

Talking to Oneself: Diaries of Museum Visits

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TALKING TO ONESELF: DIARIES OF MUSEUM VISITS

Museums are fundamentally social and cultural institutions. They are cultural in that museums are where our society gathers and preserves valued and visible records of social, scientific, and artistic accomplishments. They are social in that the collector, curator, designer, and educator are in tacit and sometimes explicit dialogue with the visitors. They are also social in that they are places where groups go together to visit exhibitions. The Museum Learning Collaborative (MLC) is a research project that is designed to study the processes and outcomes of learning in museums (Leinhardt, 1996; Leinhardt & Crowley, 1998; Schauble, Leinhardt, & Martin, 1998). The studies that are being conducted under the auspices of the MLC use diverse methodological approaches (from naturalistic unobtrusive observations to controlled experiments), focus on museum learning, and tend to emphasize the social conversational nature of learning in museums. The study we are reporting here serves as a counter point to the studies of conversational groups in that it focuses on the private and interior conversations of the individual as he or she experiences and records the museum encounter. The record is written instead of spoken and is distinctly authored, edited, and selected.

Research on and in museums has a long tradition. However, the research has been in the service of multiple, sometimes conflicting goals (formative evaluation, summative evaluation, marketing, demographic tracking), and has, with a few notable exceptions lacked theoretical coherence. The MLC addressed the issue of theoretical coherence and focus by drawing on sociocultural and sociocognitive theory (Cobb & Bowers, 1999; Greeno, Collins & Resnick, 1996; Wertsch, 1991).

To move towards a coherent system of studying museum learning we need to define learning in a way that is consistent with the values and intentions of museums and with theory. For our operational definition of learning in a museum we use Conversational Elaboration. Conversational Elaboration is a naturally occurring and meaningful group process and product of the museum experience. By conversation we mean talk, occurring during and after a museum visit, that focuses on the way meaning, experiences, and interpretation develop. By elaboration we mean an extension of details, exemplification, emotive connection, and specificity. Conversation, as White (1995) indicates, is a reflection of the "intertwining of the social with the cultural processes." Sociocultural theorists emphasize that this intertwining is a primary activity of knowledge co-construction and appropriation (Rogoff, 1990; Wertsch, 1997). At first glance it might appear that the idea of an inner conversation is an artificial extension of the concept of a socially produced audible (or visible) act of communication between two or more people. But as recent studies of electronic conversations (Schofield, in press; Alevin & Ashley, 1997) and older theories of dialogue with the self (G.H. Mead, 1934) have shown, the critical features of conversation, namely an awareness of social context, self monitoring and reflection, a strong sense of other, are often preserved in these non face-to-face settings.

By adding the diary study to our interconnected web of studies we intend to illuminate some of the ways in which more completely developed elaborations of meaning unfold. In

studies in which we follow participants as they experience the exhibitions and interview them afterwards we have the advantage of the intensity and immediacy of the experience. In this study we have the advantage of reflection and selection of experiences; what is reported as significant in the diaries are presumably the more memorable aspects of the visit. Memory studies add to the contextual picture of museum learning (McManus, 1993; Stevenson, 1991). The resulting diaries portray socially constructed semantic and episodic memories (McManus, 1993; Neisser, 1982; Tulving, 1983). In discussing learning in museums many of us have referred to the "conversations on the way home." We know what we mean by this (or think we do) but we are frustrated by not being able to capture the language and thoughts by which the unique and special experience is folded into, and becomes a part of, the visitor's larger sense of self – the manner in which the details become appropriated by the visitor and the results of that appropriation (Wertsch, 1997). In this study we have laid out before us the results of imposing a sense of meaning on an experience. The simultaneous crackling of events and experiences are drawn out into the forced linearity of prose. The odd personal mixture of the trivial and profound have all been re-weighted by the diarist's own hand.

Here we trace the ways identity and personal history play themselves out in interpreting the museum experience. Forty diary entries from eight individuals, each having visited five museum exhibitions, are studied for the ways the diarists approached the institutions, their sense of the environment, and the ways that they built meaning out of engagement.

Visits to museums have been described at a variety of levels of detail from broad brush strokes of the experience (Silverman, 1990) to more fine-grained examinations (Falk & Dierking, 1992). In Silverman's (1990, 1995) discussions of meaning making in the museum she emphasizes the contributions of the individual's identity and experiences to the museum encounter. At a more observational level Pekarik, Doering, and Karns (1999) emphasize the role of specific classes of experiences and patterns of behavior in the museum. To these researchers we owe the recognition of not only specific museum experience but of the more general categories of expectations about the objects to be seen, the kinds of cognitive potentials, the introspective experiences that the museum afford and the social opportunities that museums in general support. In work not directly related to museums Wertsch (1997) has discussed the ways that historical narratives are appropriated and mediated by groups in the former Soviet Union. In a similar sense our diarists molded and formed their museum experiences by melding knowledge and values with curatorial presentation in a private conversation.

At times these recollections of museum visits illustrate aspects of Dewey's notion of "aesthetic experience." The experience with the object includes completeness and uniqueness, and,

the underlying emotion that permeates an experience has...ups and downs and may... undergo...transformation....Those changes, however, form a coherent whole....the emotional history of the experience....Dewey wants us to understand that emotional unity is fundamentally aesthetic. (Jackson, 1998, p.11)

What makes the transactions with the object an experience as distinct from description, is that the diary has integrity, coherence, informal structure, attachment to an object and is cumulative. The narrative (text) provides a framing of the experience, its meaning and interpretations, and the viewer is giving shape to the experience. The ‘object’ of an experience could be a single work of art, an exhibit, or even the museum itself.

These strongly singular “experiences” tempt us, at one level to simply reproduce the diaries and exclaim, “Look! Aren’t these marvelous!” Pulling apart, counting, and reconstructing what has already been done with thought and care by these diarists seems almost destructive. However, studying the diaries as text and discourse opens up a window onto insight. Through these texts we can do two things: first we can understand the general construction of the visit and the critical features that impact it; second, we can examine the diaries to see which cognitive tools are used as the diarists interpret and enfold their experiences, we can note the mediating features of the museums that the diarists themselves note, and we can examine which of the many possible ideas and themes become appropriated by the diarists and woven into their identities. We can explore the ways in which the specifics of the experiences in different types of museums change or do not change the interpretations of the diarists and the ways in which these diaries show or do not show development over time.

Design

Population

Ten women and eight men, all of whom were acquaintances or friends of at least one of the authors, who were known to visit museums regularly, and who were known to naturally do some level of writing were approached and asked to participate. The approach was quite simple usually an email or telephone call explaining the overall MLC mission and the role of the diary study. If the person agreed to participate they were given a series of tasks and a promise of payment upon completion of the overall task. Each participant was then asked to write a personal description; to agree to visit five museums in the subsequent four to six months; and to write up a diary account of each visit. Any museum was acceptable and any spacing of the visits was acceptable. Eight of the women and seven of the men agreed to participate. All of the women who participated handed in all five entries within seven months and one man handed in one entry (a second man sent in his diary four months later and the data will be included at a later time).¹

The diarists ranged in age from 21 to 67. Three of our diarists were under thirty-three and five were over fifty-five. Their educational level varied from college student to Ph.D. Their occupations included opera singer, university advisor, educator, university professor, docent, TV

¹ Follow up conversations and emails with the men who had agreed but subsequently did not write the diaries did not turn up any clear pattern – the men were distributed geographically and demographically in almost identical patterns to the women. Each individual had a slightly different reason for not sending in the diaries.

producer, and insurance investigator. Their frequency of museum visits ranged from once a year to 48 times a year with one going approximately 120 times a year. Of the three under thirty-three the average number of visits per person was six visits per year while the average number of visits to a museum for those over fifty-five was 21 (not including the docent who was in a museum at least 120 days a year). Their personal interests in museums ranged from very little interest to deep subject matter curiosity and study to personal fulfillment and expansion. The diarists were clustered on the two coasts of the continent (Portland, Seattle, San Francisco, New York, Boston), with one across the Atlantic in London.

Task

The diarists were free to visit any museum that they wanted to for any purpose. Each diary entry was to be written as soon as possible after the visit and was to be between three and five type written pages in length. All of the entries were at least three pages although some were longer than five pages. Diarists were asked to include any pictures, cards, flyers, or catalogues that they felt would help us understand what they were writing about. The diaries were sent to the first two authors. Upon completion of the five diaries each diarist was paid five hundred dollars. The diarists made a total of 40 visits. The diarists made 28 visits to art exhibitions – in art museums and other museums; 10 visits to history or natural history exhibitions – these included historical reconstructions, historical surveys of instrumentation or scientific ideas, and history museums – and two visits to live exhibitions-- a zoo and a forestry center. We asked that each diary include the purpose and circumstance of the visit. We did not encourage nor discourage people taking notes or using any other device for remembering their experiences. In the sections that follow each quotation will be followed by a pseudonym and a number, for example, (Molly, 7.4). This means that the seventh diarist was writing about her fourth visit. Thus, the reader can always tell both which segments come from the same diarist and which diary in the sequence of five it represents.

