Temple of the Muses
Beyond the Secular Museum

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Abstract

Around the world, indigenous peoples are reclaiming the museums established by colonial powers, and matters of spirit are taking their rightful place. Museums in Western Europe, on the other hand, exhibit two parallel streams: religion, faith and belief are accepted when somehow exotic or 'other', but when they apply to 'us', the dead hand of secularism descends. Yet museums really are temples of culture, available for inspiration to everyone. Cathedrals and churches once had that role, but in a multicultural society, they are not the universal institutions they once were.

Public museums are one of the key institutions, at the heart of our communities, able to provide that level of *inclusive* cultural inspiration, epiphany and exultation, but they fail by running scared of anything beyond scientific materialism, thereby missing half of life. The contrast between post-colonial museums and those in the former colonial powers is striking.

We can learn a great deal from world developments, and by going back to first principles. What, then, would a museum, prepared to be a true temple of the muses, be like?

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Acknowledgements

This is a development of a paper presented to the Museum Ethnographers Group Conference, *Faith & Community: Interpreting Beliefs in the Modern Museum*, in Manchester, in April 2016. It is the result of discussions with and inspiration from many people in the museums world, both in the UK and elsewhere, over the last five years, too many to list here. Some do appear in the reference list in relation to specifics, and, as always, any errors of fact or interpretation are mine, not theirs.

1 Introduction

This paper begins with the changes that have come from a greater focus on the needs, wishes and beliefs of indigenous peoples in former colonial museums. These changes have generally included a renewed respect for sacredness, for magic, and for the numinosity of artefacts.

'Colonial museums' is here used to mean both museums in countries once subject to a colonial European power and museums in the homelands of the colonial powers with collections derived from the colonised countries and peoples. The 'colonial museum' is of course a broad spectrum, depending on the nature of colonisation and the relative proportions of populations with indigenous or European backgrounds today. It must also not be forgotten that Europe itself has indigenous peoples reclaiming their culture, particularly the Sami.

The focus then shifts to the situation in Western museums with respect to the numinous and the sacred, and finds significant differences in attitudes. There is a key factor that seems to be at play. Over recent decades, a philosophy called the 'New Museology' has taken root. It seeks to move away from a perceived paternalistic and elitist museum *modus operandi*, to a people-centred paradigm. This appears to have worked where there was an imposed, colonial museum ethos, no longer applicable in the modern age. In post-colonial situations, the New Museology has allowed community-focused museums to flourish around the world, and in very many cases the sacred has been restored to its rightful place at the heart of life.

The application of the New Museology in the West, however, has focused on people in a purely socio-political sense and rejected traditional museum roles that are deemed no longer applicable. Yet, these in fact are the core roles that people expect museums to play and indeed need to play. Religion has been seen as part of the paternalistic problem and a strong scientific-materialist ethos has developed. That ethos, though, is just as paternalistic in its own way, is afraid of the sacred, rejects the numinous, and twists the idea of the museum as temple to belittle the pursuit of knowledge. Curators, conservators and, indeed, collections themselves, play second fiddle to safe social activism in a managerialised sector.

However, Western museums can rediscover their traditional roles and adopt a vision of community centrality that goes beyond the secular. Museums *are* temples of culture, available to all in a multi-cultural, multi-faith society.

It is commonly assumed that in order to be available to everyone, museums have to be strictly secular. This is a mistake as, by embracing secularism, museums abandon much of what makes them relevant to people. Visitors do not become secular people, leaving their spiritual selves at the door.

Nor do objects. Artefacts of religion and magic, sacred, numinous objects, do not automatically lose their associations on entry into the museum, even if insensitive marking, handling, storage or display can desecrate them. If museums are to recognize their role as temples of culture, then the treatment of objects as well as of people must embrace their non-physical needs. The paper considers the practical implications of such a vision, from the perspective of the Ickeny Collection, where the numinous is recognised and there is a presumption of its presence in all objects in the collection.

In her book, *Liberating Cultures*, Christina Kreps (2003) talks of non-Eurocentric museologies, indeed diverse museologies around the world. Can we apply non-Eurocentric

museology to European museums, and can other museologies co-exist here? Can we see beyond the New Museology that seems to have rejected the core roles of museums and searches desperately for a new one? Can we, in essence, have faith in the museum as the inspirational heart of our society?

2 Reclamation of colonial museums

Around the world, indigenous peoples have slowly reclaimed the museums established by colonial occupying powers and made the very concept of the museum their own. In doing so, they have frequently integrated local traditions, as is well documented (e.g. Karp and Lavine, 1991; Herle, 1997; Simpson, 2001; Kreps, 2003; Hendry, 2005; Paine, 2013).

The processes are varied and inevitably not universal. Indeed, some governments still seek to impose a Eurocentric museum model, as is described by Kreps (2003) for Indonesian Borneo. However, many excellent examples exist of locally defined ways of working, which fully integrate the spiritual, magical or *numinous* properties of objects, and traditional sacred activities and beliefs, with modern museum practice. A few examples are given here.

In the USA, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act has had a profound influence on curatorial practice. Sensitivity to native requirements for object care is now standard and increasing numbers of museum professionals are drawn from First Nations (Flynn and Hull-Walski, 2001; Kreps, 2003; Sullivan *et al.*, 2004).

As Indian colonial museums have been reclaimed by Indian peoples, they have become living centres: "granaries" and "mothers", repositories of culture and "dancing peacocks" spreading inspiration with their treasures (Wolf & Wolf, 2015). The rejuvenation is a spiritual as well as a secular phenomenon. This has manifested, for example, as a bronze "idol" of Mumbai's tutelary Goddess at the Dr. Bhau Daji Lad, Mumbai City Museum, and as animist reverence for culturally symbolic artefacts at the National Museum of Mankind, Bhopal (Mehta, 2014; Wolf & Wolf, 2015).

At the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum, Honolulu, the presence of Hawaiian deities and especially the traditional guardian spirits, *Mo'o*, are actively acknowledged. Statues of the god *Kū* held at the British Museum and at the Peabody Essex Museum (Salem, Mass., U.S.A.) are considered bridges or portals between cultures and places. Artefacts have the *mana* and worldview of their makers embodied in them and have become portals to that worldview. As Noelle Kahanu, from the Bishop Museum and University of Hawai'i, said to an audience of museum professionals (Kahanu, 2014): "You are all contemporary *Mo'o*, guarding portals to another time and place."

At the same Symposium, Steven Hooper (2014) discussed the *Pacific Encounters* exhibition at the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts from 2006. He emphasised that: "Objects are agents, activated beings. So what is the nature of an object and what is a person?" Reflection on that question leads to another: is there a difference between an object-centred and a people-centred museum?

Sometimes respect can be a negative factor, however. There is, for instance, a reluctance to deal with non-Christian ritual items at the Fiji Museum on the part of its Christian management (Hooper, 2014; Jacobs, 2014).

Furthermore, there are many examples of object-based indigenous traditions for passing living culture between generations, that are actually very close to the Western concept of museums, but with very important differences.

The Maori meeting house (*whare whakairo*), with its associated ceremonial site or temple, the *marae*, maintains collections of cultural artefacts. It is a living museum; everything in it tells stories. There are, however, two key differences to Western museums (Mead, 1983).

1) The objects are used and are not expected to last forever, but are replaced, keeping craft and spiritual traditions alive.

2) The collections are not public, traditionally open only to people from the village and to invited guests, and are hedged around with *tapu* restrictions. Simpson (2001) makes much of this second distinction, yet it resonates with the private nature of one of the key roots of the modern Western museum, the Renaissance *Wunderkammer* (see Appendix Three).

Similar comparisons can be made elsewhere too. Similar functions are performed by custom houses in the Solomon Islands (Mead, 1983), men's houses in Papua New Guinea, teaching houses in the pre-colonial Cook Islands, and various shrines, granaries and stores in West Africa (Kreps, 2003).

These experiences contrast strongly with the Western secular perspective, demonstrating the validity of other ways of relating to each other, to artefacts, and to our world, whether the global environment or the local sacred place. Looking out from the conventional British world of museum 'metrics' and local authority 'service level agreements', it can feel like a breath of fresh air to attend a gathering of people with different approaches from around the world, or read accounts such as that of Carol O'Biso's life-changing experience with Maori *taonga* (O'Biso, 1987).

The term 'colonial museum' necessarily includes those in the colonial homelands that collected and display the artefacts from colonised lands and peoples. However, modern museum ethnographic departments are, in general, a world apart from the origins of many of their collections (Harris and O'Hanlon, 2013). Cultural sensitivity, contemporary collecting and flexible co-operation with 'source communities' are now central to their work (Herle, 1994, 1997; Peers and Brown, 2003; Paine, 2013). Similarly, museums with significant ethnographic collections are increasingly likely to have policies in place to ensure that staff follow guidelines agreed with source communities (e.g. National Museums Scotland, 2014). This is entirely in keeping with the International Council of Museums Code of Ethics (2013), which states that collections of material of sacred significance…

2.5 *"…should be acquired only if they can be housed securely and cared for respectfully. This must be accomplished in a manner consistent with professional standards and the interests and beliefs of members of the community, ethnic or religious groups from which the objects originated ..."*

Such material also…

4.3 *"… must be displayed in a manner consistent with professional standards and … taking into account the interests and beliefs of members of the community, ethnic or religious groups from whom the objects originated. They must be presented with great tact and respect for the feelings of human dignity held by all people."*

The picture is not perfect, of course. Ethnographic displays in smaller, non-specialist museums have difficulty balancing a collection gathered in a transitional, colonial time with

contemporary source communities, and frequently ignore the negative aspects of colonialism. Some military museums still display objects looted from China in the Opium Wars as trophies (Tythacott, 2015). And the claims to universality and its benefits by such institutions as the British Museum have been questioned (O'Neill, 2004).

