

Safe places for unsafe ideas? History and science museums, hot topics and moral predicaments

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Contemporary discourse casts museums as socially responsible (Janes and Conaty 2005), as organizations with the capacity to sustain societal health (Anderson 2005; Sutter and Worts 2005: 132) and improve the human condition. Similarly, the American Association of Museums study *Mastering Civic Engagement* presents museums as sites that can exert greater influence in society, as places where values are generated and as incubators for change (Hirzy 2002: 9). Interestingly, the desire to improve the human condition, to act as sites for the formation of values and incubators for change, appears reminiscent of the older and now unacceptable moralising and reforming treatise.

Museums have always acted as sites of social transformation and social responsibility. According to theorist Tony Bennett (1995; 1998), the history of the modern museum is that of instilling dominant moral codes of conduct, values, and reforming behaviours. Working alongside other institutions of symbolic, coercive, political and economic power such as the penitentiary, the police, church, state, education system and the media, museums were established for the delivery of moralising and reforming discourses. All this raises interesting questions. Are the contemporary discourses of social responsibility simply a revisionist version of the older ideal? What roles do museums perform as moralising and reforming spaces in contemporary society? And how do audiences imagine museum roles and the shifting foundations of museum authority and legitimacy?

The induction of contentious and divisive topics such as 'hot' contemporary issues, political topics, and revisionist histories into museum exhibitions offers an ideal starting point to examine the contemporary roles of history and science museums as moral and reforming technologies. Such topics raise moral dilemmas, questions about what is right and wrong and circumscribe acceptable forms of behaviour. They engage the self in ways other topics may not, as they speak to values, beliefs and moral position.

In this paper I draw on the findings from the international research project 'Exhibitions as Contested Sites – the roles of museums in contemporary societies' to examine these questions. This project examined the relevance, plausibility and practical operation of history and science museums as civic centres for the engagement of contentious topics. To do this, we used a range of research methods including literature review, quantitative and qualitative research. Quantitative research involved telephone surveys in Sydney and Canberra drawing on a sample of 500 respondents. We asked participants to respond to 16 topics that Australians might consider controversial and to a series of role positioning statements using a five-point Likert scale (strongly agree to strongly disagree). Exit surveys were conducted at the Australian Museum and the Australian War Memorial with 197 and 248 visitors respectively, and at three Canadian Museums with a total of 286 visitors. Here participants were asked to respond to a range of questions comparable to the phone survey. Surveys were then analysed using SPSS (data analysis software) to compare data sets. The qualitative phase of the research involved five visitor focus groups (40 participants) in Sydney and Canberra. Here we discussed the findings of our quantitative research, museum visiting experiences, functions and activities, and notions of authority, expertise, trust and censorship.

We also investigated the perspectives of museum staff, stakeholders and media using an online survey, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with over 100 participants in 26 institutions in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, USA and UK. Participants were asked to identify topics that might be considered controversial for their institution and country in order to capture current thinking about museum roles and emerging controversies. Other questions related to museums and social responsibility, authority, expertise and censorship, controversies and their impact on institutional functioning, as well as successful programming and funding arrangements. In comparing geo-political, social, cultural and institutional contexts we were able to illuminate the multifarious challenges, limitations and opportunities that institutions face in presenting contentious subjects. Our research revealed a diversity of opinions about museums as sites for cultural politics, characterized broadly by an apolitical/political divide.

Apoliticality

Opinions about whether museums have a responsibility to represent contentious topics are founded on the belief that museums are apolitical. For those that saw museums as having such a role (60 per cent in phone surveys in Sydney and Canberra) maintaining an apolitical position was imperative to securing institutional legitimacy and trust (Market Attitude Research Services 2002a; Market Attitude Research Services 2002b). Stronger support, around 80 per cent, was given to this apolitical position by visitors sampled through exit surveys at the Australian Museum (AM), the Australian War Memorial (AWM), the Museum of Anthropology (MoA), Vancouver, the Canadian War Museum (CWM), Ottawa, and the Musée d'Art (MA), Montreal. So how is apoliticality perceived as an exhibitory strategy and what are the implications for institutional power, legitimacy and trust?

