

From the Theater to the Gallery: Evaluating Popular Media in the Museum

On October 24, 2009, *Harry Potter: The Exhibition* opened at Boston's Museum of Science. The exhibit was incredibly popular throughout its four month run; the crowd for Christmas Weekend alone totaled around 30,000 visitors. As advertised, the Warner Brothers-sponsored exhibition promised a sneak peek into the creation of the film by featuring over 200 original costumes and props from the films. Despite the buzz surrounding the exhibit however, there were some in the community who questioned why a science museum would feature an exhibition about a fictional media universe that seemingly had nothing to do with science or technology. In response to a blog post advertising the opening of exhibit in the *Boston Globe*, for instance, a number of people responded with comments including: "The only science behind this is economics" and "Could a creationist or intelligent design exhibit be far behind?" (as cited in Kirshner, 2009). As a result, the paper published another article entitled "Does Harry Potter belong at Boston's Museum of Science?", which questioned the relationship between a media fantasy-based exhibit and science museums. Questions in the article included: "what does magic have to do with science?" (Kirshner, 2009).

On the one hand, the producers of the exhibit (Exhibitgroup/Giltspur and Global Experience Specialists, Inc./GES) focused on the craftsmanship involved in the creation of the objects. In press releases for the exhibit opening at the Pacific Science Center (where it went after Boston), Eddie Newquist, the chief creative officer of GES stated: "There is no better way to... appreciate the artistry and creativity which went into bringing this epic series to life", and "A visit to Harry Potter: The Exhibition is great for anyone who loves seeing how inspiring stories and blockbuster films become a reality".

On the other hand, directors of the science museums to which the exhibition traveled tried to connect the show to the goals of their organizations. Ioannis Miaoulis, director of the Boston Museum of Science, stated in a press release that the exhibit would “spark curiosity and imagination, leading [visitors] to experience the excitement of discovery that's also at the heart of the Museum's science and technology exhibits and programs”. Pacific Science Center president and CEO Bryce Seidl (in another press release) furthermore (in another press release) adds: “We are confident that [the exhibition] will attract new audiences, including people of all ages and backgrounds... to the Science Center’s world-class science exhibits and programs ”. Thus, the justification for the exhibit resided partially on its allure for fans of the film and book series, and partially on its ability to inspire imagination and creativity. However, how seriously can we take the latter claims of its educational value? How can we reconcile the opposing view that this exhibit has ‘nothing to do with science’ (and is therefore not educational) and that it encourages discovery and imagination?

In this paper, I attempt to address the question of how to evaluate the educational value of this and other media-based exhibits. *Harry Potter: The Exhibition* certainly is not alone in its critique. Other popular culture-based exhibitions and popular culture have also undergone criticism for their lack of connection to their museum hosts; examples include the *Chronicles of Narnia* exhibit (created by the same marketing group as the Harry Potter show) and *Star Wars: The Magic of Myth* (which was hosted at the Smithsonian Air and Space museum). In general, critiques surrounding these museum engagements mostly fall in line with discussions surrounding the broader category of ‘blockbuster exhibits’ – an umbrella term used to describe large traveling exhibits that feature a range of popular topics. Other examples include *Bodies: The Exhibition*,

Origins of Impressionism, and the “ubiquitous *Treasures of...* exhibition(s)” (Prior, 2006, p. 515), which have traveled to notable museums around the world including the Denver Museum of Nature & Science, the British Museum in London, and the Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais in Paris. While these shows often bring in much needed finances to museums (many of whom, in the United States at least, are struggling to survive in the wake of increasingly limited private and government funding), blockbuster exhibits have often been criticized within the field. In general, these shows have been critiqued as being too one-dimensional in that they export one version of culture and do not allow much space for personal interpretation on the part of the museums themselves (Prior, 2006, p. 515). As Steven Conn (2006) states: “Blockbusters can have the effect that distorting what the public sees in the museum and driving out other kinds of exhibits that do not have the same appeal or effect on the bottom line” (p. 506).