Where then does this leave the broader museum sector in the West?

3 Western attitudes to the sacred in museums

In Western museums, there is often a reluctance to acknowledge the numinosity of objects or of places, even where the site is itself an ancient temple (such as with *Aquae Sulis*, the Roman Baths complex in Bath). Where specific sacred items *are* acknowledged, the context frequently remains historic rather than allowing for a contemporary relevance (Hendry, 2005), save for rare cases of museums of living faiths, such as the St. Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art in Glasgow (Lovelace *et al.*, 1995). The Musée du quai Branly in Paris is very open about deliberately treating objects as decontextualised artefacts (Paine, 2013), and some collections, historically, have done this for avowedly partisan reasons, as with the old missionary museums. The legacy of the disparaging use of the word 'fetish', to describe an object that 'primitive people worshipped' for its 'supposed' magical powers or indwelling spirit, still spits its venom on modern interpretation.

It is commonplace for museums to distance themselves from any hint – or perhaps taint – of the non-material realms. "Scientific thinking and seemingly fact-based impartiality are held in such high status in museums that objects of any religion are not to be venerated when on display," as Elaine Gurian (2004: 91) puts it. This is especially true in social history and science museums, although not universally so. The Wellcome Collection takes a more nuanced view.

Archaeology can be extremely secular, as well as being dismissive of any interpretations, however well founded, that do not come from within the profession. There is a very real tension in the archaeological community and some archaeologists are more open to what is disparagingly known as the 'fringe'.

Art and ethnographic departments are, today, often more open. There are notable exceptions (as at quai Branly) and they do have their own biases. In art departments, particularly, there is a general Judeo-Christian outlook (perhaps not surprising given most of their collections), and even here the dominant paradigm is art history, so that it is the aesthetics of religious art (or indeed ethnographic artefacts) that are given priority (e.g. Davis, 1997; Sjögren, 2012). However, some have seen evidence of a counter-movement to the secularism agenda in such departments (Gurian, 2004; Paine, 2013).

Our most venerable museums are founded on Enlightenment principles, which despite the esoteric interests of several famous figures of that era, such as Isaac Newton and Elias Ashmole, prioritised a materialist rationality over magic and mysticism. Later, the evolutionarily progressive assumptions of Victorian science permeated Western museums as well (Bennett, 2004). Magic and mythology are therefore often misunderstood in museums, although there are notable exceptions. Happily, the exceptions are becoming more common as art departments recognise that myth and magic appeal more than art historical discourse, archaeology acknowledges the world beyond the material, ethnographic collections find a new respect for their source communities, and social historians acknowledge the value of folk beliefs.

Excellent work has been done in this area, working with faith and other 'source' communities. Recent British cases in point include the ritually opened and closed *Pacific Encounters* exhibition at the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts in Norwich in 2006 (Hooper, 2006; 2009; Dupreez, 2009; Jessop, 2009; Nuku, 2009), or the recreation of ritual, meditative space at the Wellcome Collection's *Tibet's Secret Temple* exhibition in winter 2015/16 (Garde, 2016).

The exhibition, *The Art of Faith*, held at Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery in 2010 (Moore and Thøfner, 2010), brought together communities, art and artefacts celebrating 3500 years of religious history in Norfolk by dint of curatorial insistence and led to a landmark, inter-disciplinary conference (Heslop *et al.*, 2012). The 2012 exhibition, *Hajj*, at the British Museum (Porter, 2012), was itself structured as a ritual, pilgrimage experience, and smaller temporary exhibitions bring out the contemporary relevance of the museum's more historical collections, as with *From temple to home: celebrating Ganesha* in 2014 or *Containing the divine: a sculpture of the Pacific god A'a* in 2016 (see Adams *et al.*, 2016).

More permanent or regular initiatives include Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery's annual Buddha Day (Paine, 2013), the Hindu shrine at Brighton Museum (Parker, 2004), or the display of Chinese Buddhist material at Liverpool Museum, set up in 2005 deliberately to emulate a temple, which in turn was the way Chinese Buddhists responded to it (Tythacott, 2011).

Such enlightened attitudes go back a century at the Newark Museum (New Jersey, USA), where the religious collections are meant to be used (Price, 2004; Paine, 2013). There are even places of worship and other ritual spaces *in* some museums worldwide, such as the Christian church at the Canadian Museum of Civilization and the Maori *marae* at *Te Papa*, National Museum of New Zealand (Gurian, 2004).

One British museum which takes matters of ritual and magical power very seriously is the Museum of Witchcraft and Magic in Boscastle, Cornwall, where for instance curses are displayed opposite apotropaic (evil-averting) devices deliberately. On the other hand, at the Roman Baths in Bath, open acknowledgement of the presiding goddess(es), Sulis Minerva, is not encouraged, but coins, cast into the pools and the prosaically named, yet especially numinous Overflow, are a traditional source of revenue!

Folk magic collections in most British museums that have them were collected as superstitions and are often still treated as such – as examples of the beliefs of our 'unenlightened' forebears. In fact, those beliefs could be as much the interpretations of the collectors as actual popular beliefs (Cadbury, 2012).

Fortunately, greater sensitivity is emerging with folk beliefs and the Museum of British Folklore is a positive influence here. Examples include the Clarke collection of charms and amulets in Scarborough Museums and the similar, though larger, Lovett collections. Charms made from fragments of the shells that fell on the town were included in the 2014 *Remember Scarborough!* exhibition at Scarborough Art Gallery, commemorating the bombardment of the town from the sea in 1914. The Wellcome Collection's part of the Lovett collection was used as an exhibition-cum-installation by the late Felicity Powell in 2011: *A Charmed Life: The Solace of Objects*. The Pitt Rivers Museum's (2010) generally excellent introductory guide to amulets and charms presents them in a refreshingly matter-of-fact way (but still uses the past tense more than is strictly necessary!). This all reflects the way that folklore studies has also become less paternalistic and inward-looking.

In their introduction to the book *The Materiality of Magic* (Houlbrook and Armitage, 2015), the editors note: "The fear that one will not be 'taken seriously' evidently motivates scholars to avoid certain terminology, and words like *supernatural* and *magic* send up red flags declaring a subject to be 'unworthy' or 'frivolous'." (p. 2) This book itself represents a step towards a more objective view of the subject, and it is interesting that I for one have met with

greater acceptance of magic and Paganism amongst museum people than in the general population!

In general, then, whilst there is a spectrum of presentation, the approach in Western European museums is still largely one of parallel streams: faith, belief and the numinous are accepted when somehow exotic or 'other', but shied away from when it applies to 'us'. Sensitive displays are usually about, or for, a defined ethnic community. Chinese Buddhists in Liverpool, for instance, are an ethnic minority or perhaps visitors. The focus is on the minority, the 'other', rarely on mainstream society. This is not to attack the work that is done, but to point out that the elephant in the room remains unaddressed.

The 'other' comes in three, overlapping forms: distance in space, distance in culture and distance in time.

Space and Culture

Recognition of the impacts of spatial and cultural difference are not new, whether resulting in enthusiasm for the exotic or paternalistic attitudes towards those who live far away or follow different 'lifeways'. Even the St. Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art was set up around core displays of the six 'main faiths' in preference to an overall comparative approach (Lovelace *et al.*, 1995), thereby looking to the safety of numbers rather than embracing diversity as such. Spatial and cultural 'otherness' are fairly well understood in ethnographic discourse and it is heartening to see institutions like the British Museum stepping beyond its permanent galleries, of historic collections of world religious art and artefacts, to stage temporary exhibitions bringing out their contemporary relevance. However, time is a distance more familiar in the archaeological sphere.

Time

As much as Western museums and academia colonised the rest of the world, so too did they colonise the past (Bennett, 2004) – and here there are, in general, no direct living representatives of the colonised.

There are no living 'source communities' for most European archaeological collections, so that interpretations from outside the archaeological profession tend to be scorned. World-wide, there are 'affirmative' approaches to the history of minorities, battles over interpretation being won by indigenous peoples, and a slow recognition that ancient human remains should be treated with the same respect as modern ones (Skeates, 2000; Kreps, 2003; Greenfield, 2007; Wallis, 2012). Human remains from former colonies are now being repatriated, but those from our own distant past are still jealously guarded. Sacredness is beginning to be recognised for indigenous peoples in far-flung parts of the world, but when it comes to Europe, the admission that some people regard certain ancient (and indeed modern) places and artefacts as sacred, *today*, comes somewhat grudgingly.

In 1999, after a Bronze-Age timber ring was revealed by erosion on the North Norfolk coast the paternalism of the archaeological profession became evident, with locals finding common cause with Pagans against an 'incomer' assumption that the timbers had to be excavated and removed (Wood, 2002; Watson, 2005; Wallis, 2012). Interestingly, however, a second timber ring nearby remained unexcavated and unpublicised, and was allowed slowly to be taken by the sea.