Analysis

Each diary was read at least five times by the three authors. We then worked on parsing the general structure of each diary in the following way: we located and interpreted the purpose of the visit; located and interpreted the diarist's response to the general layout, orientation, or environment of the exhibition; and identified at least one central connecting interpretive concept on the part of the diarists – that is the main big point or elaboration (sometimes there were several). We then considered the kinds of cognitive tools that were used by the diarists as they built up meaningful interpretations of their visits and the ways in which the mediating features of the museum interacted as the diarists appropriated messages and meanings of their own.²

Coding

In order to describe the purpose of the visit we developed three codes that seemed to capture the various reasons that the diarists gave in their writing. Floating meant that the diarist appeared open to any experience and had few preconceived ideas as to what the exhibit was about or would mean to them. Focused meant that the diarist had a clear purpose in going to a particular show, usually to expand her understanding of a particular art form or to learn a specific thing; frequently these visits were prompted by seeing articles in a local paper. Challenging meant that the diarist wanted to stretch herself or force herself into an unfamiliar situation. Each diary was coded for one and only one purpose.

In order to describe the environmental impact we considered whether the diarist made any particular mention of the museum environment at all; if not then the environment was coded as neutral. If the environment was described mainly as a context or a setting for the exhibit then we coded that environment as frame. If the environment was melded into a part of the exhibit and became as much a part of the discussion or analysis as any object then we described that as content. Finally, in some cases where we felt that the environment was described as disruptive or unpleasantly confusing, we called that conflict. Each diary was coded for one and only one environmental impact, although parts of some diaries clearly reflected multiple responses.

In order to describe the kinds of cognitive tools that our diarists used as they constructed meaning in their writing we made use of four categories. These categories all treat the diary and the diarist as if there were, at least at some level, an awareness of self as diarist and an awareness at some level of us as readers. The first tool is description. The diarist recounts in a fairly complete fashion most of the objects in the exhibit. A second tool is analysis. When diarists use analysis they focus on a few objects and inspect their component parts in great detail, often elaborating on those details as seen in other settings. Another tool is narrative identification. When using narrative identification as a tool for making meaning from objects in a museum our diarists spun out a small (one or two paragraph long) story usually attached to an analytic feature but sometimes attached to themselves as possible players in the scene. Diarists deliberately blurred the lines between the objects in the exhibit and themselves—sometimes drawing the meaning or interpretation of an object out into their own lives, or at other times imagining themselves in the metaphorical situation completely. Finally, some diarists wove several strands of analysis together –moving from large panoramic images to very small fine-grained components as they examined a specific piece. This was not very common but was very noticeable when it occurred – it was a kind of intertextuality in which personal travel experience, a particular object, and detailed textual descriptions were merged. Two other tools that we did not retain because they were diarist specific were argument – in this case the diarist argued against the curatorial decisions, and docent – in this case the diarist imagined herself to be conducting a tour.³ The diaries were coded for the predominant cognitive tool, although most diarists used several. Inter-coder reliability was 83 % on a 30% sample of the data.

² We use the concept of cognitive tool here in the way that Greeno, 1991, uses it.

³ See Abu-Shumays and Leinhardt, this volume for discussion of this latter stance.

Results

The paintings are not beautiful. It is the light in them that is overwhelmingly beautiful. I look at these paintings and ask: ‘how does he do that?’ ...the next room was a study in the light present in storms lashing open fields and roads, and three or four paintings of the fires in eastern Washington a few years ago, the light in the fire being the subject. These paintings are dark, grey, wet, foggy. They look like the wet, charcoal grey days all too familiar in Northwest winters, and make you grab metaphorically for the Gore Tex jacket. The light in the storm pictures is present yet subtle. If the light on the mason jars is focused, laser beam-sharp, the light in these pictures is diffused, hopeful, wanting to be, but uncertain. I am reminded of how Northwesterners look at grey wet skies and say, hopefully, “look it’s lightening up.” We have a finely nuanced range of greys that substitutes white grey for sun yellow in our winter psyches, allowing our sun-starved winter souls to be satisfied with the high, white grey of a wispy overcast, and not the clear, sky blues and yellows of a New England winter day. (Megan, Art,1.2)

...a raven standing on top of a giant clam shell...The carving is situated on a carpeted pedestal in a sort of rotunda, surrounded by carpeted benches so that people can walk or sit all the way around the carving...it is meant to depict the Haida story of how the Haida people ... came to be ...there was a big flood that covered the earth for a long time. After it receded, Raven was walking along the beach, looking for something to break the monotony. Finally he came upon a huge, half-buried clam shell. He bent closer to examine it and saw that the shell was full of tiny, frightened looking creatures. He leaned towards them and “with his smooth trickster’s tongue, coaxed and cajoled and coerced them to come out and play in his wonderful new shiny world.”... I really enjoyed this piece, although whether it was because of the art itself or the story behind it I’m not sure. I suspect that as usual it was the mixture of the two... The people inside the clam shell were really great – they were in all sorts of scared and topsy-turvy looking positions, and of some you could only see pieces, like a hand or a rear end, poking out from inside the shell. The raven on top was covered with all kinds of intricate carvings, including a big, upside down face on the top of its tail...Mostly...I loved the way everything—the roundness, the lighting, the simplicity of the pale yellow wood, and that chaos of what it depicted—combined to catch an instant in time and freeze it for anyone and everyone to see. It was so completely unto itself, and yet it represented the creation of humanity. Somehow the wholeness of it really worked for me. (Jane, History, 3.1)

The first thing I saw when I got to the third floor was a bunch of muted green rectangular objects attached to the wall near the elevator. Each object was attached directly above the next in a stack formation, almost like rungs in a ladder, and the caption next to it said “Green Stack” (in case we couldn’t figure that out). Even though the title was rather uncreative and the rectangles could have been a brighter green, I thought this piece looked pretty cool. The squares looked good on the wall, and I thought it was a creative idea to put them there. (Molly, Art, 7.4)

As these three quotes show, our diarists, in describing objects in the various exhibits, wrote richly and responded deeply. Some diaries show a continuous connection to a larger frame of reference and embedding of the experience in the world at large. The discussion of light and grey in the first segment by Megan shows, we think, how this diarist responded to the messages of the curator and the artist to enhance or expand her own experiences of Northwestern winter skies and to interpret the specifics of the painting. The next segment offers a rather detailed description of an object and Jane's responses to it. In this passage we see the diarist drawn completely into the work and sounding detached from the rest of her own or the museum's world. In the last passage we see Molly considering the effectiveness independent of the construction effort, and with less engagement. In some senses she is trying to "get" the message of the museum and the modern art.

How did our diarists come to see what they did? Was it a simple matter of who they are? Was it a matter of their intentions and plans? Was it the skill and insight of the curatorial staff involved? In the next sections we examine the varying purposes and intentions that each diarist had on each visit, the ways in which they responded to the overall environment, and then examine the major message that emerged from a sample of diaries. We examine these major messages in terms of the cognitive tools used, the mediating factors clearly present, and the kinds of appropriations being made.

Purposes

At some level the purpose for all of the museum visits was to help fulfill the obligation of participating in this study. That is, we, as authors, can never be sure that any one of the diarists would have gone to a particular exhibition on a particular day if they had not been a part of the study. However, beyond that reservation, all diarists expressed personal and convincing reasons for the visits they made.

We did notice patterns among the purposes. On some occasions the purpose was clearly to pass the time or to enrich a portion of a day – we call these floating purposes because the sense we got in reading the diaries was that the individual was open to whatever the experience might have to offer -- purposes of these types ranged from almost aimless: "Often I find myself going to museums to "find out" without having planned to do so. This lack of planning gives me a sense of relaxation and adventure. And rarely do I read anything beforehand about exhibits--I like the freedom of discovering things on my own in museums," (Celine, 4.1) to introspective and almost metaphysical, "I almost always go into the museum at Lincoln Center for that solace of the soul it provides," (Anne, 2.3) or simply social, "this visit was an opportunity for us to spend time together at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. We enjoy being able to do something we both like, and usually have lunch together afterwards" (Sara, Art, 6.3).