According to 90 per cent of focus group participants, apoliticality is linked to a museum's information credibility factor. Participants identified museums as places that present trusted and reliable information; 'the museum has always been factual – we can rely on it...' (Sydney Adults 30-49). Knowledge claims are factual because of collections. As one visitor commented, 'If history is facts why cloud it with viewpoints... Museums have artefacts why cloud it with opinions' (Exit Survey CWM). Similarly, exhibitions are perceived as based on quality and rigorous scholarship. Typical responses included, '...museums have a reputation like university professors, you expect to show things which have the backing of scientific method. It is not just propaganda, it's a well thought out established viewpoint' (Sydney Adults 18-30).

Apoliticality is predicated on the belief that a museum's voice is impartial and value neutral. As one participant stated, 'In principle museums should deal with something confrontational in a non-judgmental way... it's not there to manipulate, its simply there to say here it is' (Sydney Adults 30-49). Impartiality refers to maintaining a non-judgemental position where the ability for audiences to self-regulate has primacy. For one participant this meant that '...museums give a non-biased view and allow people to form their own opinions' (Exit Survey CWM). And impartiality is about emotional distance; 'Museums need to be distanced from public opinion. To base museum information on public opinion can be a false premise...' (Sydney Adults 50-64).

In Bennett's (1998) analysis of nineteenth-century museums as pedagogical civilizing institutions, the normative belief was that museums should be accessible to all citizens. This idealized notion of access for all is linked to concepts of the museum as apolitical and as a space where all values are equal; 'Museums should present for the largest number of people and not for certain categories' (Canberra Adults 50-64). In taking a political stance on hot topics, some respondents feared that this right of access might be violated. For example, one visitor commented, 'with an exhibition about asylum

seekers ...people might use it to push their own political angle...you've got to be very careful' (Sydney Adults 18-30).

Apoliticality refers to museums as safe, physically protected, calm and civil spaces for people to interact; 'Museums are a protected environment you can't get anywhere else for dealing with contentious topics' (Exit Survey MoA). Safeness also relates to values and beliefs; 'The challenge for museums is to put something forward that holds up to all our values and truths' (Sydney Adults 30-49). Legitimacy is a key factor in this. Legitimacy can be undermined when museums present unsubstantiated opinions and openly engage in a partisan debate; 'As long as you present the facts, both sides but as soon as anything political comes up, someone's extreme view, it won't be a success' (Canberra Adults 50-64).

Clearly, many audiences have a utopian view of museums as democratic spaces, although this is changing. For some, the apolitical-political divide is becoming less certain. This confusion is sustained by a longing for objectivity on one hand and the realisation that topics and their interpretation are contingent and subjective. As one participant stated, 'when you talk about these things emotion comes into it and you may not be able to present the facts. Depending on who is presenting the exhibition... they put their own point of view so you have to be careful' (Canberra Adults 50-64). [Still others, while acknowledging that objectivity no longer exists, fear museums may suffer from government interference. One focus group participant commented, 'The information provided on a topic is going to depend on what government is in and who is funding an exhibit' (Sydney Adults 30-49). The blurring of the boundaries between an apolitical and political stance and the potential for social manipulation for many is summed up by one focus group participant, 'My concern with a lot of topics is that there is tremendous scope for social engineering...' (Sydney Adults 30-49).

Apoliticality is about the power museums hold as cultural authorities, and underscores institutional legitimacy. Many staff expressed the need to uphold this belief otherwise institutional power and credibility is relinquished. As one member of staff noted, 'we should be inciting debate not championing single points of view. If we become too politicized we lose our power and perhaps our funding' (Staff Web Survey). The belief in apoliticality and in particular aperspectual objectivity is shared widely; 'This museum should be a place of neutrality, the places for contestation in western societies are academia' (Staff, national museum USA). Apoliticality is synonymous with Elaine Gurian's observation that 'museums are safe places for the exploration of unsafe ideas' (Gurian 1995: 33).