In a different form of paternalism, museums of Classical antiquity, in particular, tend to the style of art galleries. Objects are often chosen for display in 'white cubes' for their visual impact and interpretation focuses on their art historical relevance (Sjögren, 2012).

Another bias is the assumption, still evident in interpretation and display, of a natural progression from paganism to Christianity (or one of the other 'world religions' outside the regions of Christian colonisation). This is reflected in the use of the dating conventions of BC/AD rather than BCE/CE, as if the latter were reserved for instances where only people, cultures and places outside the (assumed) Christian realm are in question.

Another temporal 'otherness' we erect is to divide history into named periods, which, by our loose use of language, suggest that the 'Victorians' or the 'Edwardians' were somehow different to us, or indeed to each other. The entire population did not change with the change of monarch, and nor indeed did much of the population of 'Roman' Britain come from central Italy!

Similarly, the notion that most of Britain was 'ethnically cleansed' by hordes of invading 'Anglo-Saxons' has long been considered out-dated academically. Yet museum interpretation, especially that aimed at younger people, still resorts all too often to the simplistic language of the old-fashioned idea, using the phrase 'the Anglo-Saxons' to mean the whole population of that period, those people who migrated from the north-western continent, and the material culture that resulted, as if there was no distinction in meaning. And whole books have been written on the loose use of the term 'Celtic'… (see for instance Cunliffe and Koch, 2010).

Museums are necessarily children of their founding principles, of course, and, as they get older, children may rebel against their parents, thinking they exist in a bubble of modernity. But the bubble is burst by adulthood and maturity comes from a synthesis of the old and the new.

4 The Museum as Temple

Modern museums evolved out of the collections formed by individuals and organisations: cabinets of curiosities, scientific collections or trophies of conquest. (See Appendix Three for a discussion of the value of the Renaissance collecting legacy today.) Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European explorers, missionaries, traders and adventurers brought back exotic objects from their travels, whether as items for study (such as Charles Darwin's specimens), souvenirs, or trophies of religious conversion. So, many artefacts from Polynesia reached the British Museum directly from explorers, and others initially formed the collections of the museums of the London and Methodist Missionary Societies, whose purpose was the raising of funds for further Christianisation of the peoples of the Pacific (Hooper, 2006).

Out of this diversity of collecting, at home and abroad, emerged the modern museum, a concept that has spread around the world, often as a result of that same European colonisation. Museums are places where collections and exhibitions provide a link with the past and other cultures, where everyone can learn from displays, where scholars can study real objects, and where social outreach and inclusion can operate. They are treasure-houses, guarding objects of cultural, research and monetary value for future generations. They are important tourist attractions and bring kudos to their localities, however like tourism generally, they are seen politically as nice things to have, but inessential.

We live in an age in which the internet provides instant access to seemingly anything – including objects from museum collections that never find space in exhibitions – and in which multifarious TV channels offer documentaries that wash the viewer with sound-bites of cultural knowledge or speculation. We have gone far beyond the democratization of art and cultural heritage through low-cost book-printing that André Malraux dubbed the "Imaginary Museum" or "Museum Without Walls" (Malraux, 1965).

In this situation, one may ask whether the traditional museum still has a function. However, from a deeper perspective, the utilitarian justifications do not actually do justice to the museum's real rôle: *as a temple of culture*.

A comparison between Western museums and temples is not new. Established religious institutions have always collected treasure, whether ancient Greek temples (Shaya, 2005) or the Renaissance Vatican, as part of their interpretative role, for self-aggrandisement or, indeed, the display of imperial loot (Davis, 1997). The comparison comes up with a certain regularity in the Western media, especially in relation to art museum architecture, whether positively (e.g. Forago, 2015) or negatively (e.g. Rocco, 2013). Benjamin Ives Gilman likened art museums positively to temples in 1918 and Carol Duncan (1995) produced a seminal treatise on the art gallery being a temple, with its structure encouraging ritualized behaviour concomitant with the learning and promulgation of civilized social norms. To Sharon Macdonald (2005), museums are ritual spaces dedicated to the mediation of rational knowledge and magic or enchantment. Macleod *et al.* (2012) do not use the word, but effectively describe the museum as a temple:

"At its heart is a vision of the museum as theatre, as dramatic ritual, as a telling of the world in miniature, and as a site where space and place[-]making connect with human perception, imagination and memory" (p. xxi).

There is however a strong voice within the museum sector that rejects any connection with temples or higher wisdom. Whilst the possibility that some museums used the architectural image of the Classical temple to overawe and even indoctrinate was suspected by Victorian commentators (Merriman, 1989), the sheer negativity, associated with a comparison of museums with temples in Western museological discourse, perhaps goes back to a misreading of Benjamin Ives Gilman (1918), of Boston (USA) Museum of Fine Arts. He wrote specifically: "A museum of science is in essence a school; a museum of art in essence a temple" (p. 81). However, leaving aside the fact that museums specifically of science are relatively few, that many art galleries are integrated into wider museums and that modern museums increasingly mix fine art and other artefacts in displays in order to cross-fertilize understanding, Gilman actually continued: "Minerva presides over the one [science], sacred to the reason; Apollo over the other [art], sacred to the imagination" (p. 81). So, for Gilman, the "school" still has its sacred muse!

The common rejection of the comparison with temples may therefore have one of its roots in a reverse snobbery about the art museum, where it is perceived, in our post-Socialist, social-inclusionist age, only the better-off are welcome. The same attitude can be seen in relation to the original cabinets of curiosity, which were the province of the rich, as if it is possible to view one aspect of history in isolation from its context. The Renaissance was not democratic; we can hardly expect the *Wunderkammer* to have been anachronistic! The sixteenth-century museum was a research centre, tool of good governance, a design and innovation centre, and a theatre of wisdom (Meadow, 2013), a veritable temple of the muses, in the service of emperors, princes, dukes and in particular the emergent mercantile class. In a democratic age, these same functions apply, but it is the general public (and the specialist interest groups within it) that is the focus of that service. But the service remains the same. (See Appendix Three.)

Since the 1970s, the museological perception of temples has also been skewed by Duncan Cameron's (1972) polarisation of 'temple' and 'forum' – the one a place for devotion, the other for debate, at any rate in ancient Rome. This problematisation still colours the debate (see for instance Rocco, 2013; West, 2004; Karp and Levine, 1991, p. 3). Cameron was perhaps prefigured by Gilman (1923), who, in the second edition of his book, preferred the term 'basilica' to 'temple', as the former, he felt, was a place for people to come together. There is in fact no conflict between temple and forum (except for dyed-in-the-wool Romanists, perhaps). After all, in one of the West's core mythologies, the young Jesus is found in the Temple debating with the elders.

An ingrained legacy of this perception of the temple is that it is about dogma and privileged knowledge, and not a place for debate. This seems to result from a misunderstanding of the role of the temple, whether in the ancient or modern world, and perhaps a sense of it being somehow in opposition to the Protestant Christian idea of a church as purely a place of assembly for worship and therefore a place defined by its congregation.

The temple is far more than a place of assembly for popular worship. It is a place of learning, healing and cultural identity, and a conduit for Divine Harmony and Wisdom, however that may be defined: Holy Spirit, Grace, *Sophia*, *Dharma*, *Awen*, *Ma'at*, or the place where the upwelling power of the land meets the down-pouring of spiritual essence from On High. Here, in the direct presence of the god(s), or of our multifarious muses, is the power that enlivens our society, inspires our cultures, and makes the wonder and greatness of our humanity

manifest. The temple is where we make real the "big lies", of mercy, justice, duty, *etc.* (Pratchett, 1996).

One does not go to a temple just to 'worship' in a Christian sense, but to be in the presence of the god(s), to be seen by the god(s), receive healing (spiritual, psychological, emotional or physical), ask a boon, fulfil an oath, learn from the priests or oracle, feel more part of one's culture, and assert one's identity. The temple, like museum, is a special place designed to help epiphanies occur (Skolnick, 2012).

Modern secular society, it is imagined, was first liberated by Christianity from the hegemony of the Jewish Temple, and then from Roman Catholic mystical, sensual and priest-led religion by Protestant and Non-Conformist intellectual dependence on the printed Word. Then, in a final, glorious skin-shedding, we emerged on the shining heights of secular materialism. Religion is still tolerable, as a private thing, but please don't talk about it! We therefore reject temples as places controlled by priests and expect the holy places to be democratically managed, and then we reject the holy itself. Perhaps the art gallery is uncomfortably like the Church that we think we have escaped from and yet perhaps to which we are secretly drawn back.

As adults, we cannot return to the womb, but that does not mean that we reject all it stands for. On the contrary, we do our best to build our own, new places of growth and harmony, whether in the home, at the workplace or on the political stage. Similarly, acknowledging a culturally sacred role for the museum is not a step backwards, some childish and useless return to the womb. It is on the contrary a step forward, to re-embrace the totality of human existence and provide a new space where people can come to learn, feel connected and be inspired, regardless of their background in our multicultural societies, without having to accept a specific dogma or belief.