In this case, questions surrounding the educational value of these exhibits are not only related to its potential to ‘teach’ visitors but also visitor agency. If fans of media franchises may be posited as ‘consumer dupes’ of corporations, what happens when they are additionally positioned as ‘museum dupes’ attending blockbuster exhibits? In this paper, I argue that any potential import of these media-based shows and events in museums depends entirely on the way in which visitors are asked to engage with the media property in the museum context. Looking at this relationship demands that we look at how these interactions are actually organized within these “museum interventions” (which I will use throughout this paper as shorthand to describe *both* exhibits and public programs). How do the designers set the stage for interaction? How can the ‘usual’ techniques of museum interpretation and display (either through physical space, timing, or staff interactions) help us to figure out how this relationship is framed

for the visitor? Is there space for visitor and consumer agency to develop within the intervention? And how is relationship supported (or not) by the ways in which people deal with these media properties outside of the museum space – in the ‘real world’ – as either consumers or fans?

In order to answer these questions, I will continue in this paper to focus on Harry Potter engagements within the museum. Harry Potter-based exhibits and public programs have been plentiful within the English-speaking world since the books gained worldwide popularity over 10 years ago. The Warner Brothers exhibit is by no means the only Harry Potter-based museum experience that exists; numerous museums have hosted Harry Potter-related public events (which often include elements such as costume competitions, lectures and workshops, scavenger hunts, etc.), or themed exhibits which are related to the movie. While all of these Harry Potter museum exhibits and events ask visitors to engage with Harry Potter in different ways, I will look at three specific Harry Potter-based museum interventions: the corporate-created Harry Potter exhibition mentioned above entitled *Harry Potter: The Exhibition*, the library-created *Harry Potter’s World, Renaissance Science, Magic, and Medicine* from the National Library of Medicine that focuses on Renaissance traditions that relate to the themes and topics within the books,[†] and the museum-created Harry Potter event, *Harry Potter and the Magical Muggle Museum*, at the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology which ran from 2008-2010. The Warner Brothers exhibit is a ‘traditional’ museum exhibit where props from the entire series of Harry Potter movies are on display in glass cases. [†]The National Library of Medicine display is a small six-banner traveling exhibit, which is mostly hosted by public or university libraries. The event at the Penn Museum is a day-long event which includes workshop classes, lectures,

competitions and games, as well as traditional exhibit displays. While all three interventions focus on the fictional universe of Harry Potter, visitors are offered radically different experiences in each museum intervention, in terms of how they are expected to interact with the 'content' of Harry Potter, as well as other visitors. In looking at these factors then, we can arrive at a more complete picture of how they make function as educational entities.

This paper is structured as follows: first, I begin with a brief discussion of already existing perspectives on the nature of learning the museum, as well as developments within the field of education regarding the relationship between mass media and schooling. Much of this literature is focused on the relationship between learner, content and context. Second, I move into an analysis of the three museum case studies mentioned above. In particular, I will look at the techniques of media engagement used by each of these interventions, as well as how these create certain modes of engagement, which I categorize as pedagogies of, about, or with media. By viewing these engagements as such, I hope to create space for discussing and understanding other media-based museum interventions. This comparison does not strictly fall along corporate-sponsorship boundaries (incidentally the Penn Museum event and the NLM exhibit are not sponsored by Warner Brothers, but rather implemented banner of 'fair use'), but rather through the shaping of visitor experience. I hope therefore to create a general set of guidelines that enable us to better understand how to compare and evaluate these media-based interventions against one another in the context of the museum, rather than rejecting them all outright. In the end, I hope to come up with general conclusions on the ways in which visitors can be positioned within all museum interventions, and thus what opportunities for visitor agency are possibly enabled by these structures.

Theoretical Framework

Before analyzing media interactions in the museum, it is essential to look at studies in both museum learning and the intersection between mass media and schooling. As with educational theory generally, these subfields look at both theories of knowledge (i.e. how knowledge, or content, is constructed) and theories of learning (i.e. what processes are involved in learning content).