On other occasions the purpose for the visit was intensely focused and intellectual. We considered visits in which the diarist wanted to see a specific object, examine a particular feature of a display, or was responding to an analytic piece of writing that she had read to be of these

‘focused’ types. “I decided to visit Tibet House and this exhibit since I am currently trying to learn more about Tibetan art after a visit to Tibet in June 1999. I expect to see Thangkas from different periods of Tibetan art and perhaps from different traditions in Tibetan art. I plan to expand my understanding of the iconography, probably not styles of individual artists, but perhaps some differentiation based on the century (time) of the art” (Sara, Art, 6.2).

Finally, some purposes were what we call ‘challenging’ in the sense that the diarist was pressing herself to be expansive; the diarist seemed to sense that there was more to learn in a general way about her immediate environment. “Mostly, I’m going to this museum because its different from the types of museum I usually visit, and because now and then I like to get a dose of what it means to be part of something larger than yourself, which is really, for all of its individual achievement and athlete-heros, what sports is all about” (Jane, History, 3.5).

When we hear the diarist’s voice in these ways we can see that these purposes can either strongly shape the experience – as in the case of the focused visit to Tibet House, or simply leave the visitor open for whatever comes by as in the visit to Lincoln Center. What Pekarik, Doering and Karns (1999) have referred to as satisfaction would likewise be quite different depending on the initial purposes. Thus, a visit to a museum that included a gruff and unhelpful guard might cloud the experience if the purpose was closer to that “solace of the soul” than if the purpose was to “see Thangkas from different periods of Tibetan art.” In the former case part of the purpose was a calming experience while in the latter the clarity of focus might provide a kind of immunity from the disruptions of daily life.

Of the forty diaries we soon saw that the purpose for the visits were neither a single property of the diarist nor of a museum type. That is, each diarist had a range of purposes, and each museum provoked a range of purpose. We judged that 10 of the diaries were of the floating type, 20 were of the focused type, 10 were of the challenging type. Were these different purposes evenly distributed among our diarists? Did our youngest and oldest, least experienced and most experienced share evenly the different purposes? If this distribution held evenly for each of our visitors we would expect that out of the five visits 1 would be a floating type, 1 would be challenging, and 2 or 3 would be focused.

Our three younger diarists made a total of fifteen visits. The purpose of 7 of these visits we viewed as floating, 1 was focused, and 7 were challenging. What this suggests is that our younger diarists who were less engaged in museum visits (but probably far more than the average public) tended to go to the museum for less focused and structured purposes than did our senior diarists who were more engaged with museum going in general. Our five senior diarists visited museums for floating purposes 4 times, 18 were focused, and 3 were challenging. If the visits had been proportionately distributed among purposes we would have expected that out of the 25 visits 13 would have been focused, 6 would have been floating, and 6 would have been challenging. Thus, this group had a focused purpose approximately thirty percent more than would have been expected overall. Purposes did not seem to be influenced by the kind of museum visited.

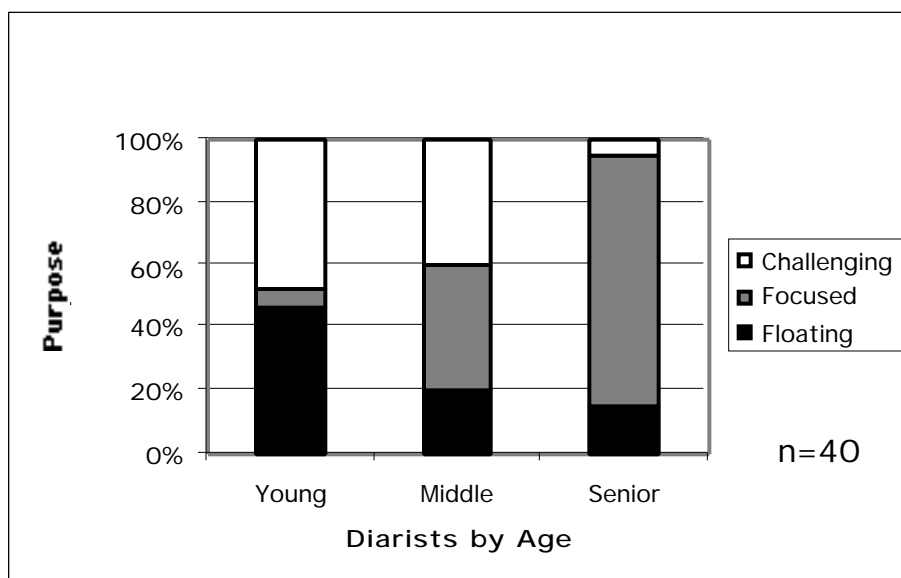


Figure 1. Percentage of diaries coded by purpose, floating, challenging or focused

Figure 1 shows the rather striking difference between the percentage of visits with a focused agenda and those that had a more personally challenging agenda. Our 3 younger diarists went to museums to challenge themselves in about the same proportion as they went to just have an experience. Our 4 senior visitors went far more frequently to a museum for a focused purpose. We noticed that our middle-aged visitor seemed to combine the features of the younger (under 33) and more senior (over 60) diarists.

We do not consider one purpose to be superior to another, nor, as we mentioned, do we sense that purpose is a consistent characteristic of an individual; rather it is a characteristic of the individual in interaction with the particular museum and exhibition and the particular time. We do consider that the intentions and purposes probably influence what the diarist ultimately felt about the visit and the meanings that they made from it. It is not obvious whether this pattern of differences between younger less experienced and older more experienced is a consequence of age and knowledge or whether it is a more subtle consequence of cultural change: shifts in interpretation about what a museum is and is for, or a shift in the role and view of authority and information. It does seem that there is quite a distinction between our senior and more frequent museum goers (4 over 60) and our younger less frequent museum goers (3 under 33); what makes this even more compelling as a consideration is that our one diarist in the middle (55) is indeed in the middle. We see her diaries as having some of the focused feel (2 of them did), some challenging (2 did) and one floating. Her words, too, have a feel of self exploration and discovery found more commonly among our younger visitors; but we also hear the respect and notice of the curatorial effort that has gone into the exhibits, a voice that tends to be silent among our younger diarists. We will return to these issues at the end of the paper.

Responding to the Environment

Our diarists may have each had unique and special reasons for selecting the exhibitions that they did. But these intentions could have been foiled, redirected, or enhanced by the specifics of the physical space. For most of the diarists it seemed natural to move from a brief description of the nature of the visit to some sort of discussion of the general layout of the exhibit and its environment. In some cases, of course the environment was the visit. To give the sense of the range of ways in which the diarists responded to the environment we arrange the description from the outside of the buildings to the inner layouts.

When I first saw the Met. I was struck by the beauty of the building itself, especially the two beautiful fountains and the enormous staircase out front, with all the people sitting on it sunning themselves. They somehow reminded me very much of seals I saw in San Francisco harbor who were always lounging and playing in the sun. I think it was because these people seemed happy to be sitting on the steps...and that left me with the impression that the Met was a fun place to be. (Molly, Art, 7.1)

What is especially interesting about this reaction is not only does it resonate with those authors who incorporated the Metropolitan Museum into our adolescent New York City lives but how contrary it is to the more common academic post-modernist take on the meaning of the Metropolitan's overall layout. Here we do not see the visitor in front of the "Temple" diminished in stature and importance, overwhelmed by the grand scale of the architecture (Duncan and Wallach, 1980; Duncan, 1995) – we see a visitor reminded of seals sunning themselves on rocks; a place of fun and relaxation. Becoming a part of that group does not require special expertise or badges of knowledge, rather the environmental setting is perceived as almost beckoning. Other museum environments are more challenging but also more informative with respect to their contents. In some cases the environment sets a calming mood, in other cases it jars the visitor into a unique setting. Sometimes the entrance is seen as part of the aesthetic experience as both context (the first quote below) and content (the second quote below):

The entrance is now up a ramp beside a large reflecting pool to double burnished copper doors. It is very understated and lovely. One enters into a small two story rotunda, with daylight pouring down through the skylights. The rotunda is Shaker simplicity itself, with a waxed colored stone floor and a single bench along the wall, thus the light plays an important role in setting the aesthetic ambiance...(Megan, Art, 1.2)

I entered the tower through a very narrow spiral set of stairs surrounded by old brick walls. There was a thick rope to hang on to as I made my way upstairs-no rails....I felt like I was embarking up into a hide-away in a castle during a harsh Medieval conquest! As I made my way into the attic, I noticed some huge oak logs constituting the walls, the ceiling and support beams for the ceiling. Right away there was a flair of the "old" in the atmosphere, along with a mix of real herbs that were being displayed around. (Celine, History, 4.5)

In the second passage the diarist, who is visiting a museum of medieval medicine located in a 19th century operating theatre in London, quite literally enters into the sense of the museum by reenacting the daily passages of the doctors who had worked in the operating theatre and apothecary shop. She responds to the authenticity and oldness of the place. In this environment size and scale is appropriately oppressive, not grand and intimidating, nor sweeping and inviting but authentically crowding and pressing in, almost secretive.