The Comparison

The temple is not like the modern conception of a church, simply a place of worship for the masses. It may well have areas for devotees to congregate, for communal activities and for festivals, but the core of the temple, the *temenos*, is the conduit of divine power, and here lies the temple's true function. It serves as a spiritual power station, a place where the creative impulse is harnessed for the benefit of the human world. And the original *musæum*, the Greek temple of the Muses, was "the temple of knowledge, research and performance, whose purpose was to make manifest the Divine Harmony on Earth" (Pennick and Field, 2004). Interestingly, just as ancient temples began as (and many remained) sacred groves amongst trees or papyrus stands, whose legacy lived on in the architecture of classical temple, Christian cathedral and imperial museum, so the *musæum* itself could originally be anything from the Library of Alexandria to a rural grotto – it was the immanence of the Muses that mattered (Findlen, 1989).

The temples of ancient Egypt are perhaps the best exemplars of this rôle of temples as sustainers of the ancient world, simply because we know as much as we do about them. They are where *Ma'at* (creative or divine harmony) was manifest. *Ma'at* as a goddess could be said to embody the roles of all the Greek Muses, a personification of all that is important and worth striving for in human culture. In many ways, medieval Christian monasteries were the successors to the pre-Christian temples, more so than the churches, as they contained a

working community furthering the Christian life, a spiritual power station, as well as the publicly accessible church. Hindu and Buddhist temples perform similar functions today.

Richard Davis (1997) discusses the effect of placing a Hindu deity image in an art gallery, where hushed attention and respect is "quasi-religious", if leading to a more intellectual transcendence of the parochial into an aesthetic realm, compared to the religious transcendence in the image's original temple. Both are consecrated spaces: "Both set aside areas for highly valued cultural activities, where esteemed objects hold court … for human viewers, and both engender certain ways of looking and responding on the part of their audiences." (p. 25.)

To generalize, **the temple** is where a deity is especially immanent, where He or She can be invoked constantly, and be indwelling in a shrine or statue. It is staffed by dedicated priests and priestesses, all with different functions. Some care for the sacred objects, wash the statues, open and close shrine doors at set times of day, and bring offerings. Others honour the deity in song and with music, entertain guests and interpret the deity's symbols and stories, or impart oracular wisdom derived from a long-term communion with the deity through the sacred place and objects. At festival times, the statue, in which the deity is immanent, is taken out of its closely guarded *temenos* and paraded around the land in the sight of the populace, even visiting other temples.

The museum is where cultural history is especially immanent, and where it is embodied in collections and exhibits. It is staffed by dedicated professionals, all with different functions. Some curate the precious collections or clean and conserve the objects. Some honour the collections with special displays, welcome visitors or impart knowledge and wisdom derived from a long-term communion with the collections and their stories. The collections, in which culture is immanent, are paraded in the sight of the populace, either as permanent or temporary exhibitions, or as travelling exhibitions that visit other museums. This may be a somewhat idealised picture, but then temples also have their imperfections.

Like temples, key museums are often located at geomantically significant places. Norwich's and Colchester's main museums are at their castles (and Colchester's castle is built on the remains of the Roman temple). The Museum of London is in the heart of the City, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery in the city's civic and mercantile core, and of course the British, Victoria & Albert, Natural History, and Science Museums are in London, capital city and one-time seat of Empire. From these focal points – symbolic centres of the world – the Divine Harmony or *Ma'at* can spread out to benefit the whole of the human sphere.

In Britain, we are not seeing anything like the threats to national heritage suffered in recent years in Iraq, Syria or Egypt, but nevertheless museums are seen by many as a luxury that has to be a lower priority than 'front-line services'. Museums are actually a vital part of our culture and economy – not simply as tourist attractions that bring spending in to an area, nor as easy field-trip destinations for schools, but as the very heart of our being. It is not that the British economy gives ill-afforded subsidies to the nation's museums, but rather that without the great national museums and galleries, and their regional, local and specialist counterparts up and down the country, there is no Britain.

Colonial Museums

In addition to the Euro-centric museum discourse, there is also a very real sense that museums established in colonial eras are *temples to colonialism* and the debate, at least in the USA and Sub-Saharan Africa, where there may be less indigenous resonance with the temple in the Eurasian sense, has been skewed by this factor. Despite such issues of terminology, there is plentiful evidence worldwide of people treating their reclaimed museums as temples in a positive fashion, as shrines and places of sanctity, respectful community repositories for objects of sacred and magical numinosity, as outlined at the beginning of this paper.

5 The New Museology

The 'New Museology' has been identified as the democratizing and activist factor that has rejuvenated museums in non-European contexts (Herle, 1997; Kreps, 2003). This makes sense in as much as the New Museology differs from 'traditional' Western practice in the reclamation of colonial museums, and because museums set up by colonial powers necessarily appropriated their collections and knowledge about them, being pretenders to the latter.

"Whereas museums were, in the past, perceived as élitist institutions which served a narrow, ethnically defined audience, today many institutions are developing closer working relationships with the communities whose cultures they interpret, and are proving that museums have a relevant and functional role to play in the contemporary issues which face indigenous and other ethnic groups." (Simpson, 2001: 247)

Yet, this New Museology is itself a Western construct, and one which, as applied in the West, has actually tended to *devalue* objects *and* people in favour of populism and safe causes, especially 'social inclusion' (whilst less concerned about the sustainability of the society into which people are to be included). The devaluation of objects has gone hand in hand with the devaluation of the numinous and the sacred, whereas in non-Western contexts, the New Museology has if anything bolstered respect for the numinous.

In the West, the New Museology has been interpreted politically and fails in two ways.

1. It maintains the traditional concentration of power in the establishment (including the museum as a corporate entity) by setting the boundaries of discourse: general scientific materialism with a strong socio-economic agenda, and social activism constrained within politically safe areas. Frank Furedi (2004: 115) may be being a little harsh, but his point is not without substance: "It is now never clear whether museums are masquerading as drop-in centres, or community centres pretending to be museums."

2. The differences between the museum 'us' and the community 'them' are minor and largely economic and socio-political rather than truly cultural (hence point 1, above). Thus the New Museology can be a useful foil to a *colonial* ethos where the 'old' museum represented a colonial appropriation of indigenous culture, but is counter-productive in the modern-day former colonial powers themselves. Whereas curators in post-colonial contexts have been at the forefront of indigenous involvement, British curators have never been as remote as they are painted.

In the West, the 'old' museology is not an objective, clear colonial relic, but a nebulous paper tiger, selectively formed by those who, originally in the 1970s and 1980s, stood against it (*contra* Vergo, 1989). The centrality of collections, curators, buildings and the public sense of museums as cultural authorities (*i.e.* everything that made a museum a museum) became suspect (McCall and Gray, 2014). The very essence of a museum was rejected because some aspects needed updating. The fact that most museums still have collections and buildings, and that the public still wants them to be cultural authorities (BritainThinks, 2013), whilst they have kept up with scholarly and social developments (if perhaps with a time lag), suggests that a more nuanced approach was needed. For example, Bennett (1988) and West (1988) deconstructed the top-down, bucolic vision of the industrial past at (respectively) Beamish and Blist's Hill (Ironbridge) open-air museums. Their analyses have to be tempered by the

fact that more recent post-industrial social history museums, with full community involvement in their development, can be just as rose-tinted, as at the Time and Tide Museum of Great Yarmouth Life (Watson *et al.*, 2012).

Cameron (1972) begins his influential paper with the claim that museums have an identity crisis, not knowing what they are. This chimera has become an established fact in the minds of many in today's museum sector, such that bald statements, like "…in the past the museum tended to be exclusive and elitist" (Ross, 2004: 1), can go unremarked. Fuelled since 1997 by the New Labour Government's desire for the cultural sector to stimulate (undefined) social change (Appleton, 2001; McCall and Gray, 2014), the impact of the New Museology has been the development of a Blairite, Philistine managerialism that prioritises 'metrics' and devalues knowledge, convinced that museums have no inherent purpose and desperate to find one in the performance of other agencies' jobs.

A hallmark of the new managerialism is the rejection of the traditional role of curators as the visionary and intellectual hub of the museum, turning them into administrators rather than actually allowing them to be people-focused (McCall and Gray, 2014). It thus feels able to denigrate curators as being like "High Priests in Temples" (Taylor, 2013; then Director of the Museums Association), assuming widespread agreement.

Simpson (2001) presents an apparently worrying picture (p. 113):

"Museums in Britain are, for example, frequently perceived by the public as a casual leisure facility, and by museum curatorial staff as a research facility for their own and other researchers' work, with the public services and education being secondary. The educational element is all too frequently centred upon schools, and left almost entirely in the hands of the education staff."

Whilst her last sentence is all too true, it is not the curators who are to blame. As McCall and Gray (2014) point out, curators frequently feel they have been pushed down in museum hierarchies and there are real tensions as managements favour education departments. The focus of education on schools and the control of this function by education staff is a result of managerial bias in favour of schools-based programming (encouraged by cross-subsidy from local authority education departments) and against research and collections care. The pertinent perception, on the part of some of the public, is that museums are only for children, which is reinforced enthusiastically by management, education and marketing staff alike, whereas the perception of museums being casual leisure facilities is more prevalent amongst management than the public. Knowledge is devalued and children's entertainment is prioritised.

