some learn more through touching, or hearing, all of which makes the

experience more personal than merely looking. These non-traditional styles of learning support different visitor learning profiles and help to prolong visitor interaction with the exhibition. Unfortunately, in most cases; museums have taken the opportunity to use our senses out of their exhibitions, even though studies have shown “a concern with sound and smell can significantly enhance our understanding” (Julian 2006 57)

One way museums have been able to better personalize their objects and “enhance our understanding” has been by tying a collection of objects together with a story. Storytelling allows museums to play on all different styles of learning when trying to interact and educate their audience.

In this way the story is not about words – it’s about presenting what happens, the objects on the other hand are more about facts – “storytelling is a powerful tool for taking these facts and making meanings for the objects. The way that objects are presented should allow the visitor to participate in the process of reading objects as cultural artifacts”. (Johnsson 2006 8)

Unless you know the stories behind the object it’s farfetched that you can read them. Look at the picture below –what can you tell from the picture?



Marble Sculpture GR-1825.6-13.1 (Sculpture 1720) Room 69: Greek and Roman life, Personal Collection 2011

7.6 The Utilization of Storytelling

By telling the story of the object the history behind it suddenly means something, it becomes relevant; visitors can personalize it and better read and connect with the object. This has extended over into a museum like the British Museum, where they have a statue of Mithras (above) killing a bull and it's very dramatic. There's corn coming out of the bull, instead of blood, there's a scorpion biting his testicles and a dog ripping at his throat; but when the whole story of Mithras is told you look at this thing entirely differently. Because now you realize that the story of Orion is in there, there are all these things that have cosmic meaning, you understand that they are worshippers and that it's possible that Christianity has derived its whole iconography of the stable and the nativity, the rock birth and even the 12 apostles from Mithras religion.

Using storytelling and telling stories like this; the visitor can suddenly read an object and imagine different scenarios.

Ben Haggerty followed this up during our conversation by saying:

An informed academic, who has studied an object or a story for many years eventually, brings this type of information to the table; however to the casual museum goer it's necessary to bring them up to speed. One way is through the utilization of storytelling. If you want to bring kids up to speed very quickly you tell the story, you contextualize it and they can suddenly read the object. The amount of information you tell in a story could never be written on a wall beside the object. (Haggerty, Ben. Personal Interview 26 Oct. 2011)

Looking back it's easy to say that storytelling provides a link between the content and object featured in the exhibition and the visitors themselves. Currently; the utilization of storytelling and other hands-on styled, interactive exhibitions have been given a sort of rebirth in museums because they "add a depth of knowledge and understanding that cannot be obtained through a singular object". (Johnsson, 2006 9)

Stories are as important today as they've always been and they're important for museums to utilize if they want to create a true and personal connection with the past. Stories, together with museum objects help us understand the time period and the people by whom they were used. Visitors may have a personalized connection to objects and for certain an object depicted in a photograph, or an object described in text might provide the same intellectual

information; however, it doesn't have the same emotional pull as the story. As representational items for an idea, concept or intended learning outcome; when the object is portrayed in context, with the help of the story; together they help museums more effectively build pictures of the past.

Chapter 8

Case Study: The MythStories Museum



Wall photo by: MythStories,

“The MythStories museum at Wem in Shropshire serves a purpose that so far as I am aware no other institution can even claim to contain. The purpose of its service is to illuminate everyday life and enlighten through the oldest means of educational communications...” (Del Reid, coordinator, National Storytelling Week)

8.1 The Beginning

In 1998 The MythStories Museum was conceptualized and established by Dez Quarrell as a website for his pictures and the stories behind them. Together with Ali Quarrell, who delivers the Museums educational programs this led to the development of a new beginning. They “called it MythStories and it was soon to be one of the founding sites on the governmental educational portal, National Grid for Learning”. (Quarrell, Dez. Personal Interview 28 Dec. 2011) They opened the inaugural Mythstories museum in 1999 and it has been utilizing stories with objects and breaking new ground in interpreting non-tangible heritage ever since.