Once inside the museum some of our diarists responded to the building as frame and setting for the objects within. They recognized the ways in which the buildings set a tone and set off the pieces being viewed but also how the totality created mood and ambiance.

Although The Treasury of Saint Francis [exhibit] contained but a modest number of objects, its setting in two large, wonderfully proportioned rooms to the right and left of the central, marble foyer, immediately gave it importance and grandeur. Both of these rooms have soaring creamy ceilings and heavy mouldings, while the walls, painted a subdued medium brown, perfectly set off the paintings and other artifacts. Taped Gregorian chanting added an ecclesiastical note. (Sally, Art, 8.4)

But not all of the responses to this framing were so completely positive. For some the fit between either the objects and their surrounds or the intentions of a museum and its surrounds were in some type of collision. Diarists noticed most clearly the situations of collision but as can be seen from the quotes below also sensed when the environment supported their activity of viewing and interacting with the contents.

The American Craft Museum has turned its entry into a bazaar...Entering the museum for Spirits of Color was to be plunked into a scene of hot, active color and pattern.... There is always a sense of grandness in climbing or descending the Craft Museum stairs. The curve is gentle but emphatic. The pitch is high yet broad risers at the banister edge give the feet secure comfort. And at the head of the stairs in this exhibit was a large, stunning, blue-green patchwork piece. (Anne, Art, 2.2)

The Berkeley Art Museum is an aggressively harsh modern building, built of concrete and steel. Its harsh, tent-like interior consists of a large central space that is broken up by great gravity-defying walls and slashes of glass windows admitting intense Californian light....the paintings had carried me into another world, and when I turned to go down, I again was assaulted by the aggressive architecture: diagonal concrete, slashes of light and a red painted steel automaton relentlessly hammering, the centerpiece of the floor below. I was filled with admiration that the curator of Genji had managed to create such a different mood in a space of quite another sensibility. (Sally, Art, 8.3)

In some cases there was either an ambiguity or duality with respect to the fit between environment and exhibit. If an historically recreated house is the “museum” is it the house itself or the objects in the house that are the museum or is it the integration between the two? If a zoo artfully displays animals in “their own habitat” but also places those habitats in the larger habitat of the park in which the zoo is located how do visitors respond? In the next two segments from

diaries we see how these issues played themselves out as the diarists responded to being a part of and in some senses inside the exhibit itself.

Here Molly begins her description of a visit to the home of Paul Revere in Boston:

As we got closer to the house, however, we entered an area of Boston that had very narrow streets, some of which were still partly paved with cobblestones. There were no side walks. The shadows from the buildings completely covered the streets, obscuring the sunlight. I know Paul would have been familiar with these streets. Somehow, it was a little unnerving to look at this part of the city, because it made me understand how cramped and claustrophobic the whole city would have been, and poor sanitation and wood smoke hanging over everything would have made the problems much worse.

When we first saw his house I was filled with awe because Paul Revere actually lived here. This was the house he returned to after staying up all night chopping open chests and dumping tea into Boston Harbor. This was the house he left to make his famous night ride, and this was the house the many spies who reported things to him in the months leading up to the war came to...Only the roof covered with wooden [shingles] and a sort of fragile look the house had showed that it was in fact very old. ... not only was Paul's house still in tact, some of his old yard on the other side of the house was there too. (Molly, History, 7.2)

We can see quite literally that the diarist moves back and forth between the real modern world and the assumed historical world that is still present with its narrow sidewalkless streets before she plunges herself into the fantasy of Paul's daily life. Another, highly reflective, diarist both responds to the design features of the large scale setting of the zoo and appreciates them as acts of design. She explores how the design works just as she had asked, how does the painter do that?

The zoo is so beautiful. It really is a park and not just a bunch of animal habitats. The paths between habitat areas are richly landscaped to guide you naturally to the next viewing area. Viewing areas are either openings in the vegetation surrounding habitats, or lean-to enclosures with glass separating you from the habitat and animals. You feel very much a visitor to the animals home because of this. ..The pool is crossed by a small bridge on which you can just lean over and watch the water and feel like you're a thousand miles from a major urban area. (Megan, Zoo, 1.1)

Examples of the Fit between Purpose and Environment

In addition to playing a role as a part of the exhibit the environment was also a facilitator or impediment to the visit. All of our diarists commented at least to some extent about the layout within each museum, or the setting of the museum in its larger surround. Our docent commented extensively at a meta-level on each museum or exhibit area in terms of its probable feasibility for a docent guided tour. For her some layouts were clear and crisp and the general plan of the

exhibition easy to find and follow, for example the Korean gallery of the Asian Art museum. While other visits, especially the one made to the Berkeley Art Museum, she described as both frustrating physically and confusing intellectually – that is, a chronological route through the exhibition was hampered by physical and design layout.

Overall, the environment interacted strongly with what for lack of a better term we will call the management of the visit. Most of our diarists were either clearly in control of how to manage the visit (going early, cycling through backwards, and getting maps to plan the visit) or were able to make use of the physical tools such as maps or the social ones such as helpful museum store clerks to design a path that in turn afforded them the opportunity to engage with the intent of the exhibition. Rarely, the combination of intention and museum environment combined to create a less than productive tension surrounding the visit. An example of the kind of confusion that did occur came from Celine's visit to a retrospective of Kurt Weill in London. Celine did not know who Kurt Weill was and did not automatically look for a chronological organization. In an attempt to avoid physical objects and people she worked through in a somewhat backward and round about fashion. This in turn led her to be confused about some of the assumptions of the exhibition.

Her purpose: "In sequence of buildings along the river, Royal Festival Hall was next. I went in. Quite randomly as most of my museum visits tend to be...Often I find myself going to museums to "find out" without having planned to do so. This lack of planning gives me a sense of relaxation and adventure."

Her orientation and visit:

The posters were mounted on display panels of about 1m x 2m arranged in a circle with both sides showing some aspects of Weill's life. At the entrance to the circle, there was a TV monitor with headphones as well as some brochures. I came into the circle from the right and walked initially counterclockwise. The first poster I saw was titled "I am an American." It consisted of a big black and white photograph of Weill covered up in cigarette smoke, reproductions of his identity cards, and some quotes about his sentiments – extremely positive – for the USA. This poster drew my attention fast since I am currently evaluating my own sentiments of the same country where I have spent the last 12 years of my life.

...Before going on to see the rest of the posters, I went back to the TV station and put a headphone on to listen to some of Weill's music. I don't know why. Maybe I was hoping there would be something special about him filtering through his music. The TV didn't work.

...At this point I realized that maybe the exhibit was to start from the other side of the circle and the posters were to be followed clockwise, eventually leading to his life in the US. I didn't care nevertheless. (Celine, Art, 4.1)

Other museum visits, in contrast, proved quite fruitful, where the subject matter was personally meaningful, the environment comfortable, and the objects intriguing. Anne, a quilter by hobby, visited an exhibit of contemporary quilts where the environment and the objects on display combined to create a resonant experience, which started, as we quoted earlier, with the sight of an particularly stunning quilt displayed at the top of the museum's magnificent staircase:

Then I mounted the curving stairs. ...And at the head of the stairs in this exhibit was a large, stunning, blue-green patchwork piece. To a quilter this was a marvel.

...The gallery is small by most standards. And yet to stand, to contemplate and to appreciate the works took me over an hour. Some of the time I spent listening to a docent give a class of children inside tips on how the quilt was made and why the design took the form it did.

...I will carry the image of those children sitting on the floor in front of various quilts and slowly warming to the lure of the cloth, the design, the stories. They did get involved. They did understand the ideas the quilts were picturing. They made me understand ever more surely that the quilting carries a tradition that is beyond the traditional bed covering. They are a way to make art that touches the soul. (Anne, Art, 2.2)

The diaries show us how the intentionality of the visit, the environments of the museum, the planning and orienting behavior of the visitor combine to support the activity of carrying out a particular museum visit. When the intention is highly focused and something in the environment is less than facilitating – large crowds for example, or confusing instructions -- then quick tricks such as starting from the back, or going through an exhibit very fast and returning to one or two pieces are extremely helpful. On the other hand, when the intention is less focused and more generally experiential then the environmental features of format and display can either support, as in the case of the zoo, or inhibit the activity as in the case of the Kurt Weill exhibit.