Ross (2004) bemoans only partial progress in the New Museological enterprise. Two major progressive factors are at work for Ross: a transformation of intellectuals from 'legislators' (or definers of knowledge) to 'interpreters', and museums being thrust into a market economy. However, his assumptions that there is more freedom of thought now than in the Enlightenment and that changes in museum presentation are due to changes in the role of the intellectual are highly questionable. Changes in museum interpretation usually represent them *catching up* with scholarly thinking. What has changed in the last forty years is that knowledge has become a commodity. We have gone from a meritocracy of scholars (imperfect perhaps, but then the imperfections, especially the closed shop of academia against independent researchers, remain) to a situation where culture and knowledge are mediated by

the market, which is not even democratic! Even Ross has to admit that a new public of 'consumers' cannot democratize representation in the museum.

Paine (2013: 40) sets things in perspective: "Museum people have a tendency to believe that their generation is the first to throw off the dusty elitism of 'old' museums, and to discover a new public-oriented inclusive museum service – the 'new museology'. In fact, such public orientation has been the driving force for very many museums for at least two hundred years, and most 'modern' approaches were pioneered generations ago."

Priesthood

Why should curators *not* be like priests in temples? After all, Sorensen (1989) finds this a useful analogy, not a problem: "So the historic theme park/museum curators and the heritage centre administrators are all in some ways representative of a new secular priesthood," (p. 66). A priest is a person who helps people make contact with things outside of mundane experience, a facilitator of inspiration and guide to the brink of epiphany. A temple, to many people in our multicultural society, is the very heart of the community, a spiritual and cultural powerhouse for society. The negative view of priests and temples is a peculiarly post-Christian, socialist-atheist perspective. It could be said to have been conceived in the early Church's attempt to distance itself from the (in many ways very similar) institutions in Judaism and Roman Paganism, gestated through the post-Reformation anti-episcopalian movements and a 20th-century Socialist rejection of knowledge for knowledge's sake, to be born as a post-modern materialist and Philistine worship of the average.

In this scenario, to aspire to anything more than can be described by socio-economic 'metrics', and to foster individual progress beyond a basic understanding is considered elitist and anti-social. Those, like Strong (1983), Appleton (2001) and Furedi (2004), who object are themselves lambasted with arguments from partial reading, tainting by association, and *ad hominem* attacks (e.g. Porter, 1983; O'Neill, 2002; Barr, 2005). A focus on the average has never brought and can never bring cultural progress or intellectual development. It can only lead to conformism and social and intellectual stagnation. In the words of Canadian lyricist Neil Peart: "Everybody got to elevate from the norm" (Peart, 1981).

The rejection of spiritual and non-material things, along with the negative association of curators with priests, by a scientific-materialist establishment is actually highly reminiscent of the rejection of ritualistic church liturgy, and the church hierarchy, by the 'Godly' Protestants of 16th and 17th century England (see for instance Reynolds, 2005.)

The role of priest had necessarily to change as the ability to read Christianity's holy book for oneself spread further through the population, and certainly there was corruption, in the new Anglican as well as the old Catholic hierarchy. However, the insistence on the primacy of the thoroughly exoteric, literary and literal exegesis of the religion via the printed word ignored the real role of priests as gatekeepers to religion. The role of gatekeeper is not so much about barring the gate as about showing people where it is and how to pass through it.

Similarly the current rejection of the knowledgeable curator sees only their potential for closing the gate, not their main role in facilitating access. By dispensing with the gatekeeper, we lose sight of the gate itself and all that lies beyond it.

There is always the need to ensure that the gateways are accessible to everyone, always the need for iconoclasts to rebel against the established order, which tends to a comfortable hierarchy, and democratise religion. But the rebellion becomes the new establishment and it is vital to ensure that the gate itself is not forgotten amidst the politics.

So, Christianity was born in part as a rebellion against a comfortable Judaism that collaborated with Rome, which in turn had appeared as a revolutionary monotheism rebelling against the corruption involved in the inseparability of religion and state as much as against polytheism (Assmann, 2008). However, the Church set up its own hierarchies and became the supreme collaborator with Rome, blind to the fact that it had actually closed the gateway and that those branded 'heretics' were merely reopening it.

The Reformation repeated the pattern, as the Protestants became the new orthodoxy and suppressed the more radical groups and, later, the Non-Conformists. Most Non-Conformist churches have themselves in turn become conservative.

In museums, any paternalistic attitude, in which curators could sit in ivory towers and never meet the public, disappeared many years ago. Yet the New Museological establishment still riles against this non-existent foe, denying the value of knowledge, research and learning, as if they were tainted with some anti-democratic contagion. This is an attitude that is at best inverted snobbery, a recombination of the Victorian dichotomy between work and learning on the one hand, and entertainment on the other (Greenhalgh, 1989), so that learning becomes a dubious leisure activity, set against the serious work of entertainment. At worst, it is a dictatorship of the ignorant. And this new establishment maintains its own barriers. Whilst it vilifies curators as gate-closers, it restricts access itself. Everyone suffers as the core role of museums, using collections to inspire people, is forgotten.

Those who say that curators should not be like high priests in temples, indeed that museums should not be like temples at all, mean, at root, that curators and museums should not be aloof and off-putting. However, it is the hapless, hard-pressed curator who is the paper tiger for this attack. Other aspects of museum management, increasingly separated from the curator, are ignored, yet are what really create a barrier between museums and their communities.

Ways in which museums can be off-putting include poor promotion or promotion focused on children's entertainment, which loses many potential visitors. In particular, the fact that it is possible to come and look at reserve collections is usually poorly articulated (or indeed resourced).

Museums can be physically aloof: behind high fences, railings or walls, on castle mounds, in peripheral parks, *etc.*; you have to make a real effort to get in. Similarly, charging for access to collections, photography or indeed admission can exclude. There is of course a trade-off here, in that making an effort, or indeed paying a fee, is part of approaching something special. People tend to appreciate things they pay for and making a special effort is normal in the approach to a shrine or temple.

Once in, the visible staff are key to the impression given to a visitor. These are almost always the front-of-house and security staff. If security is unsubtle, it makes people uncomfortable. If the front-of-house staff are officious uniforms behind a desk or superficial 'hosts' trained to regurgitate scripts, rather than be welcoming and engaging, then people do not feel welcome.

In the galleries themselves, the visitor experience can be marred by patronising displays and interpretation, whether dumbed-down, biased, too limited or minimalist. Labels that are difficult to find, have little useful on them when found, or indeed non-existent, as in some art museums, cause dissatisfaction. Sometimes labels are even simply wrong, which does nothing for the museum's credibility. Jargonised language, whether that of academic silos or, increasingly, the ambiguous corporate language of business, leads to confusion and dissatisfaction. Use a language enough and one starts to think in those terms as well!

There is also a need to find a happy medium, according to resources, between clearly scruffy presentation that says "we don't really care" and slick, over-designed presentation that says "we paid a lot of money to marketing designers".

People expect to be able to see the advertised galleries. Spaces turned over to children's play activities or hired events during normal opening hours may bring in revenue in the short term, but undermine the future audience. Similarly, inconvenient opening times, such as closing at four p.m. or not opening on Saturdays, lead people to consider other attractions.

Intellectual property rights are perhaps the issue least acknowledged as being a problem in public museums in particular. The commonest examples here are the prohibition of (non-intrusive and non-damaging) photography and its publication, and the unreasonable use of copyright as an excuse to restrict photography or the supply of texts for follow-up off the premises, where copyright law does not demand the restriction or where what is in the museum's copyright is being held back from the museum's own public.

Museums tend to present themselves as being fiercely protective of the collections and knowledge that they hold in trust for their communities (whether local, source or research communities); indeed museums usually treat these collections and knowledge as exclusively their – not their communities' – property, and give the impression that they know all there is to know about them. But it is not the curator, but the museum as a corporate entity that restricts access and sets itself apart.

The problem is not that curators are like "High Priests in Temples", but rather that the "High Priests" of museums are now more likely to be managers than curators.

6 Having Faith in Museums

The museum is a temple of culture available to all in our multicultural society, yet there is *today* a crisis of meaning in museums, a crisis developed, if not brought about by the New Museology movement.

If museums are to promote social justice, as the New Museology espouses, i.e. to be society's conscience, from where does their moral authority come? The corporate ethical stance for public museums can only come as a focus for the ethics, morality and sense of justice of their societies. The museum thereby becomes the moral centre of society, its moral compass. But how can it then go beyond the moral parameters of its society? How can it challenge society if its focus is derived from that society? How indeed can the Museums Association's (2013) 'Museums Change Lives' agenda be maintained in a democratic country with a right-of-centre government?

In order to challenge, a moral compass must derive its authority from beyond the mores of its society. In the secularized and multi-faith society of the 21st century, the West's traditional moral compass, the Christian Church, can no longer provide this service for everyone. The museum is one institution that is stepping into the breach, as in fact is demonstrated by 'Museums Change Lives'. Unlike museums, the Church had the advantage of appeal to a higher moral authority, yet the dominant ethos in museums, as set out above, is to reject any similarity with a church or temple, any connection to non-material reality. Indeed, many in the museums profession appear positively threatened by such connections.

The current dominance of the 'Museums Change Lives' and 'Happy Museums' discourse actually risks leaving behind the core role of museums, as places of inspiration, where our cultural, scientific, artistic and historical treasures are looked after for the future. It is clear from the research amongst visitors and non-visitors commissioned by the Museums Association that the public values museums for their core roles of caring for and protecting heritage, display and research, not for helping vulnerable people, social activism or even being a forum for debate (BritainThinks, 2013). Yet these findings were taken to mean that the MA had to campaign harder rather than reconsider its policy.