8.2 MythStories and the Traditional Museum

Here’s an in house quote, to start things off, that gets to the heart of things:

What's the difference between the Mythstories Museum and any other museum? That's a question that's difficult to give a short uncomplicated answer to. The stock answer is our main collection is intangibles; stories you just can't touch. But somehow that just isn't quite the full story. As you walk

freely through the Museum you quickly realize that the magic of MythStories is their making of stories through tangible objects. (Quarrell 2011 1)

At the MythStories Museum you see both the object and the story; the function of the object being passed down to make an impact as the voice of history. “When the museum started it was a very wordy collation; with simple stories alongside the banister of the staircase leading to its first floor location”, (Quarrell, Dez. Personal Interview, 28 Dec. 2011) much like traditional museums with their use of text. Since then they’ve come a long way escaping from the documentation of the written word and using an interactive approach appealing to all the senses and a great deal of interaction and human to human oral storytelling to provide new perspectives to their collection.

Each visitor that walks through their doors gets at least one live story, often a lot more, many respond with telling their own story. This is exactly what the MythStories museum provides its diverse audience – a chance to listen and learn. Following their experience here a workshop participant in 2011 was quoted as saying “we had great fun telling stories and making stories and making props to use with stories. We had lots of laughs and learned much, I am inspired” In essence a visit to the Mythstories Museum is more of a human encounter that has the power to move people and teach in its broadest sense.

So to answer the question posed above about the difference between The MythStories Museum and others? Simply put; it’s not exactly a museum, at least not in the traditional sense of the meaning of “Museum”, where “objects are held in trust for the public”. (AAM 2000)

8.3 A Collaborative “Telling Space”

The Museum is more of an intimate space where stories are told and collaborative, community created exhibits are put on display. One of their recent exhibitions titled “The Roman Gypsy Storytelling Wagon” is a perfect example of this. “The wagon itself was created in the museum by six local travelling teenagers. It was an opportunity for them to tell the story of their own heritage and more importantly tell it in their own words”. (Quarrell 2012 2)

To help better connect the past to the present this project was followed up by some of the younger family members and friends, from the local community; who “first learned craft woodworking and painting skills, then made boxes to fit under the wagon. They collected

stories of their forebears who had travelled in wagons and then collected artifacts of their lives to put in the boxes”. (Quarrell 2012 4)

As many museums can attest to; this type of approach and mentality didn't develop overnight. An intangible museum, a space for storytelling is just what they've "been busy creating over the past 14 years and it has been a fact that has confounded many from the traditional museums world who insist on the primacy of objects". (Quarrell, Dez. Personal Interview 28 Dec. 2011) A museum, people may think, can only be a collection of objects and not a space dedicated to stories. This bias has affected the MythStories Museum negatively – "up to now the Museum has been denied the opportunity to go through the accreditation process in England & Wales because the process has been devised *solely for the care of objects*" "emphasis mine". (Quarrell, Dez. Personal Interview 11 Jan. 2012)

However; their dedication to creating a "Telling Space" and a memorable museum experience and their optimism is inspiring. Despite it all they've managed to be "awarded funds for a number of Museums Libraries and Archives council grants because they have been shadowing accreditation standards". (Quarrell, Dez. Personal Interview 11 Jan. 2012)

8.4 A Personalized Experience

Because of this the Museum has wrestled over the years with "contextualization; whether to use the written word for explanations, to rely on people's senses to guide them to their interpretation or to intercede with human contact". (Quarrell, Dez. Personal Interview 11 Jan. 2012) As we've seen in our discussion on Living History talking one to one is no doubt the most effective at creating a personalized experience; you can seamlessly move from an explanation of an object and what the audience is seeing into a story.