Figure 2 shows the ways our diarists used the overall environment of the museum. Note that our younger visitors never treated the museum space as neutral and considered it as content 30% of the time. In contrast our senior visitors never treated the museum as content and tended to treat the environment as neutral over 40% of the time. Fortunately, both younger and older diarists sometimes visited the same museum (the Metropolitan for example) and indeed, they did treat that environment differently. Our middle diarist treated the museum as frame somewhat more than the younger diarists or our older ones and treated the environment as content more than our older diarists but less than our younger ones. Of course as with the diarists' purpose we can ask if it was the age of the diarist or the type of museum itself that influenced the sense and response to the environment. Appendix A shows there is very little difference by museum type. However, the historical museums are seen as content more frequently than art; on the other hand, art museums are seen as frame a disproportionate amount of the time.

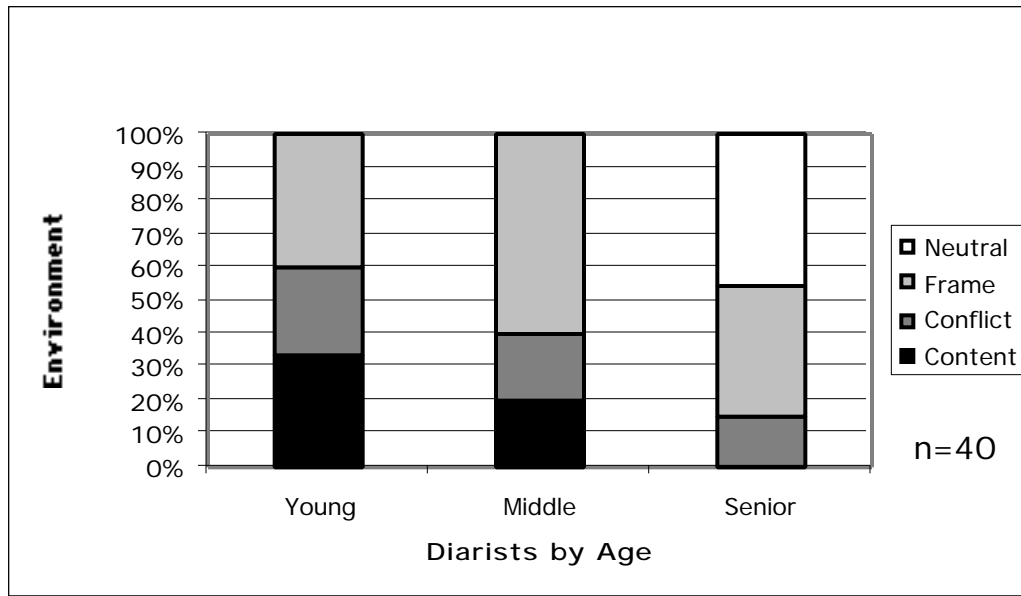


Figure 2. Percentage of diaries coded by environmental effect, neutral, frame, conflict, or content

A Core Experience

Up to this point we have presented the edges of the diarists' experiences. We have described their general purposes, their responses to the environment, and the ways in which they manage their visits. We turn now to a sharper focus on eight diaries, one from each diarist. We use these examples to develop the idea of a "core experience." Table 1 identifies the diarist by pseudonym, identifies the museum, categorizes the purpose, and briefly describes the core idea of the selected diary. We describe the diary topics in greater detail below and then turn to an analysis of essential meaning that was constructed, trying to point out the ways in which various features of the identity of the diarist, the tools available to her, and the museum supports were used. We start with Molly, an aspiring opera singer, visiting the reconstructed house of Paul Revere briefly noted earlier. She had gone there with her parents in part because she had liked reading about Revere as a child.

When I saw the house's front entry, which was barely big enough for one person to stand in, and the stairs which were incredibly small and cramped and delicate, I realized the house was much too small to have held all of Paul's children (I was told he had sixteen, but probably only about six were living with him at one time) and his wife and mother comfortably. It occurred to me that he could not have had any privacy back then. The only way that a person could stand not having any privacy was if she didn't mind displaying intimate details of her life for everyone to see. I suppose people back then weren't shocked by much. Paul was such an easy going person I'm sure it never occurred to him to worry about what people saw him doing....

The upstairs further convinced me Paul had no privacy, his bedroom doubled as an upstairs living room where he entertained friends, and the only way to get to the back

bedroom was to walk through his room...but back then space must have been more important than privacy...the bed looks so incredibly uncomfortable and hard on the back. Apparently two of his children slept in this bed. I doubt they ever expected to sleep through the entire night without waking up...

The thing I noticed most about the house was the almost total absence of entertainment and “impractical” things...The biggest impression I received from seeing Paul’s practical house was that in Paul’s time enormous stress was laid on practicality and usefulness...Basic things like cooking took up so much time and effort that “impractical” things like the arts were probably thought of as empty wastes of time. Paul Revere was by all accounts an extremely competent and practically-minded person, so he would have fit in well. However, I doubt I would have fit in to his time very well. I don’t think I would have had a very high opinion of myself if I lived then, because I would have had little opportunity for mastery, and I might never have known that I have certain skills. ... I also have extremely little patience for repetitive tasks, but “women’s work” was filled with them... If I had been Paul Revere’s daughter I would have learned to read and write a little, and I am good at those things so I would have taken pride in that...I would still be able to sing well, although I would never be able to sing as well as I do now because I wouldn’t have had singing lessons....Of course I never would have been sent to college back then. Girls had absolutely no choice about what they would do when they grew up....All men back then were sexist, but I don’t get the impression Paul was especially so... After touring the house and discovering how dreadfully practical life was in Paul Revere’s day, I was shocked to see some of his silver work...His work took my breath away because of the sharp contrast between it and the no-frills environment he lived in. It was delicate and intricate down to the last detail. ...Paul wanted his work to be as beautiful as he could make it. I’m sure he would never have allowed an apprentice or a journeyman working with him to do sloppy work. He would have been just as excited or perfectionist as any artist...So this practical man got his greatest joy out of making something impractical. He was a lot more like me than I thought. (Molly, History, 7.2)

Here we have a young woman caught in a time warp. She imports herself intact to the past and imagines all of her talents, desires, and limitations to be carried with her – as they were in her visit. In a pre-feminist time women’s lives were narrow and prescribed, Abigail Adams, first lady, abolitionist and ahead of her time, has no presence in Molly’s picture of Revolutionary America. Molly would have wanted the kind of spacious privacy she has been raised with and imagines everyone suffering without it. Her beliefs about the social independence of interests and competencies rings quite loudly. She identifies with Paul Revere’s daughter and develops a narrative of practicality and female oppression that is then up-ended when faced with the delicacy and art of Paul’s silver work. What is remarkable about the diary is that the diarist has retained in the retelling the same contradiction she experienced. She has simultaneously braided a story of what her life would have been like, how as a girl she would have been deprived, and placed in an almost unbearably practical public environment and recognized the contradiction of Revere’s work so clearly impractical and artistic.

Table 1: Samples of Core Visit Experiences (See also Appendix)

Identity	Museum Type	Purpose	Tag	Tool
Molly (21) College/ opera 7.2	Historical House	Challenging	What life would have been like for Paul Revere	Narrative Identification
Jane (23) Writer 3.1	Anthropology	Floating	Curatorial effort, discussion of <i>Raven and the first men</i>	Weaving
Celine (33) Educator 4.4	History	Focused	Chemistry display lacked coherence	Analysis
Megan (55) Undergraduate Advisor 1.2	Art	Focused	Connection of art and life via discussion of northwestern skies	Narrative Identification
Anne (61) Writer, producer, quilter 2.2	Art	Focused	Aesthetic quality of quilts	Analysis
Beth (60) Retired professor 5.5	History	Focused	Varied understandings of Rossetta stone	Descriptive
Sara (66) Educational psychologist 6.2	Art	Focused	Analysis of Tibetan art	Weaving
Sally (67) Docent 8.5	Art	Focused	Imagining tour of Korean art exhibit	Analysis

Jane, a talented writer, visiting the Museum of Anthropology in British Columbia is likewise connected to a portion of the museum. She, too, is visiting with her parents but with some trepidation. She does not usually enjoy this type of museum, she is a bit burnt out from visitors, but she had been reading Annie Dillard’s *The Living* which was set near Vancouver, so she was hopeful. In addition to the Raven by Bill Reid that is described in a quote opening this section, this diarist was drawn to a room that had been curated by a group of college students for an anthropology class:

...in addition to the exhibit materials itself, there was also a binder in the middle of the room in which students had recorded their learning process with photos and a step-by-step explanation of how the physical exhibit had come to be. I really enjoyed looking through the binder, especially because it called my attention to many details about the exhibit that I wouldn’t have noticed otherwise, including the color of the walls (a

greenish turquoise)-along with an explanation of why they had chosen that color over the initially favored bright magenta, the brightness and direction of the lighting, the font used in the exhibit text, and the difficulty of condensing weeks, or even months, worth of research into a single short and understandable paragraph that visitors will want to read.