Reid (2004: 50) articulates the principal way in which museums change lives: '…the awesome mystery of 'the real thing' remains an exhilarating and spiritual experience for people. It is the museum's job to help such life-changing experiences happen.'

Museums are, at root, temples of the muses, and just as Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist and Pagan temples are the heart of their specific communities (as of course are their Abrahamic counterparts of churches, cathedrals, chapels, synagogues and mosques), so museums are temples of culture, largely free of sectarian ties, celebrating the whole of our diversity, and the heart of the community in our multicultural society. As cultural powerhouses, museums do not need to demonstrate direct impact on 'social issues' to justify their existence. That does not mean that museums should not engage with disadvantaged people (which is entirely consistent with being the heart of the community), simply that it is not what they do best (and indeed others may do it better) and it should not detract from their core role. The public clearly expects and wants museums to concentrate on their core roles, not diversify into doing other people's jobs for them.

In a workshop at the Third Annual SHARE Museums East Conference (Bury St. Edmunds, November 2013), someone asked whether, if we were all shipwrecked on a desert island with no hope of getting home, and having built schools and hospitals, we would build anything resembling the museum institutions for which we work. My response was that they would start as shrines, housing the memories of our homelands and those left behind, memorials to those who did not survive or who had died since our arrival, and commemoration of the people who had done great things since then. These shrines would probably be associated with those of whichever religions we had brought with us, or if the dominant perspective was secularism, they would quite probably develop into religious or quasi-religious centres, along with a developing collection reflecting our origins, our history and the new land with which we were coming to terms.

Museums dedicated to an individual, a group of people, a movement or a zeitgeist often have the feel of a shrine, at least in part of their structures. Regimental museums are clear cases in point, but a good non-military example is the dovecote at John Clare's Cottage in Helpston, Northamptonshire. This is a normal human reaction and something to be celebrated, not feared. (Although it can be gently guided, to avoid inappropriate offerings being left, such as synthetic textile clooties tied in trees, wax and cases from nightlights, or non-biodegradable items in a natural setting.)

That there is a fear of shrines is evident from certain 'archaeological' museums and heritage sites that actually include ancient places of worship (or those presumed to be). Stonehenge is perhaps the obvious case, but its rather complicated recent history, where it is difficult to disentangle genuine religious aspirations from hippy hedonism (although The National Trust seems to try its best to strike a good balance), rather obscures the arguments.

A better example is the previously mentioned case of the Roman Baths at Bath, *Aquae Sulis*. Here the natural phenomenon, on which the pre-Roman shrine and its subsequent Roman temple were established, is still active and there is still a presence, but the sanctity of the place is played down. It is run as a slick heritage attraction, with an expectation that visitors will use the audio guide. It is quite surreal watching the majority of visitors moving around in silence according to the directions on their handsets. This is not the silence of reverence that one might find in a cathedral, as people are kept from a full engagement with the place. Archaeology, as a profession, can be more paranoid of religion and sacredness than museums. The one concession to people's sense of reverence is the acceptance of coins being thrown into some of the baths, but these of course contribute to revenue!

7 Practical implications of the Museum as Temple: the Ickeny Collection perspective

When an object enters a museum collection, it changes its status. Generally, it is given a special, inviolate status (although there are exceptions, as in the occasional use of herbarium material for destructive analysis). However, the fact that it becomes a museum artefact usually removes previous contexts and attributes, to varying degrees. Whilst this phenomenon is well known, the consequences for culturally sensitive objects are rarely considered.

A number of museums, faced with demands from source communities, have begun to consider some of these issues, but normally as special cases. The Ickeny Collection (see Appendix Two), in contrast, operates with a *presumption* that objects are potentially numinous. This is a useful perspective for considering the practical implications of the vision of museums as temples of culture, that go beyond the secular and accept that neither people nor objects leave their spiritual and magical selves at the door.

These issues fall into two overlapping categories, respect for the numinous and respect for communities.

Respect for the Numinous

With respect to items of a religious or magical nature, generically *ritual* artefacts, the change in status on entry into a museum collection becomes especially important. The 'specialness' of being a museum object cannot replace the original sanctity or numinosity, which is usually the significant characteristic of a ritual object. Spirit is not a separate thing. This pantheist or animist realisation has implications for museum practice, including object handling, storage, conservation, marking, photography, display and indeed being seen at all, as well as the need in some cases for active honouring (Paine, 2013: 58-62). There are many apparently simple actions that can desecrate, pollute, sully or otherwise deconsecrate an artefact. Handling a copy of the *Qur'an* without first washing one's hands (at the very least, depending on the Islamic tradition) is considered sacrilege, for instance, as is even the public display of some items. Guidelines have to suit the collection.

Storage and handling

There can be very precise requirements for how numinous items are stored, according to the source community, with additional restrictions on handling by certain people or people in certain states (e.g. menstruation). (See: Herle, 1994; Rosoff, 1998; Flynn and Hull-Walski, 2001; Kreps, 2003; Paine, 2013.) It can be difficult to know details of other cultures' requirements for storage, especially in a small museum with limited numbers of relevant items, which emphasises the importance of networks like the Museum Ethnographers Group.

In the Ickeny Collection we have items that have spiritual life and should not be contained (see below) and others that are powerful, indeed magically potentially dangerous if *not* contained. Depending on the item, careful wrapping and avoiding 'being seen' by the object may be enough; in other cases more substantial physical and magical containment may be necessary. Each item is assessed on its own merits by a magical practitioner.

Containment versus conservation issues

There seems not to be a simple answer to this dichotomy. It is well documented that American First Nations, in particular, stress that their sacred objects need to be allowed to breath (not be wrapped in plastic nor placed in anoxic atmospheres against pests; maybe not frozen (as this may suffocate, kill or offend spirits or ancestors); certainly not fumigated with chemicals) and need to be recharged - ceremonially (Rosoff, 1998; Flynn and Hull-Walski, 2001; Kreps, 2003). Some research into indigenous preservation techniques has been done (Nicklin, 1983; Flynn & Hull-Walski, 2001) and, at the Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, a collection of Nepalese Tamu shaman's items was not frozen, to avoid offending the Ancestors, and was placed in quarantine with insect traps before going into storage (Herle, 1994).

The power of an object can be reduced or even 'switched off' by placement in a display case (Grimes, 1990; Simpson, 2001). A careful balance has to be maintained with security and environmental control. The impact of placement behind glass or perspex does vary between traditions. Whilst for intellectual Hindus, *darśan* (seeing and being seen by a deity in an image) is arguably still possible in a case (Gamberi, 2014), and Chinese Buddhists treated the Buddhism display (in cases) at Liverpool Museum as a temple, which it was deliberately designed to emulate (Tythacott, 2011), others object that the souls of culturally symbolic objects are submerged and dampened by the glass (Shyam, 2015) or that objects regarded as alive would die (Hendry, 2005, p. 49), as they need to breath and be recharged (Kreps, 2003). At the Sainsbury Research Unit's 25th Anniversary Symposium in 2014, several people, of varying backgrounds, agreed that the 'power' coming from the British Museum's statue of the Hawaiian god *Kū* was massively diminished when in a case.

At the 1986 exhibition, *The Great Eastern Temple*, of Buddhist art from the Tadai-ji monastery, at the Art Institute of Chicago, monks blessed and chanted in front of a statue of the Thousand Armed Kannon that was therefore displayed in the open, not in a case, even though the spirit had been temporarily removed before leaving Japan (Mino, 2004).

In the Ickeny Collection we see three trade-offs:

- Containment for display in cases versus security risks, as we do not, in general British society, have a sense of taboo around sacred objects, and in our case there are even those who might deliberately seek to harm an exhibit.
- Containment for display in cases versus dust and more limited environmental control.
- Sealed storage boxes versus fluctuating relative humidity.

We are unlikely to acquire objects where there would be an objection to freezing, although anoxic atmospheres and air-tight storage boxes will not be used for some items that are spiritually alive (not simply numinous) and need to breath.

Object marking

There are many examples of museums numbering numinous items in an insensitive manner, and even in some cases, historically, deliberately branding them with a number to attempt to remove uncomfortable associations, to reduce them to mere material artefacts and divorce them from a culture that is deemed barbarous or otherwise unwanted. One thinks of tribal masks or mummy cases with accession numbers written across their faces (for instance, Mack (1994), pl. 12, p. 30).

However, with items that have powerful, non-physical associations, *i.e.* that are numinous, numbers do not have to be written in such an obviously obtrusive fashion to detract from their numinosity and indeed desecrate them. However, standard museum marking (*i.e.* writing a number between two barrier layers) entails a long-term, if not permanent, physical earthing or denial of the numinous, by asserting the dominance of secular administration over the non-physical.

At the Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, the Nepalese Tamu shaman's artefacts mentioned above (Herle, 1994) have tie-on labels deliberately (Herle, 2015).

The Boscastle Museum of Witchcraft and Magic (MWM) is very aware of these issues, but began a programme of conventional marking and object photography following the disastrous flood of August 2004 (which, remarkably, caused less damage to the collection than expected, but inevitably led to even undamaged items being misplaced). However, having a comprehensive, well-maintained photographic record is now seen as the key expedient (Froome, 2015).