Politicality

Our research suggests that many history and science museums, when engaging contentious subjects, are inextricably political, acting as moralising technologies for stakeholder values. According to Bennett (1995) the work of museums as moral technologies in the nineteenth century operated from within government, culture and an economic rationale to influence and modify thoughts and behaviours. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1977: 30, 101, 110) refers to this process of civilising espoused by Colquhoun as a new technology of power over the mind where pedagogy becomes one of the tools of ideology.

Since recreation is necessary to Civilised Society, all Public Exhibitions should be rendered subservient to improvement of morals, and to the means of infusing into the mind a love of the Constitution, and a reverence and respect for the Laws...' (Colquhoun 1806: 347-8 quoted in Bennett 1995: 19).

Antonio Gramsci (1971: 261) extends moral hegemony in civil society to the bourgeoisie as they possess the economic power to recruit for moral projects. Moreover, Gramsci (1971) views moral hegemony as descending flows of cultural and ideological power

countervailed from below. Foucault (1977) and Bennett (1995; 1998) on the other hand, direct their attention to institutional properties and mechanisms that frame and facilitate moral projects. Our research reveals that the moralising apparatus in contemporary museums is governmental and class, but also extends beyond to include the moral projects of a range of diverse social groups. It engages ideological struggles from above and below and technologies such as exhibitions for framing public morality.

Robert Janes (2005: 12), in his introduction to *Looking Reality in the Eye: Museums and Social Responsibility*, states that museums are among the most free and creative work environments and, unlike the public sector, are not forced to administer unpopular government policy. Our research refutes this and suggests that moral projects are still mobilised by government to serve political agendas and secure economic advantage. As one UK director explained, the political and moral values of conservative boards and politicians is one of the major defining acts of moral leadership for extending political power although this varies. This reflects Bennett's interpretation of 'governmentality' and Gramsci's ruling class recruitment for moral projects.

...museum boards and politicians, often funders, tend to be conservatives... active in politics and socially upwardly mobile. They support their own values in their work to get approval. Everything comes down to values, will, determination, money and politics.

The relationship between morality, political agendas, capitalist aspirations and exhibition content is clearly expressed in the case of one state museum in Canada. Here, economic and political drivers were instrumental in recruiting the museum to support neo-liberal government policy on the clear felling of forests.

The current government is very pro-business, right-wing. It is now possible in Ontario to clear thousands of hectares of forests but the museum can't talk about that because we get so much money from the province. In the environmental community this is a very serious issue (Staff, Canadian state museum).

Moral projects may also be counter-governmental, at times leading to undesirable consequences. The Aboriginal Gallery at the National Museum of Australia, in presenting revisionist histories of frontier conflict and massacres of Aborigines over neo-liberal discourses of European settlement, was deemed at odds with the conservative right and the Howard government's political position (Edwards 2003; McDonald 2003). This controversy sparked a review that re-cast exhibitions on the nation's post-1788 history in a more celebratory tone and resulted in the loss of the Director's job (Attwood 2003; National Museum of Australia 2003; McDonald 2003).

The Museum was planning a major Aboriginal Gallery for a nation...public figures had been claiming that Aboriginal people had received preferential treatment... Massacres had been exaggerated or even invented. There was no stolen generation, and if Aboriginal children had been removed from their families, it was for their own good (management, national museum, Australia).

The induction and support of moral projects by museums beyond government and class into the broader ideological and cultural apparatus of civil society is highlighted by the 2003 *Treasures of Palestine* exhibition at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney. Under pressure from the Jewish lobby, this travelling exhibition promoted Jewish political aspirations in the Middle East by the removal of controversial photos and documentaries showing Palestinian dispossession and life under Israeli military occupation (ABC Online 2003: 1; Legislative Council General Purpose Standing Committee 2003). The exhibition was transformed into a celebration of Palestinian art and culture (Abdul-Nabi 2003). Similarly, the diversity of moral projects serving social groups can originate from below. This was highlighted by the exhibition

Anita and Beyond at the Penrith Regional Gallery on the rape and murder of Anita Cobby in 1986 (Loxley 2002; 2003). Framed according to the sensibilities of the family, the exhibition of artworks, video and personal memorabilia was used as an introduction to a discussion of the repercussions of the rape and murder for the community rather than the violence itself or the forensics surrounding the murder.