In addition to learning about the process of exhibit-building, I was also fascinated by the exhibit itself. The prints and drawings were all from either Baker Lake or Cape Dorset.... The students had broken up into five groups of about three students, and each group had chosen a subject to research, such as Inuit economy and the printing press, the place of myth and story in Inuit culture, hunting and so on...A short explanation written by the instructor ...said that although most outsiders think of the Arctic as a bleak and colorless place, there is a time once every year when the ice breaks up and melts away and amazing colors spring forth...I don't know what attracted me most to the "Break in the Ice" exhibit. It could have been that, unlike the rest of the museum, there was some small amount of explanatory text in this exhibit that made me more able to relate to the pictures. It could have been the fact that it was created by students, and that their sharing of the learning process made me look at it from a slightly different perspective. (Jane, History, 3.1)

Here again we see a diarist drawn into a particular relationship with the museum. In this case the connection is not with the material of the exhibit but with the college age curators. The diarist appreciates the difficulty and success of the task and recognizes the narratives of the students and the metaphor of the exhibit and relates to them. The insight gained from this section of the museum spills over into her description of the Raven sculpture and the details of its placement that opened this section. What she has come to realize is that the material she gets to see is the consequence of myriad decisions and cuttings. In her own work of writing she too has to struggle with what to keep in and what to leave out so she appreciates and responds to the details of the decisions and the effort that went into them. She does not place herself in the narrative as strongly as the previous diarist, rather she is drawn both to the narrative of constructing the display and to the narrative of the Raven as creator of the Haida. Her weaving consists of movement between the objects, the text, and her sense of her own experiences.

We move next to Celine who wears a fairly critical lens most of the time. A scientist by training, and a Turkish Cypriot, she completed her Educational doctoral work in the United States and has moved to England. Her stance in viewing the Science Museum in London was one of concern for her discipline and how the public might be viewing it. She visited the museum with a focused intention. "As someone with a background in chemistry, I wanted to start with the chemistry exhibits. I am always curious to see how chemistry is "displayed" to the public...(4.4)" While she is not directly looking at the exhibit as if she herself is being examined, her close identification and appreciation of chemistry presses her to not simply look at the objects but how those objects might be understood and judged by others.

Walking past the exhibit area on chemical analysis, we ended up in a section of display panels consisting of old weighing equipment. Of course if you knew a bit of chemistry, you'd find some meaning in the role of weighing in chemistry. Linking changes in matter with mass of matter, the ground for the chemical revolution of the 18th century. Discovery of oxygen. Phylogiston and negative weight. The whole room was filled with balances,

made in Egypt to China, some looking crude, some beautiful and meticulously decorated, which makes one think of a blur of art and science.

I noticed a piece that was labeled as one that was made in the Ottoman Empire in the 17th century. I suppose due to my ethnic background, I'm always drawn to anything that touches on Turkish history so I studied the label of this piece a bit more closely. There was reference to a weighing unit, 'oke', from this time which surprised me. Nobody in Turkey these days would utter anything close to this term to denote weight. But in Cyprus Turkish, there is an unit, 'okka' which I always assumed was a word of Greek influence because of the way it sounds. The word could still be of Greek origin, I suppose, since there were many Greeks living under the Ottoman rule. But more importantly, the prospect that this word was brought to the island and survived after almost 500 hundred years when it didn't in the mainland, I found quite fascinating....

I enjoyed the exhibit on balances even though on the surface it might have looked boring. It was a gallery of balances. One gets the point after seeing just one balance! However, the diversity of cultures depicted and the ambition to measure – for trade, for science, for whatever purpose it might have been – was interesting to witness. The question in my mind at this point was why the exhibit was not organized the other way around – chemical analysis techniques to come later not first – if the exhibit was to tell a story about the history of chemistry and how these techniques played a role in the development of this science. What I mean is that I would not put a polarometer equipment in front of anyone before a balance! If the aim of this part of the museum is to inform people about chemistry, then there needs to be some logical coherence in the way that the information is presented...(Celine, History, 4.4)

Celine, about ten years older than the other two young diarists, stays firmly outside the exhibit as an analytic critic but seeks a logical narrative in the organization of the exhibit. What was developed first, what made a difference first historically should be presented first. But at the same time she holds this rather dispassionate stance she is drawn into the origin of a word and its power to survive, and to survive on “her” island. She delights and marvels in the discovery at the same time she critiques the rest of the display. Her concern and assumptions about other visitors are likewise quite interesting. She assumes that ‘others’ will not see the inherent beauty in the mix of design and function of the balances; even though many who may have little interest in armament look at the armor of the middle ages and examine its beauty and refinement. Likewise she assumes that the logical temporal order of first to last is more sensible than near to far – an ordering that unpacks the present in terms of the past. What comes through as subtext is a desire that the presentation of her domain, science, and her field, chemistry, be one whose logic and aesthetics are visible and interpretable to a larger public.

We turn now to Megan whose quotes about the grey skies opened this section of the paper. Her various analyses show an acute awareness of self and environment. In terms of her identity she moves back and forth between being drawn into the exhibit, analyzing it from a more distanced eye, and taking it with her. Originally an historian by training, a person clearly formed by the 1960s, she advises young people at a university and so stays very much in touch with their perspectives. She had a focused purpose in going to this exhibit.

One painting, in particular, ‘Still’ by Thomas Shields with the salt marsh in the foreground, the slough winding through it into the sea and the mountains in the

background, caught my eye. I could feel my blood pressure going down just looking at this print, for it was still, indeed. It was a hard edged painting, with the marsh and slough stylized, but representational and the mountains in silhouette, the colors fairly muted bronze oranges, pale dawn yellows, greys, indigos, and black. Realistic in a lithographic sense, not a photographic sense. When I am at the top of a mountain, or at the edge of the sea or a lake in the wilderness, my mind empties out all of the urban images, chaos, and deadlines into the view. They don't necessarily disappear, but they become faint memories...I don't mean this to sound like a trite child of nature essay—I still recognize and appreciate the inventions of humans – indoor plumbing and heat, good clean water, a good movie or book, a beautiful flower vase...

Tony Angel ...has long been a favorite of mine. An environmental educator...his sculptures of birds are particularly well known. The museum did a nice job of juxtaposing a sculpture of a hawk owl by Angel next to a painting of a hawk owl by one of the artists. A nice curatorial touch. My favorite sculpture was of a small bird, I'm not even sure of its name, now, carved out of a piece of light brown marble. The sculpture was no more than six inches tall, a large flat piece of marble out of which rose the small bird as if flying. The bird was horizontal—only its body and wings fully visible in the marble. While the bird was highly polished, the rest of the marble was left rough and unpolished. The tactile nature of the sculpture—finely polished and smooth—made us all want to rub our hands over the bird, which the museum guard was conscientiously telling us not to! The contrast between the polished bird and the unpolished, marble was especially compelling for the polished stone was not beautiful. Whereas one longed to stroke the smooth curve of the bird, the flat rough marble out of which it rose didn't invite one to touch it. A long crack went through the piece of marble, and through the carved bird, slightly distracting but also in a strange way, adding to the beauty of the small bird. It was a piece, which if you had it at home on your table, you would constantly pet as you came by, the way you might pet a cat sleeping in the sun. Just for the pure pleasure of the feel of the warmth and smoothness. (Megan, Art, 1.2)

For this diarist, twenty to thirty years older than our previous three, identification and interpretation means allowing one to be transported to other experiences that are reminiscent but it also means appropriating the very objects and figuratively taking them home. There is a strong interplay between the relaxation in viewing the paintings that allows this diarist to recapture other experiences of similar environments, to the strong analytic descriptive discussion of one sculpture, to finally imagining that piece in her own home. She is aware of herself as a member of the museum public in tension with the social rules governing all art museums DON'T TOUCH and of the tacit rebellion of many visitors. But she is also deeply conscious of the social messages of the exhibit itself as well as the curatorial effort and decisions.

Anne, one of the senior diarists, is a writer, T.V. producer and, among her many talents, she is a quilter who teaches homeless women quilting. She went to see the American Craft Museum's quilt show with several identities: in a sense to pay homage, in a sense to study what is being done and how it is being appreciated, and, finally as a member of the quilting community. Her diaries are different from the others in that for the most part she selected a rather long list of objects and elaborated on each one. The other diarists tended to focus on two or three major objects or topics and emphasize one aspect. Anne in all of her diaries had a more reportorial style – her facility with the computer also meant that for each object analyzed she clipped in a picture of it or a similar object.