However objects are numbered, a photographic record is of course vital. Detailed photographs are invaluable in telling items apart where they lack numbers (or full numbers), but even this fails where there is more than one very similar object or where the photographer has not taken shots that show distinguishing features. To be useful, the images also have to be available either as hard copy or on a screen wherever the objects are – on display or in store.

The SPECTRUM standards (Collections Trust, 2011) for museum documentation are actually fairly flexible as regards object numbering and labelling, depending on a key interpretation (emphasised in 2, below).

1) "Ensure that a unique number is assigned to, and physically associated with all objects."

2) "Each accessioned item, or group of items, must be marked and/or labelled with its/their unique identity number in a way that is as permanent as possible *without damaging the item*."

Acceptable methods of marking and labelling do include tie-on labels, loose labels (for such items as coins) and marking packaging or supports, backed up by photography and/or weighing items. These are not considered as permanent as other methods, but with numinous items the definition of "without damaging the item" necessarily goes beyond physical damage.

In the Ickeny Collection, marking in the standard manner would present problems with numinous, ritual objects, as described above, and in some cases (for example with very small items or very fragile ones) would be practically difficult.

The presumption for the Ickeny Collection has to be that every item accessioned is numinous and that this quality would be damaged by permanent marking. Not all would be, but *the precautionary principle must apply*. There will be exceptions to this, for instance decorative art items which are in the collection purely because they have designs that relate to mythological symbolism, or items related to popular perceptions of divination, but the starting point is to assume minimal marking intervention. The primary means of associating

accession numbers with their objects in the Ickeny Collection will therefore be as follows, with duplication of labelling being an advantage.

Tie-on labels: acid-free card labels, tied on with cotton, are generally acceptable, but cannot be used on all objects, may have conservation implications, and can be obtrusive on display.

Pencil marking: writing the number on the reverse of archive material in soft pencil is acceptable, and may be applied to paper packaging that is normally associated with certain objects and potentially to other items that would in museums generally be classified as 'works on paper', although this will need to be decided on a case-by-case basis.

Container marking: items stored in individual boxes and bags have their containers marked in ink as a matter of course, and ideally with printed labels carrying an image of the object.

Inserts: where coins and similar small items are stored in trays, then acid-free card inserts, like 'coin cards', can be used.

Photography: everything will be photographed or scanned, in a manner which shows distinguishing features, and these images will be included in electronic object catalogue records, hard copy object files and, where practicable, box labels. Details of distinguishing features and imperfections are, naturally, essential in the descriptions of objects in catalogue records.

Display: when objects are on display, their numbers will be marked clearly (but unobtrusively) on stands and mounts.

Vigilance: a higher degree of vigilance is demanded when objects are removed from marked containers or places, or where tied-on labels are removed from them, for reasons of display, study, photography or conservation.

Offerings

There is a widespread need to honour sacred representations with offerings, which is often respected in post-colonial museums around the world, such as greenery for Maori *taonga* (Simpson, 2001; O'Biso, 1987) or offerings to the statues of the god *Kū* loaned by the British Museum and the Peabody Essex Museum to the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum (Kahanu, 2014). Traditional care and recharging (smudging) is facilitated at the Department of Anthropology, Smithsonian Institute, and the National Museum of the American Indian (Rosoff, 1998; Flynn and Hull-Walski, 2001), and the British Museum is considering providing a ceremonial space, although not for objects and outside, in a garden next to its new World Conservation and Exhibition Centre (Spence, 2016).

We need to accept that offerings will sometimes be left, perhaps attempt to encourage appropriate offerings, and also be *vigilant* about pests, ensuring our IPM really is *integrated* pest management – integrated with the needs of the collection and the visitor. Rather than react when people start leaving offerings, the likelihood of such behaviour should be predicted, assessed and planned for. Providing a dedicated, appropriate dish or other receptacle for offerings would be suitable in many instances and would allow pests to be spotted more readily. Offerings can be removed at discreet times when appropriate (e.g. when

plants have wilted) and preferably disposed of with respect (try to compost, for instance). Where there is a risk of offerings inappropriate to the display environment being left, the sale of appropriate items would both encourage the use of clean materials and contribute to revenue: a strategy in use at shrines worldwide!

Some offerings it may even be appropriate to add to the collection. However, the possibility of this eventuality may need to be made known by signage, in order to comply with documentation standards, but without encouraging a bias in the offerings left (some people might bring items that they think would be more likely to be accessioned).

Respect for Communities: Involvement and Sharing

Initiatives such as St. Mungo's in Glasgow or the Norwich Castle *Art of Faith* exhibition are steps towards this – a balance of curatorial co-ordination and community participation, although St. Mungo's does look at 'main faiths' rather than diversity as such (Lovelace *et al.*, 1995). However, there are issues here beyond co-curation, to do with intellectual property rights, 'secret' knowledge, and object use.

Copyright

In the Ickeny Collection a proactive approach will be taken, so that if we can, legally and ethically, provide copies of documents for researchers, *etc.*, we will, rather than imposing a blanket denial (but see the next section below). We will negotiate *joint* copyright where appropriate on materials produced in association with us and we will adopt liberal standards for licensing the use of *our* images.

'Secret' knowledge

With sacred and magical items, there are layers of appropriateness to information (see, for instance, Herle, 1994):

- open and 'public' information;
- on the record, but not on labels;
- and information not even told to the museum (secret).

This actually parallels standard museum practice of keeping some information confidential, such as object monetary values and names of some people, perhaps donors, where appropriate.

In the Ickeny Collection, as well as confidentiality in relation to donors, makers and other people associated with objects, especially given the social stigma still linked to Paganism and magical practice (although this is diminishing), there are initiatory secrets and organisational confidences that have to be respected. However, the main things that cannot be said about magical items are things that cannot be put into words.

Photography

Public museums frequently insist on controlling visitor photography, effectively claiming copyright on it, as well as being restrictive on the publication of their own images without a fee that is unaffordable except by significantly profit-making (as opposed to simply 'commercial', where money changes hands if only to cover costs) publishers and advertising

marketers. This is clearly a revenue-earning measure, but is ethically questionable for a public museum, where the collections are held in the public interest. At the Ickeny Collection, we see visitor photography as a way of spreading knowledge of the collection and will not restrict unobtrusive non-flash photography unduly, nor its respectful publication, except where the nature of the object demands it. Significant profit-making publication would require higher quality photography in any case.

Object use

A ritual object may be taken out of the museum for use in its original manner. Some dance gear at the National Museum of the American Indian is used for outside ceremonies, is carefully stabilised to allow it to be worn, and is worn by experienced dancers (Rosoff, 1998). The opposite approach is taken at the Smithsonian Department of Anthropology, however, where similar items are not allowed out due to the risk of damage or deterioration (Flynn and Hull-Walski, 2001).

Objects in Maori meeting houses are normally used for their original functions. Special arrangements were made at the Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in relation to some items from the Nepalese Tamu shaman (mentioned above), that might be wanted back for emergency use, such that they were deposited with rather than accessioned by the museum (Herle, 1994).

Norwich's civic regalia is looked after and displayed in Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery, but is taken out for civic functions regularly (a conservation concern each time for the museum). Similarly, the Castle Museum looks after church silver for the Anglican Diocese of Norfolk, some of which sometimes travels to its home church for use. Festival costumes may also rest in museums or similar institutions between festivities, such as (historically) Norwich's Snap Dragon or the Dorset Ooser (Dorchester), and cannot be kept solely as 'museum artefacts'. Indeed, such items are not normally accessioned, but entered as loan items. This kind of usage is similar in many ways to the use of steam locomotives, traction engines or machinery in railway, rural life or industrial museums, although whether civic regalia and traditional guising attire have more, or less, numinosity than a steam engine is a moot point!

Traditional usage may involve the regular remaking of sacred items, but this may not be possible today, especially with objects that are themselves very old. Items have to be *replaceable* for this policy to work. Whilst steam locomotives may be kept operational by means of continual maintenance (including replacement of parts), the same is not true of an eighteenth-century English porcelain teapot. Furthermore, some sacred and magical items are designed to be destroyed (or at last buried or allowed to decay) either after use or as part of their means of use. If they are removed their purpose is interrupted and undermined (unless their function has been made obsolete by e.g. spells failing, their purpose being long spent, or their context gone, for instance apotropaic devices no longer having a building to protect in the case of demolition). Thus, funerary items have been repatriated even though they would be allowed to decay (Flynn and Hull-Walski, 2001: 16); it is desirable to put protective items found concealed in buildings back, where they were found; and spells can be difficult to collect unless they are unsuccessful, spent (in which case, through age, they may not be recognisable as such) or are actually replicas or demonstration examples.

Additional health and safety issues apply where collections have been treated with noxious chemicals to keep them pest-free in the past (Flynn and Hull-Walski, 2001).

Ownership

Collections in non-Eurocentric museum-like situations are not necessarily in public ownership (Kreps, 2003), as is the case with those in Maori meeting houses. Yet private ownership is a barrier to Museum Accreditation in the UK.

"Should the museum 'own' an object, which in its original cultural context, has the potential of saving souls or averting disasters? If one of the museum's main functions is to preserve objects for the future, whose future is it?" (Herle, 1994: 3)

In the Ickeny Collection, the nature of the collection is such that many of the objects are personally linked to the project participants and therefore are likely to remain private until their deaths, by which time we intend to have a trust in place to which the collection can be bequeathed. In the mean time, under current rules, we have to accept that we probably cannot achieve Accreditation and therefore will not be able to benefit from its advantages.