In an open dialogue such as this:

Visitors become aware that this world and the story are one and the same or at the very least layered. The human presence here allows the dimension of passing time into a display in this kind of intangible collection, the story set in past time or imaginary time twists the linear nature of passing time and allows people to be in the story, to share experiences with the characters. (Quarrell, Dez. Personal Interview 11 Jan. 2012)

Once again what we see here is a dialogue or story building a personal relationship. The story becomes relevant through dialogue, creating a common thread between the object or story and

the visitor and creating a greater sense of empathy with the character, object or time period presented and a greater immersion in the experience; because of the story.

That seamless transition is maybe the most important lesson museums are learning. We've seen throughout this thesis how storytelling can positively inform many of the design ideas and displays we'll create as professionals. Stories are a safe way to explore all sorts of complicated concepts we wouldn't want to lay out in real life. The MythStories Museum provides the right environment to relay them.

Everyone likes stories; but this does not mean that the Museum is without difficulty. According to Dez the most difficult challenge for the MythStories Museum, "is just getting people over the threshold and letting them experience the museum - they somehow need to be enticed into the museum". (Quarrell, Dez. Personal Interview 11 Jan. 2012) Museums can look to the MythStories Museum as an example and remember to never lose sight of the goal of passing on or communicating the story they are telling. "Museums should shape the presentation of their objects into a story to the ears that are listening to it rather than attempt to fall into a recitation of facts". (Quarrell, Dez. Personal Interview 11 Jan. 2012)

Everyone has different personal experiences and "bearing in mind that a story told by a storyteller creates different pictures in every head to which it is told, due not in short measure to how do you keep the canvas as clean as possible"? (Quarrell, Dez. Personal Interview 11 Jan. 2012)

8.5 The Museum Space

In stark contrast to the arguments put forth earlier concerning space and the importance of relative quiet; surprisingly, they "have found that the familiar everyday background noises such as traffic passing by, dogs barking, birds singing etc, actually aid the transition to the story space, blurring the everyday with the fantastical". (Quarrell, Dez. Personal Interview 11 Jan. 2012) So does a neutral blank space heighten the audience's awareness, or is it an alien space? Rather than a blank space the MythStories Museum uses objects to help establish a common ground between the lesson and the visitor, helping them to embark on the journey.

Perhaps, a confined cozy space, where the object and the story are presented together, like the recreated gypsy wagon; might be the answer to getting visitors more readily to slip into the other, imaginative worlds created by museums. One negative, however, behind this idea was

brought to my attention by Jen, a storyteller at the MythStories Museum, who mentioned to me in passing the problem of people “who find it difficult to make eye contact, especially with a storyteller, in an environment like this”.

As a matter of choice the MythStories Museum does not use ‘Living History’ in their work or in the educational presentations of their objects. The stance here is that “words are strong enough on their own to convey the meaning, without the contextualization of costume”. (Quarrell, Dez. Personal Interview 11 Jan. 2012)

Still “Living History’ can be very good for conveying practical things – how implements were used, what an Iron Age house looked like, etc”. (Quarrell, Dez. Personal Interview 20 Feb. 2012) To answer the question again, as to why museums should use storytelling – from an educational point storytelling allows museums to transmit educational information and what it is that they need to convey, “how people thought and felt about their environment, their objects and the situations they found themselves in”. (Quarrell, Dez. Personal Interview 20 Feb. 2012)

So! Can or should intangibles be confined in a building like this? The answer may be yes and no. Having a built environment for their care is very important, “yet allowing them to seep out into the world around is very important too”. (Quarrell, Dez. Personal Interview 11 Jan. 2012)

8.6 The Environment, Storytelling and Pedagogy

As educators the people at the MythStories Museum do a lot of outreach work. Dez explains that it’s crucial to “familiarize people with what goes on in the museum before they’ll gain the courage and urge to come and visit”. (Quarrell, Dez. Personal Interview 11 Jan. 2012) To accomplish this; the Museum often takes their visitors out for walks in the country, picking up visual signals from the environment to suggest stories for the exhibitions displayed. “Natural environments are a great backdrop for learning, even an urban story walk telling tales or the creatures you can encounter on door knobs is much more interesting than a class based or exhibit base storytelling session”. (Quarrell, Dez. Personal Interview 11 Jan. 2012) And it gets pupils away from learned habits of behavior allowing them to see things differently. One of the Museums outreach locations, structured for school visits and meant to take advantage of a natural environment was a cave.