A psychologically disturbing quilt was the fractured traditional piece called Transitions by Sandra Smith. About six feet square, this piece whirls and jumps, shouts and screams. I felt under attack by the color, the energy, the undiluted power of it. Red triangles in light medium and dark shades made a tumbling effect in sharp under-tie shapes. They flew around the space on a grey, also fractured, ground. It was as if Hollywood special effects were incorporated into the cloth. And I did not stay long. Violence unnerves me. And so to my favorite piece [quilt] in the show, *Crystalline Fantasy* is a wonder of wonders. Made by Gwendolyn A. Magee, she must have had the patience of Job and then some. The notes indicate that this is based loosely on the forms of plants and flowers, but it takes the viewer beyond simple imagery into a fantasy worked of sparkling embroidery and applique. My favorite size, 34 1/2" X 40" it is a marvel in that every centimeter is covered with a layer of sequins. It sparkles. It shimmers. It scintillates. The fronds and tendrils of the fantasy plants, which look only distantly like anything real, seem to float in their own sea of gold and light. I suspect that the plants were appliqued onto the golden ground, then the entire piece was covered with the crystal sequins. Once more I am awed and warmed that the human mind can conceive and execute such wonders. I relate more easily to the beautiful but can comprehend the unpleasant. This show showed many sides of the human condition. The quilts themselves let the artist makers tell their side of the story. They were able to inject the energy and enthusiasm that reaches out of the piece into the mind of the viewer. (Anne, Art, 2.2)

On several occasions one or another of our diarists went to an exhibit because they were in some sense a member of the producing community: a photographer, a costume designer, a quilter. Anne was perhaps most involved with the actual production of the contents of this exhibit. Not only did she know many of the quilters personally but she could appreciate the kind of skill and effort required to produce a particular piece. Like Celine in the Chemistry exhibit Anne wore a double hat, one which allowed her to see a part of herself and her personal interests in the exhibit, but she could also watch how that exhibit was appreciated by others.

In contrast to Anne, Beth visited a specific object, one she knew a considerable amount about but in no way identified with. Beth chose to visit the British Museum to see the Rosetta Stone with a good friend with whom she had first seen the stone nearly thirty years earlier. Her intention was quite focused. Other than noting some structural changes she barely mentioned the larger environment of the museum. Perhaps initially intended as a visit to an 'old friend' the visit instead became a rather thorough and somewhat scholarly activity.

I was thrilled to see the Rosetta Stone, a fragment of a dark stone stela, now in a glass case with lights shining on it. For many years the Rosetta Stone had been encased in a metal cradle and I remember that it had been much more difficult to see all sides of the stone. The inscription on the stone had been fully conserved and redisplayed for the exhibition. The commentary indicated that the inscription on the stone is a decree for King Ptolemy V Epiphanes dating from March 196 BC which is repeated in hieroglyphs, demotic and Greek and that by using the Greek section as a key scholars realized that hieroglyphs were not symbols but that they represented a language. Special displays also emphasized the important work of Thomas Young... and Jean Francois Champollion... on deciphering hieroglyphics. Jean-Francois Champollion was an outstanding scholar

who realized as early as 1822 that the hieroglyphs represented a language which was the ancestor of Coptic, the known language of medieval Christian Egypt.

As I walked through the exhibit I found that I had to read the accompanying commentary and study the charts carefully to fully understand the items on display. While in many cases I was initially attracted to the appearance of an item I still had to read more about it to truly appreciate its importance... (Beth, History, 5.5)

In no sense was Beth overwhelmed by the authority of the curatorial voice; she was, however, very attentive to it in her detailed description. Her diary showed a shift from rather casual visitor to a known object to a serious museum-goer, ready and prepared to respond appreciatively to the scholarly aspects of the museum. She was disciplined, not simply content to be attracted to objects for their aesthetics, nor facile with respect to the trust of her own intuitions – she was there to learn and learn quite rigorously and formally. For her, this growth in knowledge and competence is the fun of visiting a museum.

Sara, our next diarist, presents the most focused set of diaries of the set. She had a clear set of motives and goals, even when those are social as opposed to intellectual. She went to Tibet House in New York City to see some thangkas as a way of continuing her developing understanding of Tibetan art following her recent visit to Tibet. Her diary is highly structured: she wove her use of the catalogue with her own rich set of experiences and personal knowledge, she described the content of the exhibit and then focused on a few pieces for greater discussion.

The first two thangkas that I looked at in depth were from I and III, of the Bodhisattva Maitreya (#32) and the Green Tara (#38). The bodhisattva thangka was of modest size...harmonious, bright colors, enchanting, and beautifully mounted as a scroll hanging—with dark brown suede framing the picture...According to the catalog it was probably painted in central Tibet (Tsang) the first half of the 15th century...He is surrounded by 28 lamas above and down both sides, the top seven with yellow hats and the bottom seven bare headed...

My trip to Tibet in June 1999 included the Gyantse Kumbum (The Great Stupa of Gyantse) in which the richness and beauty of the paintings are extraordinary. The paintings in the Kumbum represent the full pantheon of Tibetan religious art of the 15th Century...The Kumbum paintings have influences of the Nepali ...style, and so does this painting particularly in the expression and grace of the hands and body. The painting reminds me again of the wonderful art in the Kumbum, evokes the spiritual world of Tibetan paintings, and is emotionally engaging—in the beauty of the painting and appreciation for the unknown master artist. My feeling for and understanding of the painting is expanded with the description provided in the exhibit catalog. I felt happy and excited that I could be in a situation where I could both study the painting and have the detailed description of the iconography in the painting. I also felt that although there is more for me to understand about these paintings, this visit provides a unique and welcome study in detail...

...I was intrigued by a painting from the Celestial Visions section. This painting was drawn on heavy silk...from the central region of Tibet, and from the 12th - early 13th century... The title was Eleven faced Avalokiteshivara with footprints. The painting intrigued me because...the huge footprints appear in Buddhist sites and Tibetan works in several ways. Early on there were no images of the Buddha. At Sanchi (a site in India I visited last January) there are stupas and archways from about 200 BC. The carvings on

the columns of the arches include a number in which there are large footprints to represent the Buddha. In present day Tibet many monasteries have large cotton ‘flags’ or hangings over outside entrances to the main halls; and these hangings are up on the ceilings and have two large footprints. These flags also indicate the continuity of the symbols in Buddhist art. (Sara, Art, 6.2)

Here we see the diarist studiously engaged in and weaving between the fine grained detail of the catalogue for the show from which she reads and quotes, the specific objects in the show; and between these specific objects and larger personal travel experiences. She used the show both to expand her understanding and to connect a series of ideas and experiences. Like Beth her pleasure in the object is related to her pleasure in gaining competency and a rather rigorous level of learning.

Like Sara, Sally, a docent in training for the Asian Art Museum in Berkeley (she had previously been a docent on the East Coast), was deeply knowledgeable about Buddhist artistic traditions and appreciative of the many types of artistic expressions found throughout Asia. She began her diary by contextualizing her visit, describing her previous visits to similar exhibits in the early nineties. Her diary was then structured around her own movement through the gallery and her sense of how it could be handled by a docent.

It seems that the NamGoong images have never been shown publicly before, nor have they ever been professionally studied. I was fascinated by that fact and formulated my own opinions utterly without guidance. I was struck by the fact that the two reliquaries were far more refined and delicate in their craftsmanship than the images and wondered why that should be. In contrast to those wonderfully meticulous little house forms of the reliquaries, the images seemed quite chunky—heavily proportioned and with minimal detail in the rendering of features or drapery. I was also struck by the differences in alloy—some of the images had a distinctly pink cast while most were more yellow...

The Koryo dynasty...was a period of both great Buddhist power and incredible artistic refinement. Its excellence in painting, as well as its celadons, has never been surpassed in Korean art. The fourteenth century ‘Buddha Amitabha with the Eight Great Bodhisattvas’, a hanging scroll done in ink, mineral colors, and gold on silk, is a splendid example of this courtly refinement found in paintings of this period. Made for daily worship in a monastery, it depicts the Buddha of eternal life and boundless light, who promises his believers rebirth in his Pure Land paradise. Severely static in composition, it is rendered in remarkable detail—most especially the fabrics with their intricate patterns finely painted in gold.

The work is beautifully placed in the gallery being the first work you see on entering, and if I were to tour the gallery, as it now stands, I think I would begin my tour with this hanging scroll. After describing its sophistication and elegant refinement, I could then easily move on to investigate the origins of such an art and begin with the early pieces. (Sally, Art, 8.5)

Sally analyzed the reliquaries with the eye of a docent and the skill of a collector. Her analysis drew on her background knowledge of the Koryo dynasty. Her eye was drawn both to the small details of fabric folds on a hanging scroll, and the larger context of the position of the object in the gallery itself.