In museums, inquiries into theories of learning have generally fallen into discussions of collections, or object, based learning versus interactive learning. Traditionally, the role of museums has been to maintain collections of objects of value, ranging from paintings to archeological artifacts to natural history specimens. Education within this realm has mostly focused on the idea of “object-based epistemologies,” or ways in which “meanings held within objects ... yield themselves up to anyone who studies and observed the objects carefully enough” (Conn, 2000, p. 4-9). Careful examination of objects is here considered the primary mode of learning; knowledge, as a consequence, is considered as existing outside the learner (Hein, 2006, p. 346). In the last fifty years, however, with the rise of constructivist-based theories of learning, numerous museums have been moving away from this model. Passive learning has given way active learning; as a consequence, interactive exhibits have become more popular. This is most apparent in science-based institutions: ‘natural history museums’ have morphed into ‘science and technology centers’ (incidentally, as opposed to ‘museum,’ the term ‘center’ denotes less focus on maintaining a collection of artifacts). In this mode of learning, knowledge is constructed through a person’s actions or interactions (Hein, 2006, p. 346). Rather than being asked to closely examine rocks behind glass, for

example, a museum visitor is now asked to create their own ‘fossils’ out of plaster or manipulate fake sediment rock piles to learn about geological processes.

Constructivism has also yielded change in how outcomes of museum interactions are judged. Prior knowledge, experience and motivation surely influence how and what a visitor learns; an adult civil engineer, for example, will have a completely different experience at an exhibit about bridges than her 6-year old son. Rather than testing for “defined content outcomes” then, a visitor’s personal experience becomes more significant in terms of evaluation. As Hein (2006) states: “definitions of learning [in museums] are now broad enough to include enjoyment, satisfaction, and other outcomes from experiences” (p. 348). John Falk, Lynn Dierking, and Marianna Adams, furthermore, state that it becomes important in contemporary museum learning research to “actively recognize and seek evidence for a broad array of learning outcomes,” and to consider how this may differ according to an individual’s own “learning agenda” or motivations (2006, p. 329-331)

Research on media and schooling, thus, becomes extremely relevant in this light. Mass media and digital technologies are increasingly becoming indispensable to all aspects of life; people’s involvement in media and popular culture, therefore, exert a strong influence on their learning motivations and styles. With every major change in the media landscapes (the introduction of television, video games, the Internet, etc.), there always seems an accompanying interest in promoting ‘media literacy’. Generally, efforts in this area have been focused on two kinds of media education: either learning the skills of media production (e.g. video shooting and editing, Powerpoint), or developing the skills of media analysis and critique. Within the latter category, teachers and students are not only asked to look at the form of media, but to understand the ways in which these

messages are deliberately crafted by others (namely, news organizations and advertisers).

A different but related field that focuses on the intersection between digital technologies and learning called “New Literacies” has become more popular in recent years. New Literacies Studies looks at the literacy from a sociocultural perspective, recognizing that “there is no reading or writing in any meaningful sense of each term outside social practices” (Lankshear and Knobel, 2007, pg. 1-2). Literacy is here further expanded beyond reading and writing and placed within the larger framework of “big ‘D’ – Discourse”, which is defined by James Paul Gee as the usually acknowledged ways of using language (e.g. reading, writing, speaking), use of other semiotic forms (e.g. images, sounds, graphics, etc.), as well as related “ways of thinking, believing, feeling, valuing, acting/doing and interacting” as recognized within particular social groups (Lankshear and Knobel, 2007, p.3). According to Colin Lankshear and Michele Knobel (2007), the “newness” here is not necessarily related to new technologies, but rather the new “mindsets” or “ethos” that may be required to deal with these technologies (p.7-11).

Media Literacy and New Literacies therefore have different approaches to the ‘content’ of learning – the former (at least the kind that focuses on analyzing media) looks at media texts as the thing to be studied. New Literacies, on the other hand, shifts away from thinking about content generally and looks instead toward *ways* of doing things: Discourses. In trying to apply these modes of analysis to pop culture engagements in the museum, the pertinent question seems to be as follows: how is the media treated within these museum interventions – as content or as “ethos”?