The selection of moral projects for image marketing and to legitimize the aspirations of particular social groups above those of audiences is illustrated with the Australian War Memorial. Here the values of ex-service personnel prevail and are mobilized to legitimize and affirm their service while excluding discussions of the moral and political implications of conflicts even though 80 per cent of audiences surveyed wanted these topics discussed (Exit Survey AWM).

Our mission statement is very loaded and says to commemorate the sacrifice of Australians in war. The word sacrifice...can be moulded to exclude controversial views that might upset some stake-holders...We are not a war museum so you can't easily look at the political motives why Australians went to war. We are in danger of hiding the truth... (Staff AWM).

The promotion of a moral project to serve diverse ideological, political, economic and social ends, from the support of government agendas, to the protection and legitimisation of the values and experiences of stakeholders was evident with the exhibition: *September 11: Bearing Witness to History* at the National Museum of American History. Changes were made by the curatorial team to the number of people who died in the aircraft that hit the Pentagon from 64 to 59 innocent people. This reflected the views of victim's families, affirmed the Bush administration's discourses of the US as the innocent victim, while legitimising the War on Terror.

We had a controversial issue about the number of people who died in the airplane that hit the Pentagon, we said 64 and the families said they did not want the terrorists counted in that number, we changed it to 59 innocent people. They wanted to remember what happened to Americans...not to give terrorists credence...The American public did not want us to explain to them why Islamic fundamentalists hate Americans – not on September 11th ...it's not a role that the museum could play at this moment (Staff, national museum USA).

Here the process of exhibition development acted as a vehicle for mapping out the discursive territory, a moral universal wherein moral boundaries and values were drawn that had purchase in the collective consciousness of the time. In this sense the National Museum of American History helped set the agenda for discussion as part of the wider cultural and moral conversation around terrorism. That is, not as a definable and closed text but as a series of symbolic hooks on which to make anxieties around terrorism and loss representable. This included the mapping of discourses around American supremacy and innocence and the construction of a moral angle to stake out the limits of transgression in which to formulate collective solutions, the War on Terror and for the cultural policing of Muslims as potential terrorists.

Many institutions, when exhibiting contentious subjects, act as moral guides as part of a broader process of social moralization, to valorise, affirm and represent moral values that structure social life in certain ways. Exhibitions act as tools for constructing and justifying a moral system in a tangible form by constructing a field of visibility through the choice of topics, content including material objects, the moral angle and censorship decisions. For example, *Treasures of Palestine* constructed a visible field that omitted reference to the Israeli occupation and the plight of Palestinians.

The confluence of contentious topics and moral projects suggests a broadening of moral authority to a range of social groups beyond government and class reflecting

institutional commitments and pressures to engage diversity and the complex interests museums mediate. Institutions surveyed however, still tend to define moral projects around contentious topics as lessons according to one dominant moral universal. Moral projects are selected according to the perceived and actual symbolic, social, economic, political and cultural power of specific individuals or groups and the persuasiveness and functionality of a particular moral angle. For example Anita Cobby, the murdered Blacktown nurse and beauty queen, accrued symbolic power by being posthumously sanctified as a symbol for all victims of sexual violence (Taylor 2004). The exhibition used Anita's story as a symbolic hook to set a moral agenda around sexual violence, to validate and reassert accepted values and act as a reflexive agent for a discussion about its negative impact in the community.