Dez elaborated on this experience, saying:

This location is approached by a wooded ridge walk, about a kilometer away from the Museum itself; as an individual or group you come to a break in the trees where temporary steps had been cut into the sandstone escarpment. Down an audience goes, before disappearing into the cave and making their way to the middle chamber, made aglow with tiny candles. Once their eyes have adjusted, the stories begin with a hundred pairs of eyes gazing intently at the storyteller. This description contradicts the argument Jen put forth said about the difficulties of eye contact. When the stories are over, the audience makes their way back to their cars, most marvel afterwards at the fact that they had no idea at all how long they had been in the cave. (Quarrell, Dez. Personal Interview 11 Jan. 2012)

What the Museum does here, in this example, is play with the ‘linear nature of time’, spoken of earlier in this Chapter.

8.7 Methodology

When we look at this type of approach to pedagogy, implemented at the MythStories Museum a storytelling act is really the most difficult, compared to the relatively safe message objects project to an audience. “Can anyone tell a shamanic story without being a Shaman and being in trance state? Should Native American stories only be told by Native Americans at the appropriate time of year?” (Quarrell, Dez. Personal Interview 20 Feb. 2012) During a conversation storyteller Ben Haggerty commented that the biggest challenge facing museums like the MythStories Museum is that “a storyteller brings his/her own baggage and those individual life experiences reshape the story and how people view the object; however hard he/she tries not to let it do so”.

Despite this challenge the MythStories Museum and its staff are careful not to change the course of the stories they pair with chosen objects in their exhibitions. They are primarily interested in collecting stories and keeping them alive. “We don’t collect stories like an archivist or a curator in the normal sense. We’re more like zoo keepers who live alongside and talk to their animals”. (Quarrell, Dez. Personal Interview 20 Feb. 2012) What we see in their approach here is that stories are living things, even though they are intangible and to fulfill their purpose as educational tools stories have to be told. The real world is always changing and the “flexibility of storytelling means that every time stories are told they will change in respect to their new environment”. (Quarrell, Dez. Personal Interview 20 Feb. 2012)

Oral tradition and storytelling is a writhing, changing, evolving thing. It would be cruel to lock it up in a display case. “The methodology of the Museum; is to provide a safe place to explore and contemplate difficult issues and dilemmas through open communication, between the visitor and the object and the story” (Quarrell, Dez. Personal Interview 11 Jan. 2012) This approach is the key to recognizing the potential of storytelling in a museum space.

Other museums attempting to utilize stories or intangible histories, like the MythStories Museum needn’t conform to any one of the rules implied here within. But “it needs to be built with a sincere respect for the stories or exhibits and their nature, as displayed here. Also an understanding is needed, that while the tangible and intangible worlds run parallel, they can still be utilized together for the best effect and enjoyment”. (Quarrel, Dez. Personal Interview 20 Feb. 2012)

At the MythStories Museum they’ve learned how to use the object and the story together, more effectively. They do this in a way, mentioned earlier in the chapter “Storytelling as a Pedagogy Tool”, where these are planned within a supporting program, or public events, while taking place in a separate museum space from the exhibition retaining reference to relevant objects. Whatever the way museums may choose to present storytelling and their objects; it’s a part of the museum staff’s responsibility to help contribute to the conversation, not edit it.

The MythStories Museum chooses a more one to one approach to create a personal connection between the visitor and the object; however there are difficulties to this approach, most notably “storytelling reduces, and sometimes pulls away the glass curtain between audience and performer”. (Quarrel, Dez. Personal Interview 20 Feb. 2012)

8.8 The Challenges of Storytelling

Additionally storyteller’s time costs money, “they tire quickly in a sort of situation where they are constantly responding to changing situations and a one to one style is also very intense and tiring for the audience”. (Quarrell, Dez. Personal Interview 20 Feb. 2012) So the challenge is creating a mixed, collaborative approach, using objects and stories. This is practical and essential to creating an effective learning, entertaining environment.