Media literacy scholar David Buckingham (1994) discusses different ways of approaching media learning in schools, which he qualifies as “teaching *through* media” versus “teaching *about* media” (p.4). Buckingham describes ‘teaching through media’ as

the use of media production to improve other skills; for example, getting “students to make a radio programme as part of their work in speaking and listening” (p.4). Alternatively, teaching about media is described as getting students to “*study* radio programmes, or consider the conventions of radio presentation” (p.4). Marc Lamont Hill (2009), who also studies media engagements in the classroom by focusing on hip-hop, further demarcates this difference in his book *Beats, Rhymes, and Classroom Life*. Hill lays out a three-category framework to describe the use of hip-hop in the classroom: pedagogies *of* hip-hop, pedagogies *about* hip-hop, and pedagogies *with* hip-hop (p. 120-125). Pedagogies *of* hip-hop focus on the culture of the music form, or how it “authorizes particular values, truth claims and subject positions” (p. 120). In this fashion, pedagogies of hip-hop seem to engage with the “ethos” of the media rather than focusing on content. Pedagogies *about* hip-hop concentrate on hip-hop texts themselves, getting students and teachers to “operate as cultural critics,” and asking them to identify and respond to the “meaning within hip-hop texts” (p. 122). This mode of media engagement sounds similar to Buckingham’s description of teaching about media. The final mode of hip-hop use that Hill describes is pedagogies *with* hip-hop, which mostly concentrates on hip-hop as a frame to “enhance student motivation [and] transmit subject area knowledge” (p. 123). Hill mentions, for example, that hip-hop may be used to bolster a poetry curriculum, teach algebra, or help with conflict resolution.

Buckingham and Hill’s categories for media learning become pertinent when examining the nature of pop culture engagements in the museum. Within this paper, I borrow Hill’s categories of media learning – about/with/of – but refine them in order to fit more closely with visitor-content interaction as observed with the institutional space of a museum. Pedagogies *about* media refer to engagements that require a focus on the

media text itself, in the mode of media or film studies. Activities that fall within this category may include examination of the *world* of the media (e.g. Captain Picard's motivations in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*), or the *production* of it (e.g. filming locations for *Twilight*). Pedagogies *with* media refer to the use of the media text as a 'framework' through which to explore other content. This content may be comprised of the larger context in which the media might reside (e.g. looking at copyright law through an examination of sampling in hip-hop) or it might fall outside the media text entirely (e.g. comparing hip-hop use in urban American communities to the function of minstrels in Medieval Europe). Pedagogies *of* media refers to act of learning (or rehearsing) the mindset, ethos or associated skills of the media text or technology. Rather than focusing on content, pedagogies of media concentrate more on the action and activity of learners. What the appropriate or successful ways of acting within the space of this media text? All three of these categories (pedagogies *about/with/of* media) speak to precise ways of understanding the nature between visitor and content within the media-based museum interaction. I will use these categories then to discuss the case studies below.

Before moving on however, it is important to consider the role of audience background and expectations in analyzing museum exhibits and programs. As mentioned previously, Falk, Dierking, and Adams speak about the importance to understanding individual visitor context and consequently personal learning goals when evaluating the outcome of museum interventions. For museum programs or exhibits focused 'traditional' (or 'academic') topics, the level of personal engagement of visitors is unlikely to be as high as with popular culture topics (hence, its name – 'popular' rather than 'elite'). Though there may be 'fans' of King Tut or Cleopatra (the topics of two recent Blockbuster exhibits which have recently traveled around the United States), there

are probably less people in this group than fans of media phenomenon such as Harry Potter or *Star Wars*. In general, a potential lack of interest in ‘scholarly’ topic is dealt with either through interactive exhibits or ‘popular approaches’ to the content. An interactive exhibit with a shaking table may teach about seismic waves for example, just as a focus on the daily life of textile workers may also inspired interest in the Industrial Revolution. With popular culture or media topics however, how do these techniques of museum engagement change?

Fans of particular media texts, such as *Dr. Who* or *Twilight*, may find themselves within a community realm that Gee describes as an “affinity space.” According to Gee (2004), an affinity space is defined as an arena (physical or virtual) in which people are organized around a similar affiliation for a common interest, endeavor, goal, or practice (p. 85). Understanding what the space is ‘about’ (i.e. the content) is less important than examining “how the content and interactional organizations [around that content] reflexively shape each other” (p. 82). Media Scholar Henry Jenkins (who pioneered study on fan cultures) speaks about the ‘social’ nature of affinity spaces in relation to what he calls “participatory culture”. Participatory Culture can be defined as:

a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby experienced participants pass along knowledge to novices.