Overwhelmingly, the economic, political power and interests of the ruling classes as argued by Foucault (1977) and Bennett (1998) in the nineteenth century still tends to be the defining logic behind the representation of a particular moral universal. These groups have the clout to pursue their own interests and to intervene in exhibition development. The National Museum of Australia example shows how a clash of moralities and the political objectives of government can coalesce to re-define moral projects for exhibitions. Recommendations for the revision of the Horizons gallery sought to re-define its content to project Australian society's 'sense of itself' according to a celebratory vision detailing exemplary individual, group and institutional achievements (National Museum of Australia 2003: 6).

Therefore, it is useful to conceptualise institutional cultures as moralising, as a hierarchical, complex and dispersed web of values held by heterogeneous actors. These are moralising spaces that are created, opened, closed and reshaped according to the topics and the values institutions select to achieve particular political, social, economic and cultural ends.

Audiences and the legitimisation of a moral paradigm

Surprisingly many audiences sanctioned the strategic deployment of power by museums to define moral projects. Although many focus group participants expressed the importance of museums to be non-judgmental, to show both sides, there are some topics like terrorism and drug use that were deemed unworthy of a balanced consideration (Ferguson 2006). In these cases, presenting the 'other side' was seen as legitimizing certain 'extremist' values and 'deviant' behaviours; for example, in relation to the 9/11 perpetrators or drug use. One participant stated, 'presenting these topics could give legitimacy to something that has no legitimacy' (Sydney Adults 50-64).

Clearly topics with a certain moral force, those symptomatic of particular social problems or which threaten a dominant moral universal, are deemed problematic. This suggests that museums have a role as moral protector. That is, in setting moral standards, offering moral certainty, in providing lessons that protect the dominant morality against violation and avoiding moral panic by curating topics according to a certain moral angle. Here safeness refers to the protection of moral standards against deviation.

Reforming agendas, a moral and responsible society

Museum reforming agendas are integral to the moral apparatus. In analysing nineteenth-century reformatories Foucault (1977: 126, 238-9) argues that these institutions acted as mechanisms directed to the future, to prevent crime and transform the criminal in habits, behaviour, morality and conscience. Likewise, in engaging contentious topics in museums, the concept of reform is centred around morality and the deployment of tools such as exhibitions for providing moral direction in reforming future conduct.

Bennett (1998: 67) argues that modern systems of rule are distinguished from their predecessors in terms of the degree and kind of interest they display in the conditions

of life of the population. Contemporaneously, this interest according to Bennett (1998) and Witcomb (2003) has shifted from instilling a sense of morality and good behaviour to fostering an acceptance of cultural diversity. Our research suggests that the acceptance of cultural diversity is just one reforming agenda, but rather broadly embraces the idea of improving society by producing moral and responsible citizens. And reform, 'the betterment of society', is replaced by the terms social change and social responsibility. According to a UK museum director, in discussing edgy topics, museums have a role in defining, creating and promoting the views, values and activities of an open and tolerant society:

To institute change on a broad scale we need to work with other organizations, who are working towards a more tolerant, open society that's honest about difficult issues. Museums can provide the backdrop for raising these issues. We have to think about what sort of society a museum aspires to help create.

Reform, like moral direction, often operates from within government - as Bennett argued of the nineteenth century. For example, the social inclusion agenda under New Labour mobilized museums as reformers in response to government discourses of access and equity (Department of Culture, Media and Sport 2000). An older notion of civic reform within government based on a pedagogical format still prevails, especially for national museums. Curators at the Smithsonian are under pressure to produce exhibitions that portray national history in a celebratory tone and produce a shared national identity that excludes controversy and difference, affirms civic pride and forms better citizens.

There is a notion that we need national civic lessons and that the Smithsonian Institution is one of the few national institutions administering this... we are a place where you understand American history in such a way that makes you a better citizen and creates a shared ideal that excludes controversy and difference (Staff, national museum USA).

Reforming projects like moral ones are diverse and can be initiated from below. The Lower East Side Tenement Museum for example, a museum of urban immigrant history in New York, uses history to help create a more equitable society by challenging prejudices, promoting tolerance and encouraging humanitarian and democratic values (Abram 2005: 19-42).