Collaboratively speaking; the MythStories Museum does, on occasion also work in existing museums; however, you might say they go about things a bit more unorthodox than do most

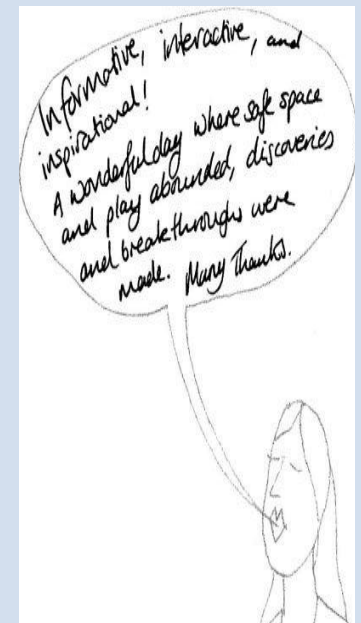
curators. “The objects aren’t the important things for us, more so the stories they suggest and how we can weave those stories into a narrative that leads around the museum”. (Quarrell, Dez. Personal Interview 20 Feb. 2012) As far as they’re concerned the objects are objects that set a context or backdrop - things that are a trigger for a story and the imagination.

The MythStories Museum utilizes space and exhibitions in an attempt to try and use different senses in their displays to communicate the stories, never all the senses but different mixes as you progress around the display areas. The goal of the Museum is that “an audience never comes away from a performance questioning reality; rather they go to those spaces expecting to be confronted with unreality”. (Quarrell, Dez. Personal Interview 20 Feb. 2012) This may be unsettling to some; but the staff here mix reality and unreality and have them running hand in hand throughout the Museum. And it works!

This Museum proves you can create a personalized experience within a museum setting, that if you have like minded people that it’s possible to use storytelling in museums as a pedagogy tool. And that it’s possible, despite the challenges for museums to use the object and the story together to reach visitors on a more intimate, personal level and accomplish their intended learning outcomes through these practices.

Does storytelling in museums work? Yes, without doubt it works, according to a workshop participant in 2011 – ‘The MythStories Museum is ‘Fantastic, thought-provoking and a must for all’.

*Taken at the MythStories Museum
October 11, 2010 by Dez Quarrell*



Conclusion

If you don't know the trees you may be lost in the forest, but if you don't know the stories you may be lost in life. -Siberian Elder

In conclusion it could be debated that the key to educating visitors is by providing them with a personal and memorable experience. As an explanation of this debate in attempting to create an Intangible Museum, where storytelling is used as the predominant way of relaying the history of objects to visitors, we've looked at the MythStories Museum specifically and several general examples of how this can be done and done successfully.

The flexibility of storytelling itself, one of its strong suits as noted within this paper provides a way of communicating with today's visitors, in an effective and more personal way than do concrete, stationary objects. History, like today's society is constantly changing and the use of storytelling gives museums the best chance to change with it and stay relevant. Using storytelling creates interest.

It's necessary for us to go back to the beginning of this story and recall that it's important to remember that we're all telling stories; however, we're not always conscious of them. In the future if museums want to do a better job of highlighting storytelling as a pedagogy tool; they will have to become conscious of them. Only then can more traditional museums understand how language works, how imagination works, how the structure of the story works, how the drama of the body works, how the use of the voice works and how the use of the space and storytelling works.

We've seen here just a small sample of the many museums employing storytelling in their halls and I have spoken with only a few of the many storytellers making rounds today. Things are going to disappear and if museums are going to continue to be places of learning, "an imposing school". (Vartanian 2009, 2) all they can do is try to record and create a context for these things, a story to remember the object, or person. Stories provide the context to the objects and "stories frame the event so the audience can appreciate what has happened, more importantly it becomes interesting and engaging". (Haggerty, Ben. Personal Interview, 26

Oct. 2011) I hinted earlier, to the fact that museums are ideal places for engagement, contemplation and interaction - storytelling ‘involves us all’.