In a participatory culture, members also believe their contributions matter and feel some degree of social connection with one another. (Jenkins, Purushotma, Weigel, Clinton, & Robison, 2009, p.xi)

Do the Harry Potter museum engagements, themselves physical ‘affinity spaces,’ create a framework for supporting participatory culture? Much of the literature on participatory

culture and fan studies concentrates on the potential agency of consumers and fans. While people have often been characterized as consumer dupes (controlled by corporate interests) within media studies, so too have they been posited as museum dupes (controlled by 'elitist' museum interests). Scholarship on fan cultures, however, has provided a new perspective on consumer practices, highlighting how fans become active shapers of their experience.† How might visitors to these media-based museum interventions be considered within the same vein – as active shapers of their own experience and knowledge?

Case Studies: Harry Potter in the Museum

Warner Brothers' Harry Potter: A Universe of Things

Harry Potter: the Exhibition is a traveling exhibit, produced by Warner Brothers (WB) through Exhibitgroup/Giltspur, an experiential marketing group. Initially created in 2009, the exhibition has since traveled to notable science museums including the Chicago Museum of Science and Industry, the Museum of Science in Boston, the Pacific Science Center in Seattle and most recently, the Discover Times Square exhibit center. As described by Warner Brothers, the exhibit is a behind-the-scenes look into the world of Harry Potter through the display of over 200 original props and costumes as taken from the eight total films of the series. These objects are displayed in a series of themed-diorama spaces including Hagrid's Hut, the Quidditch field at Hogwarts, and Azkaban prison.

Techniques of Media Engagement

In general, the techniques of media engagement in the exhibit include: a focus on

the object, linearity, and fixed interpretations. In terms of objects, despite the presence of a handful of ‘interactive’ displays within the show (which include sitting in Hagrid’s oversized chair and throwing a ball through a Quidditch hoop), the exhibit almost entirely relies on the presentation of costumes and props. In this way, the exhibition follows the ‘traditional’ object-based format of display as seen within collections-based museums. Within this system, the object is the primary form through which visitors engage with the content, whether it be Harry Potter, geology, or ancient Mayan culture. This engagement is based on the concept of ‘object-based epistemologies’ mentioned earlier; close observation of objects is expected to yield particular meanings. In a natural history museum, for example, visitors look at stuffed birds and fossilized eggs in order to learn more about the natural world.

The objects within the Harry Potter exhibit may be examined either for their aesthetic appeal or for their connection to the universe of Harry Potter. These manners of engagement may be described by what Stephen Greenblatt (2004) calls “wonder” or “resonance”. Wonder is related to the craftsmanship of the object; Greenblatt defines this as “the power of the object displayed to stop the viewer in his tracks, to convey an arresting sense of uniqueness, to evoke exalted attention” (p. 546). This feeling is akin to what may be felt at an art museum when looking at a van Gogh painting. The visitor is impressed with the craftsmanship or singular aesthetic of the object.

Resonance, as Greenblatt defines it, is closer to the connection that an object may have with a larger context: the potential or “the power of the object displayed to reach out beyond its formal boundaries to a larger world, to evoke in the viewer the complex, dynamic cultural forces from which it has emerged” (p. 546). Studying the objects from this perspective tells visitors more about the universe in which this object resides; in this

way, it is similar to an Archeology or Anthropology museum. In this case, resonance may be understood as the relationship between the objects to the production of the films; however, in this exhibit, it is more likely that this feeling derives from the connection between the object and the fictional universe of Harry Potter. After visiting the exhibition in Boston, Henry Jenkins (2009a) wrote a blog post about the show, where he states: “The exhibit rewards our fan mastery...allow[ing] us to examine each artifact closely and often gain[ing] new insights into the characters,” additionally helping to “flesh out the world of the story” (para. 10). Thus, a close reading of these objects help to create a richer picture of the Harry Potter universe at large.

Within the exhibit, there is occasionally tension between the focus on the resonance and wonder of an object. Jenkins (2009a) defines this as the opposition between “immersion” and “annotation,” or in other words “what we see as real (through suspension of disbelief) and constructed (through our behind the scenes perspective)” (para.13). Despite this confusion however, both formats still concentrate on the object as the primary mode of visitor engagement. The experience of the exhibit would not exist without the presence of these objects.