Defining and promoting what a better, more open, morally responsible society might be depends on the topic, an institution's mission and the values and interests promoted. Reform, the cultural shaping of the population, is generally predicated on a moral universal and can encompass a range of objectives from political affirmation and persuasion, image marketing to civilising rituals and self improvement projects.

Audiences, reform and technologies of self

Prevailing discourses on museums as reformers (Bennett 1995; 1998) engage with the concept of institutions as technologies of power where the power of the state submits individuals to strong ideological manipulation. Foucault's (1988) technologies of self, is less well known and offers a useful tool for understanding the complex relationships between museums, audiences and reforming agendas. Technologies of self acknowledge an individual's ability to transform themselves, their conduct and way of being, through their own means or with the help of others (Foucault 1988: 18). Overwhelmingly, audiences in focus group discussions share a similar interest in reforming self and society. Here it is useful to embrace Foucault's later definition of 'governmentality' to understand the link between the strategic deployment of museum power and how this works with technologies of self in co-determining reform.

For around 25 per cent of focus group participants, reform equates with historical reflexivity. Here museums act as sites for information on contentious topics and events in the historical record. Audiences use this symbolic content to look and learn about the past by engaging their capacities for inner reflection to evaluate their own values and beliefs; 'Museums are reflective, there is...an opportunity to reflect on the past' (Sydney Adults 30-49). This is similar to Thompson's (1995: 42-3) analysis of media content. He argues that audiences appropriate messages and make them their own in a process of self formation and self understanding.

Current hot topics were seen as too political, emotionally charged, value laden and opinion based having the potential to undermine a museum's reputation as 'impartial', 'safe', 'apolitical' and 'trustworthy' information sources.

...a museum is not there to foster discussion on contemporary issues. Contemporary issues become historical issues with the passage of time, a lot of these are very political, very contemporary and to me they just don't fall into the gambit of a museum (Canberra Adults 50-64).

This reflective reasoning is based on the idea that topics become safer with time, when opinions and views have been carefully considered and a body of scholarly information has time to emerge.

Many staff endorsed historical reflexivity, providing shape and form to what people remember, as a reforming agenda where collections and scholarly information act as impartial tools for reflection; 'We have a role retrospectively, ...by giving a context and shape to what they remember...everyone remembers market scenes in Sarajevo but they are not quite sure who was being killed and who was killing and who was fighting' (Sydney Adults 50-64).

Likewise, many staff reiterated the relationship between historical reflexivity and the emergence of scholarly information in constructing reliable information; 'A certain amount of time should pass for reflecting on events so we have time to shift through the scholarship' (Staff, national museum Australia). Clearly a tension emerges between audience views of the impartiality of information and the role of staff in shaping reforming projects.

For the majority, 55 per cent, contextualization acts as a reforming tool. Applied to current as well as historical topics and events, this approach enables audiences to understand their origin, complexities and likely ramifications; 'with September 11 and the Bali bombing for example, a museum's role is to build up a historical picture of where these events originated...' (Canberra Adults 50-64).

Symbolic content is deployed for locating, constructing and reforming self, understanding others, in reshaping stocks of knowledge, testing feelings and attitudes, re-evaluating moral positions and expanding horizons of experience; 'It is important to get some reference to where you sit in the scheme of things - where is my place in all this' (Canberra Adults 50-64). It resonates with diagnostic reporting by deconstructing problems, analysing causes and in portraying the context in which the story is taking place (Tester 2001: 39). Several staff expressed a similar diagnostic treatise of past-present-future options and opinions; 'Historical museums can pick topics that can allow you to understand why you have come to the place that you are now in the dialogue...' (Staff, history museum USA).