It’s imperative if museums want to continue to connect with all of today’s visitors and remain relevant they must continue to raise awareness and create new projects to attract new audiences. This is where storytelling comes in to play; museums are beginning to recognize “its power to engage diverse audiences” (Docherty, William. Personal Interview Jan 24, 2012) and attract new and diverse audiences. Right now, in The St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art there is a temporary exhibition, going on until 30th September, 2012 called Curious. Through objects chosen by individuals, from their collection, stories of personal association and or experience of each object displayed is articulated as the main focus of interpretation. There have also been oral storytelling events delivered as part of the ongoing program of audience engagement. I believe that museums should continue on this trek, if they are to fulfill their roles as educators.

To help museums replicate this example and improve on it there are a lot of very exciting people, some of whom I’ve been fortunate enough to speak with and get to know throughout England, the United States and elsewhere, who are thinking about these things and who are mentioned throughout this paper. One of the biggest obstacles facing museums in their considerations of employing storytelling; however; are politics of the written word and the debate between tangible and intangible heritage. To this I’ve suggested in a complimentary way, in the chapter “The object and the story” that while the written word has advantages; storytelling provides an educational, sensory experience for the visitor and a more dynamic version than the written word. Fortunately, today all these things converge and it’s bringing people from all walks of life and professions together in discussion of what I’ve talked about here.

The problem with this is that most of those people are all trying to make a living through their thinking. They’re academics, or professionals and they’re writing lots of books, or sitting in too many board meetings to focus solely on changing perceptions and operations.

An example of this was shared with me during one of my conversations with storyteller, Ben Haggerty whose “girlfriend’s father used to be in charge of the museums in Scotland. He’s still of the old fashion position that the function of the museum is to safeguard objects for the future generations - he really doesn’t appreciate the function of the museum as a living place

for culture”. (Haggerty, Ben. Personal Interview, 26 Oct. 2011) Here we see an all too common; but fading problem - a lack of appreciation of the museum as a place of education. Opposite this way of thinking, I’ve looked at examples of museums like the Asian Art Museum and the Alaska Native Heritage Center who share a different opinion about what a museum should and can do, which is to play a prominent role in the educational experience of museum visitors.

Currently there’s a tug of war going on between the old and new museology and ways of thinking. What’s best to realize and what you need to see immediately is that there’s no point in wasting time pounding on that wall. Soon the tipping point will have been reached and a more flexible, inventive curatorial way of functioning will be the norm – ‘a new museology’ to borrow the phrase. Perhaps as I’ve suggested here; this style will be centered on the story behind the object and not vice versa.

We’ve examined throughout this paper why more museums are utilizing storytelling and the conclusion is that storytelling provides museums a way of presenting objects in a more personal, interesting and educational way.

Once you get the story of an object it comes to life and increases conversation between visitors and between visitors and museum staff. From an educational standpoint this is important because the more personal communication museums have with visitors the greater the learning curve for their audiences!

Hamutal Guri adds:

As we tell our own story, it resonates with others and becomes - to a greater or lesser degree - theirs as well, and vice versa: when we listen to someone else's story, it becomes a little ours. And perhaps it is that shared human root, where things converge and is what helps us build positive things together. (Guri, Hamutal. Personal Interview 6 Feb. 2012)

Here the connection that storytelling creates between the object and the visitor; makes “learning effortless and enjoyable”. (McElroy 2006)

We’ve looked at how museums can use storytelling as an effective and helpful form of communication; i.e. Living History; but it needs to be noted that this is only one form of communication that can be used in exhibitions, as a form of storytelling to make them come to life.