In terms of structure and timing, visitors are expected to walk through the exhibit in a specific order. People must buy timed tickets (offered at half hour increments), and wait in line before entering the exhibit space. The themed room displays (e.g. Gryffindor dormitory, the Dark Forest, etc.) are arranged in a particular sequence; visitors must walk from room to room in linear fashion. Before leaving, participants must also pass through the exhibit store. There, people may purchase Harry Potter-related merchandise (T-shirts, mugs), an exhibition display book (with glossy photographs of the exhibits), or replicas of objects from within the display (including the wands of several characters in

the series).

In general, these techniques of time and structure are not unique to this particular exhibit. Traditional museum practice generally privileges linear, unidirectional experiences. Timed tickets are par for the course in blockbuster exhibits, due to their popularity. Additionally, museums have long relied on visitors viewing objects in particular arrangements. According to Steven Conn, museums have often focused on particular ways of ‘seeing the world’: “Museum objects, and the relationships in which they were arranged, were intended to convey a narrative” (Conn, 2000, p. 6-8).

This shaping of information through classification falls generally falls into Michel Foucault’s ideas about the connection between knowledge and power. While a museum can classify objects in any way they like (i.e. chronologically, geographically, thematically, etc.), their status as experts can make this order seem natural rather than arbitrary or artificial. Therefore, the museum has a certain kind of power; it can enable certain viewpoints or ways of knowing, while suppressing others (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992, p. 5). In looking at this Harry Potter exhibit then, the strictly linear and unidirectional flow of visitation creates particular ways of seeing, classifying, and thus experiencing the media text.

Issues of classification then, are related to object interpretations. The grouping of objects into certain themes generates a particular way of looking or understanding the object. Issues of classification within this exhibit, for example, might include where to place Harry’s wand; by placing it near the dormitory display with Harry’s other possessions, a different ‘story’ is told than positioning the wand near the location of his first major confrontation with his nemesis, Lord Voldemort. The labels and accompanying audio guide also provide fixed interpretations of the objects on display.

The explanatory labels focus on both the chronology of the objects (in which film it appeared) and their affiliation (either to whom the object belongs or in what fictional location). The audio guides, available for purchase at the start of the exhibit, highlight interviews with the props and costume designers about the design and production of the objects (discussions ranged from where they found the fabric for certain costumes to what it was like working with the actors). While the labels and audio guide work in two different realms of reality (the fictional world of the story or the real world of movie-making), they provide fixed, and thus closed, explanations for the objects – therefore, acting not unlike labels or audio guides at art or history museums.

It is interesting to note, however, that all the objects on display are also finished, completed products. Unlike other movie-based exhibits like *Star Wars: The Magic of Myth*, where design drawings and prototypes of props were put on display, the process of designing, creating or even using these Harry Potter objects is not made visible through drawings, prototypes, or photographs of the objects being made (though the processes are discussed within the audio guides). In this way, the act of interpretation is strictly controlled by Warner Brothers (interestingly, any mention of J.K. Rowling, the author of the book series, is also absent from the exhibition). Making these processes evident can oftentimes create space for alternate interpretations; viewers may be invited to think about other ways of designing, and thus thinking, about a prop. However, while Warner Brothers may demarcate strict boundaries around interpretation of objects, conversation between visitors within the exhibit may create space for debate and further interaction. This is mostly due to the knowledge that visitors may themselves bring to the exhibit as *fans* of the series. Fan-visitors, because of their personal investment in the content, may choose to disagree with the particular design of a prop or perhaps what is put on display

at all. Thus, it remains important to consider audience experience and motivations when thinking about media-based museum interactions, something which is discussed further at the end of the next section.