For around 20 per cent, reforming agendas also involve the active re-shaping of individuals' behaviour to bring about change. That is, by opening people's minds to alternative views on a given topic and offering suggestions on how audiences might become active to bring about change; 'If museums are to continue to exist as people friendly institutions, they have to have programs to educate people about the history of

terrorism, why it happens and the role of civil society to combat terrorism...' (Canberra Adults 50-64). Here symbolic content acts with self to interrogate choices, motivations and frame action. As one participant stated, 'I like the idea of an exhibition being empowering – in presenting good ideas and how do you turn that into action' (Sydney Adults 18-30).

For staff, reform also involved inciting audiences to perform a morally right action; 'Its not simply preserving the past or doing the housekeeping well. It's also what we think of the future, what are the options, are there things we should be doing that might be ameliorating damage, and improving the situations' (Director, national museum UK).

The instrumental nature of curatorial endeavour in influencing thoughts and action around contentious topics is expressed by one participant, 'Museums are sanctuaries from the raging world. We also need to offer the other alternatives, the other perspectives, ideas in order to get them better prepared to go out there with a better perspective' (Staff, state history museum USA). All this resonates with a public service institutional model. It positions museums as uniquely qualified to judge what matters in society, what audiences need to know in order to act as good citizens and make informed choices, and in defining the morality on which action is based.

Conclusion

Clearly reform and the relationships between museums and audiences require a new account of self as a symbolic project that is self-acting, more open-ended and reflexive than Bennett's concept of self as a product of an external system of power. According to 80 per cent of audiences surveyed institutions are seen as having the power to challenge people's ways of thinking and shift an individual's point of view. The means of constituting and reforming self, however, refers to a greater ability to self regulate, evaluate and process a range of information on their own terms; 'museums should not express an opinion, they should provide good information and arguments...We have our own opinions' (Sydney Adults 30-49). For 90 per cent, this also refers to offering opportunities to express their opinion, to engage with other visitors, the institution and to leave evidence of debates in exhibitions; 'with more discussion, people would be better informed and therefore form their own opinions' (Market Attitude Services 2002: 20). And for 70 per cent, strategies involve techniques that facilitate critical thinking and personal resolution. That is, providing carefully selected and authoritative scholarly information, multiple perspectives and opinions on given subjects, source transparency, interpretive guidance and the framing of content to show how judgements are formed and decisions made.

To this end, audiences avail themselves of museums as systems of expertise to construct autobiographical narratives such as self identity, moral position, attitudes, values and action around certain topics and events. Museum information is utilized along with a stock of resources such as face to face dialogue and alternative perspectives to construct these narratives; 'everything that you read is somebody's opinion. The best you can do is try and get as many different opinions as you can and try and formulate your own...' (Sydney Adults 18-30). Here museums' symbolic power is mobilized to persuade and confront, to influence actions and beliefs and to cultivate trust and shape the course of actions. Thompson (1995: 215) calls this the paradox of reflexivity/individualism and dependency/ institutionalisation. And as Foucault puts it, the technologies of domination, in this instance museums as spaces for structuring and shaping of a field of action, have recourse to the processes in which the individual acts upon themselves

Our research suggests that museums have a strong moralising and reforming task to perform as a system of social, cultural and self development. On one hand audiences want open debate and a range of perspectives, but on the other require museums to

set moral standards and reforming agendas that can be used to understand and evaluate societal conduct. The belief in many institutions as apolitical or aperspectual is located within institutional practices and civic purposes that are rooted in the pedagogic genre. These practices have served as a useful tool to disguise institutional politicality, frame institutional legitimacy and trust with audiences and to orchestrate consent for moralising and reforming practices. As symbolic forms, museums have been successful in sustaining a belief in legitimacy, although this is changing.

Historian Dipesh Chakrabarty (2002) argues that admitting emotion and embodied experiences into the museum's repertoire offers an antidote to analytic pedagogic knowledge and reasoning, and has the potential to democratize museums. However, our research reveals that the majority do not want a radical democracy. Rather, a pedagogic and authoritative system of relations is still longed for when engaging contentious topics countervailed by new technologies for self regulation, reflexivity and self consciousness.

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Endnotes

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