Moving forward; museums would be wise to also utilize things like dance, or song, along with storytelling to bring attention to the objects and issues in their exhibitions. We've seen how easy access to this can be, these stories, passed down from generation to generation as noted in "What is Storytelling" can be taken from a wide range of sources. They may be taken from real life experiences and are therefore; a more effective way of communicating and connecting with the audience in a way that visitor's might relate to more intimately. Personal experiences add different voices and a different form of communication to museums, thus allowing the visitor to get wrapped up in what they are seeing. Museums are already careful not to present just a single story – storytelling, already intertwined with cultures across the globe can be an important pedagogy tool, used to serve this purpose and fulfill the museums obligations as places of learning. What that purpose is obviously varies from museum to museum.

In general terms that purpose would have to be to have visitors make a personal connection with the person, situation, or time period associated with the objects being exhibited. Stories make it more feasible to reach this outcome. "Only by telling about them, interacting with them and assigning meanings to them can we understand their significance. A story can give an object a context and purpose". (Bilbe 2010-11 2) Storytelling helps the visitor to view the object not just as a thing, but as something that belonged to and was used by a real person on a daily basis, and what story that object might help tell, or what it might reveal about the person it belonged to. In this way it fulfills that obligation.

From the outset I said "a successful museum will solicit the visitor's participation and engulf them in the experience". But to do this, we've learned by now means to engulf the visitor in the story itself. But beware; it's possible for museums to lead the audience too strongly or erroneously, as we saw these concerns in our discussion on "Living History", about the believability of the information being presented and the visitor's ability to experience them accurately.

Ben Haggerty shed light on this issue, saying:

When a Shaman tells his stories to his normal audience they would have an understanding of the environment that he introduces them to, and he would have a good idea of the reactions the environment would provoke. Give him an unfamiliar audience from a foreign culture and the whole experience would be a completely different one. (Haggerty, Ben. Personal Interview, 26 Oct. 2011)

If we go back to the MythStories Museum and look at their use of an environment, such as a cave we see a group cognizant of this very problem. I don't know if you can avoid it? But their answer is, as I see it, to treat stories like living things and not impress on them - the story is offered as is.

But how can museums package storytelling in a more dramatic, educational way in a museum space? As we've seen in our discussion on space there are many obstacles to overcome, in creating the right environment, conducive to learning. The techniques they're developing at the Story Fountain; is that storytelling needs to be imaginatively woven into a seamless experience which includes other interactive elements supporting its aims. Unfortunately; museums must consider the fact that "events marketed solely as storytelling are; typically, not well attended: creative and imaginative marketing approaches which ensure an audience need to be formulated". (Docherty, William. Personal Interview 24 Jan. 2012)

A museum is filled with stories and storytellers, museums appreciate diversity and must find where the commonality is and where the common human experience is within these diverse groups of visitors. How can museums connect with visitors, while offering them a new perspective? Everybody has loved, everybody has felt the loss of love, everybody has grieved, and everybody has lost their temper and done something they regret. At that level everybody can meet. Everybody knows these truths and these are the key things that are right at the heart of all stories, which is there's something wrong with human nature; but there is also something great about human nature – that we try to do better. We fall off the horse; but want to get back up. Every human being who is vaguely aware experiences this, the problem is we don't have the stories to guide us, or teach us any longer, since storytelling has fallen from our practice.

It's also extremely important for today's museums to have diverse collections and programs to make an effort to reach diverse audiences and make these connections. I've highlighted this as one of the reasons why storytelling is so important. Museums are stocked full of objects and there are some fantastic stories to tell about them, which are far bigger than the experience an average display provides. Discussing together the triumphs and tribulations of the individuals and circumstances behind the objects and discussing topics that visitors can relate to and identify with offer a better chance of reaching those communities and building personal relationships.

I believe that after reading this that you must now acknowledge that as a civilization we have always been about telling stories – they have always been a common thread; it is the recognition and intentionality - that is new. Museums may now recognize the next phase in this new form of engaging, and interactivity; storytelling. Listening, not just telling is the secret of engaging and teaching. Museums need to develop skills, tools and above all the mindset of drawing out the stories behind the objects they display on their shelves. And when we do; we should not be surprised when we find that their story is ours.

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