The eight segments from our different diarists each show how the individuals engaged with the material in a way that allowed them to build up an interpretation and meaning in the context of their own expectations and their understandings of the significance of what they were seeing. Thus, our last two diary segments reflect the profound appreciation by Sara and Sally of Buddhism and Buddhist-inspired art. They are not looking at that as a form of national expression in the way Jane did for the Haida or Molly did when visiting Paul Revere’s house. Nor are they imposing a Western aesthetic sense of mood arousal and connectedness that we saw with Megan’s discussion of light and the bird carving.

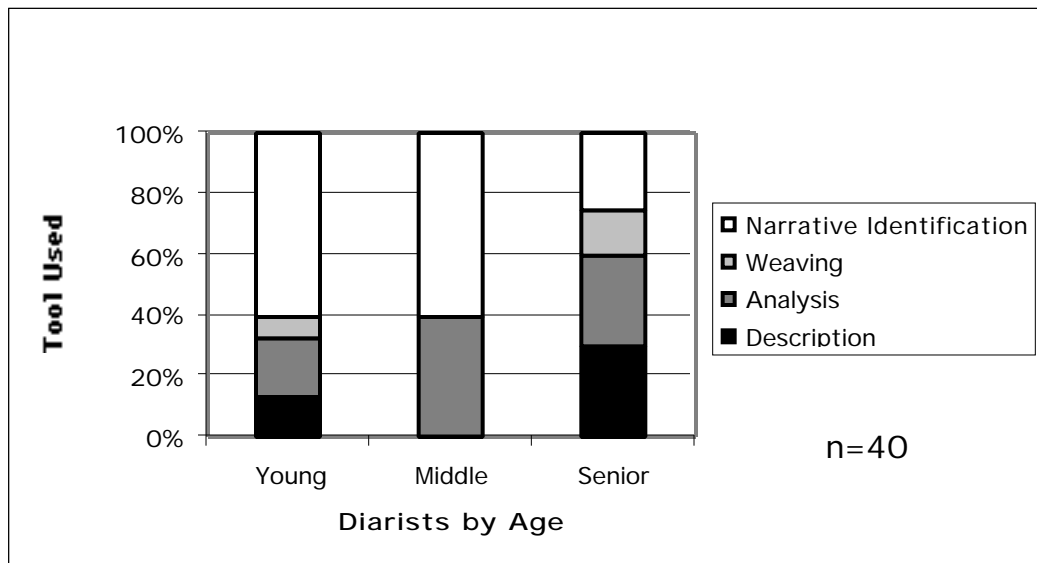


Figure 3. Percentage of diaries coded by cognitive tool used, narrative identification, weaving, analysis or description

Figures 1 and 2 contrast our diarists by age with respect to their purpose for the visit, and the way the environment of the museum was seen, while Figure 3 shows four cognitive tools that all of the diarists seemed to be using as they constructed meaning in their museum diaries. It is important to note, of course, that writing itself is a meaning constructing activity and that that no doubt affected all of our diarists. There are two notable differences among the diarists. First, in the use of what we called narrative identification, our younger and middle aged diarists used this tool over 50% of the time whereas our senior diarists used it only 25% of the time. On the other hand our senior and middle-aged diarists used what we called analysis between 30 and 40% of the time, while our younger diarists used it only 20% of the time. The main cognitive tools being used by the different populations are different although both our younger and senior diarists used all of the tools we identified. Again Appendix A displays these same categories of tool use by museum type.

Summary and conclusions

When we designed this study we wanted to have a wide range of people participate as diarists. We certainly had no hypothesis with respect to age or development as a critical dimension, given that all of our diarists were adults. Naturally, if one is a fairly steady museum-goer – say ten visits a year from 18 onwards then the difference in actual numbers of museums visited between our youngest and oldest visitor would be almost 500 museum visits. The point is, that we have three reasons all of which might be convincing explanations for why younger adult museum goers might differ from our senior ones: it is a matter of personal development; it is a matter of museum experience and exposure; it is a matter of a subtle and on-going changes between the generations concerning what a museum is for, how the society views the role of museums, and how one takes advantage of that personal experience. We tend to favor the latter, namely, that the differences reflect an evolving sensibility about museums, with a serious consideration for the cumulative differences in experience level.

We examined the diaries to see how the diarist's background and purposes influenced the choice of tools and reflect the personality of the diarists. But these segments also illustrate points at which the diarists had a distinct or intense experience with a particular object or themes of the exhibit. They deliberately blurred the lines between the exhibit and themselves, developing a personal meaning for the object, or exhibit, or drawing an interpretation out into their own lives. The diarists wove several strands of analysis together, highlighting both panoramic and small grained components of the encounter with the object. These activities reflect Dewey's notion of experience, as the expansion of meaning and the "attainment of a full perception." This expansion goes beyond a simple description of an object. In many cases we found instead characteristics that included integrity, completeness, uniqueness— there was a coherence, informal structure, and attachment that allowed some of the features of the environment to stand out and others to fade away. To obtain this kind of Deweyian aesthetic experience, the viewer has to appreciate the artist's and curator's accomplishments, culminating in appreciative understanding. In these diary excerpts, we see evidence of this engagement with the "object" per se, as the diarists reflect upon the significant aspects of their visits. In the diaries we are led to these moments, where the description of the visit deepens, and where an extended reflection on the aesthetic elements of the artwork takes place, where an interpretation is made, or where the curator's message is drawn into the discussion. An initial attraction to a particular object might be supported by the diarist's own memories, or background knowledge, and the museum's contextualization of it. The combination of tools, purpose and environment come together to provide a coherent, engaged response to a museum object, and one that comes together in the retelling of the museum visit.

What we have seen in the diaries overall is the finely honed skill of perspective taking and appreciative imagination displayed by our younger diarists coupled with a sharp, precise, analytic skill more frequently displayed by our senior diarists. What we are seeing is human beings in a social setting bringing to bear their own identities and responding to a particular context. Museums are cultural institutions multiply defined by a public that finances their existence; by curatorial "experts" who make decisions about collections, content, and display;

and by visitors who visit with a complex array of cognitive and social tools. Visitors shape and reshape their own personal activity of museum going and each museum visit—be it a novel experience, or checking in with an old friend—adds to the identity of who that visitor is. Our diarists have provided a completely unique window into that process and its meaning.

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Appendix: Diaries coded by Purpose, Environment and Cognitive Tool

Number	Museum Type	Purpose	Environment	Tool	
1.1	Megan	Other	Floating	Content	Narrative Identification
1.2		Art	Focus	Frame	Narrative Identification
1.3		History	Focus	Frame	Narrative Identification
1.4		Art	Challenging	Frame	Analysis
1.5		Art	Challenging	Conflict	Analysis
2.1	Anne	History	Focus	Frame	Narrative Identification
2.2		Art	Focus	Frame	Analysis
2.3		Art	Focus	Frame	Weaving
2.4		Art	Focus	Frame	Narrative Identification
2.5		Art	Floating	Conflict	Narrative Identification
3.1	Jane	History	Floating	Frame	Weaving
3.2		Art	Floating	Conflict	Description
3.3		Art	Floating	Frame	Narrative Identification
3.4		Other	Challenging	Content	Narrative Identification
3.5		History	Challenging	Content	Description
4.1	Celine	History	Floating	Conflict	Narrative Identification
4.2		Art	Floating	Frame	Narrative Identification
4.3		History	Floating	Conflict	Analysis
4.4		History	Focus	Conflict	Analysis
4.5		History	Floating	Content	Narrative Identification
5.1	Beth	Art	Focus	Neutral	Description
5.2		Art	Focus	Neutral	Description
5.3		Art	Floating	Neutral	Description
5.4		Art	Floating	Neutral	Description
5.5		History	Focus	Neutral	Description
6.1	Sara	Art	Focus	Neutral	Analysis
6.2		Art	Focus	Frame	Weaving
6.3		Art	Challenging	Neutral	Analysis
6.4		Art	Focus	Frame	Weaving
6.5		Art	Focus	Conflict	Narrative Identification
7.1	Molly	Art	Challenging	Frame	Narrative Identification
7.2		History	Challenging	Content	Narrative Identification
7.3		Art	Challenging	Frame	Analysis
7.4		Art	Challenging	Frame	Narrative Identification
7.5		Art	Challenging	Frame	Narrative Identification
8.1	Sally	Art	Focus	Conflict	Analysis
8.2		Art	Focus	Frame	Description
8.3		Art	Focus	Conflict	Narrative Identification
8.4		Art	Focus	Frame	Analysis
8.5		Art	Focus	Frame	Analysis