8 Conclusions: No One True Way

It is clear that the standard, Western, Euro-centric museum practice is not the only way. It is also clear that the same applies to the New Museology.

"The recognition of indigenous curatorial practices and museum models is another step towards the decolonization and democratization of museums and museum practices. It reminds us that while museums are as diverse as the communities they represent, so too are the ways in which people care for and preserve their cultural heritage."

(Kreps, 2003: 4)

Similarly, a key aspect of the sacred is respect. Academic and other perspectives are all valid and *all* limited by lack of knowledge and by dogma. Each tradition's way of relating to objects has to be respected. Sacred truth is true in a different way to scientific truth, which means that other people's sacred truths can also be true at the same time as our own. In our modern, multicultural society, museums cannot be secular, any more than society is secular. They have to reflect a multitude of faiths and beliefs (secularism included). This requires a degree of subtlety and flexibility, and mistakes will be made, but that should not prevent us attempting the task!

Appendix One: Magic

Magic is explained in many ways. Magic is many things. The power of an effective spell is similar to that of a prayer answered. The agency is different, but the effect and objective process is comparable.

Magic has been defined in many ways. It is the making of change in accordance with will. It is the performance of an act with the intent to cause change – whether or not there is any physical connection between the act and the effect. It is causative influence beyond scientific explanation, or non-causative causation. It is meaningful coincidence or synchronicity, or things working out in accordance with a pattern not obvious to the mundane eye.

The will that patterns the change can be yours, or that of one or other deity, or of the Universe. The magician, shaman or priest may pray to, call upon, supplicate, appease or otherwise persuade – or sometimes command – a spiritual entity or subtle natural forces to perform some act or behave in a certain way. He or she may pull on the threads of the Web of Wyrd, journey to the Ancestors or the Otherworld to act out a mythopoetic reality, present suitable archetypal symbols to the subconscious mind, or set up the appropriate patterns in the memeplex we call reality to effect change.

The change can be in the outer world, or within yourself. The intent and outcome can be good or bad – magic is not black or white, but the magician's motivations may be! And the outcome can be different to that expected – good intentions can pave roads to wrong destinations.

Magic has always been part of human life. Similar patterns of folk magic exist regardless of formal religion or belief system – whether Pagan, Christian, Islamic, Buddhist or materialist agnostic. Religion itself uses magic, although it employs different terminology. All too often the magician is a saintly follower of the religion if they are a priest engaged in orthodox practices, but a 'witch' or 'evil sorcerer' if a lay practitioner, outside holy orders or using unorthodox practices.

Appendix Two: The Ickeny Collection and other collections of magical artefacts

The nature of the Ickeny collection, its numinosity, means that we have to go back to first principles in a number of areas, particularly in relation to how objects are perceived and treated. The collection also crosses traditional museum departmental boundaries. At the same time, we are embedded in our ‘source communities’ or at least some of them. The key partners come from backgrounds of Paganism, Traditional Witchcraft, Natural Magic and Ceremonial Magic, but with a root in the Christian churches, as well as being part of the wider East Anglian and British society from which much of the collection comes.

The Ickeny Collection is a teaching collection of artefacts relating to magical practice and to mythology. (See Appendix One for a description of magic.) It has been developing since the early 2000s and is now being shared more widely. The collection covers the breadth of magical practice and explores the importance of mythology, with a particular focus on the East Anglian region and an emphasis on the alchemy of craft. The name, 'Ickeny', is a Norfolk dialect word for anything awkward or troublesome, particularly horses, and is thought to derive from the name used by the people of this part of the world 2000 years ago, the Iceni. It seems an appropriate link to the place for a collection dealing with magic and mythology – topics often seen as difficult in modern culture – and the image in our logo is inspired by those on the coins of the Iceni.

There are specific collections of relevance in other museums, such as the Lovett collection of charms, amulets and talismans, split between the Wellcome Collection, Cuming Museum and Pitt Rivers Museum, or the similar Clarke collection at Scarborough or that at the Cambridge Folk Museum. Others, particularly archaeological and ethnographic museums or departments, have magical, religious and symbolic items in their collections, from specific ancient or geographically exotic contexts. None of these collections range across the breadth of magical practice and interpretation can be simplistic.

There are some specialist museums on the fringe of this area of interest as well, such as the Museum and Library of Freemasonry or the Northampton Museum Shoe Collection (with its Concealed Shoe Index). Some visitor attractions dedicated to specific legends have relevant collections too, such as the former Robin Hood Experience in Nottingham.

Most importantly, there is, of course, the Museum of Witchcraft and Magic (MWM) in Boscastle, now owned by the Museum of British Folklore. Established by Cecil Williamson in 1951 on the Isle of Man (and run in conjunction with the father of Wicca, Gerald Gardner), before moving to Cornwall in 1960, the museum is a vital repository and source of inspiration that has done sterling work in research, countering prejudices, and guardianship (especially during and after the disastrous Boscastle flood of 2004). Whilst the MWM can be seen as the ‘national’ magical museum, there is room for others, reflecting their home regions, such as the collection in Brighton of the Witchcraft tools and artefacts of the late Doreen Valiente, entrusted by her to the late John Belham-Payne and held by the Centre for Pagan Studies. With the increase in numbers professing a Pagan path, and the general and increasingly accepting fascination with things magical and mythological, the Ickeny Collection is complementary to rather than in competition with the MWM, or indeed the other, more limited collections mentioned above, and signposting as appropriate to other collections is fundamental to its approach.

Appendix Three: Museum Origins: *Wunderkammern*

The Renaissance cabinet of curiosities or *Wunderkammer* is popular as a display technique in museums once again. Museums across the country are using the idea to catch the attention of visitors and introduce a 'wow factor'. Sometimes objects that have not been displayed before are brought out as a result. But often the exercise seems to be at the expense of decent labelling and interpretation. Whilst 18th and 19th century cabinets were very often shallow, 'believe-it-or-not' entertainments, even then they actually represented the cherry-picking of display techniques.

There is an early text setting out the purposes of cabinets: Samuel Quiccheberg's *Inscriptiones* (of 1565), the first treatise on museums. However, Quiccheberg's prescriptions go beyond what to collect and how to categorise collections. As Mark Meadow shows in his introduction to the *Inscriptiones* (2013), Quiccheberg saw the collection and the *Wunderkammer* as part of a complex of facilities, from workshop to library, apothecary and chapel, reflecting those in a 16th-century nobleman's court, or indeed a medieval monastery or a modern university. The collection in the *Wunderkammer* was employed by the patron to derive knowledge and inspiration, as well as to show – and thereby show off his status – to guests.

This is important, as the interpretation of objects in the collection happened by means of what might be called guided tours by the patron or the collection's curator, rather than through labelling. The model of the cabinet of curiosities, with limited or no labels, is therefore out of context if no-one is present to interpret it for visitors.

Few museums today emulate Quiccheberg's inspirational structure. Larger ones do have workshops, for conservation and display, or maintenance at transport museums. Some museums in former industrial premises have craft workshops, as at the Coalport China Museum, or indeed the fully functioning factory at the Jackfield Tile Museum. Most have libraries, some of which are extensive archives and research centres in their own right. University museums are the closest to a direct successor.

Quiccheberg's *Inscriptiones* is not simply an historical curiosity, it is an inspiration for any modern museum that links its traditional collections-based functions with both wider research and practical creativity, whether art, experimental archaeology, technical development or craft manufacture. After all, the Victoria and Albert Museum stands in this tradition of gathering inspirational design and technological practices from around the world, for the benefit of domestic industry.

Indeed, it is interesting to look back at the 138th edition of the UNESCO journal, *Museum*, from 1983. It contains the article by Sidney Moko Mead referred to above (p. 6) on Oceanic analogues to the museum. It also contains the transcript of a famous and controversial speech by Sir Roy Strong, then Director of the V&A, calling for greater entrepreneurial dynamism on the part of museums, in a way that has actually been taken too far (Strong stated in a TV interview in 2015 that the pendulum has swung too far in that direction), yet was not acceptable to the New Museology as he questioned the automatic assumption of prioritising visits by schoolchildren and the tendency only to provide interpretation for those at the lower levels of the 'mountain of knowledge'. What is striking is that both Strong and Mead, from their very different backgrounds and perspectives, stressed the importance of maintaining craft traditions (Mead, 1983; Strong, 1983).

The standard museum gallery, with its visual and audio interpretation for the many in a democratic age, can be argued to be closer to the spirit of the 16th-century *Wunderkammer*, with its human interpreter for the few in a different age, than are most of the 'cabinets of curiosity' which have appeared in recent years. Whilst acknowledging their value in literally inspiring wonder and curiosity, today's versions do not always follow through by backing up the wonder with good information. If curiosity is not satisfied it soon turns into frustration.

Quiccheberg had a potent vision of museums as true centres of knowledge and inspiration, surrounded by the facilities that turn those into practical creativity. In his day, this was for the moneyed and powerful few. Today, when museums are open to all and seek to ‘change lives’, should we simply cherry-pick display techniques, or should we perhaps build on that full vision?

We have a vision for the Ickeny Collection, which may not be realised in our lifetimes, of it fitting in to a complex including library, archive, ritual space, herbal apothecary and craft workshops.

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