Mode of Media Engagement

The mode of media engagement within this exhibit may be categorized under pedagogies *about* media, or Harry Potter. The entire show is structured around the epistemological goal of learning more about the universe or the making of Harry Potter. Examination of the objects is of utmost importance in engaging the media text. Jenkins (2009a) speaks of “attention to detail” during the experience of this exhibit: “looking more closely teaches us things about th[is] world we would not know from consuming the other media manifestations of the franchise” (para. 10). This immersion into the world of Harry Potter (as described by Jenkins) is thus positioned as a form of learning or knowledge acquisition. This relationship is best described through Jason Mittell’s concept of narrative “drillability” or a “mode of forensic fandom that encourages viewers to dig deeper, probing beneath the surface to understand the complexity of a story and its telling” (as cited in Jenkins, 2009b, para. 15). This exhibit, therefore, promotes the “drillable” mode of media engagement. Going along with Neil Young’s conception of “additive comprehension”, the knowledge (or content) acquired here exists outside the learner (or fan) himself. Other forms of this mode of media engagement (i.e. “pedagogy *about* media”, “additive comprehension”, or “forensic fandoms”) include attending Star Trek conventions, learning more about George Lucas’ inspiration for Star Wars by listening a DVD commentary, or going on a tour of *Rocky* film locations in Philadelphia.

As compared with other exhibits that focus on more ‘academic’ topics (e.g.

Ancient Egypt, anatomy, Monet), the mode of engagement at work for *Harry Potter: The Exhibition* is also different because the most visitors probably have more of a personal stake in the content. Even if people express interest in a Silk Road exhibit, they are unlikely to be as knowledgeable as the curators developing the show. In the case of this show however (and similar blockbuster exhibits featuring media franchises with large fan bases), members of the audience may have as much “expertise” about the fictional narrative of the story than the official producers or curators. This museum intervention therefore does not merely replicate the ‘traditional’ didactic-expository mode of museum learning (as detailed by Witcomb, 2006, p. 356). Instead, it provides a space for debate, discussion and alternate interpretations. Says Jenkins (2009a): “This exhibit clearly function[s] as a *cultural attractor* – creating shared space for ... fans to gather and have common experiences... we had a common relationship to this fiction”. Visitors are thus inculcated into an “interpretive community” of fans (Jenkins, 1992). The exhibit provides a new platform of content engagement for an already existing affinity space.

National Library of Medicine’s Harry Potter: A Universe of Information

Harry Potter's World: Renaissance Science, Magic, and Medicine is a small scale traveling exhibit designed to connect the Harry Potter universe to historic content – in particular, the development of the science of medicine during the Renaissance. The exhibit highlights information and graphics from the collections of the History of Medicine Division of the National Library of Medicine. The exhibit was designed the Library (which functions under the National Institutes of Health) and hosted at numerous public libraries and specialty university libraries (usually in medicine or the natural sciences). The format of the exhibit is six 7-ft tall standing panels, each of which are

focused on a different topic including: Potions, Monsters, Herbology, Magical Creatures, Fantastic Beasts, and Immortality. Each panel contains information on certain themes in the book series as well as related Renaissance information. For example, the panel on monsters speaks about the use of dragons and basilisks within the Harry Potter narrative, and then also the early zoological work of 16th-century Swiss naturalist and physician Konrad Genser, who also wrote about the physical properties of these famed, fanged creatures. The display draws from Renaissance literature and history, often quoting and showing images from the period, drawn from original medical and scientific resources.

The information found on each of these display panels can also be found (in full) on their website. Also contained in the site are related educational resources which include two middle and high-school lesson plans, a higher education course module for undergraduate and graduate students, as well as “online activities” (mostly questions for students regarding the content of the exhibit, pulled from the other resources). The lesson plans (designed by Sahar Saddiqui and Annabella Kraut, teachers from Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School in Maryland) are intended for English and Science classrooms and focus on character development and genetics respectively. The higher education module (developed by Mark A. Waddell, professor of history of science and medicine at Michigan State University) focuses on “various magical and esoteric traditions that shaped past thinkers' conceptions of the study of nature in the Renaissance and early modern periods” (“NLM Exhibit” website, 2009, “Educational Resources” page).

These resources and the exhibition content are free and available online. However, the traveling exhibit (of where there are five copies) must be reserved in advance for a 6-week period, and are fully booked until Fall 2012.

Technique of Media Engagement

More akin to a book or a website than an exhibit, this traveling display primarily uses ideas and information, rather than objects or experiences, to engage with the viewer. Harry Potter, in this respect, is used as a starting point to motivate interest in the main topic: Renaissance science, magic and medicine.

Each panel is divided into two parts: a discussion of Harry Potter plot points, characters, and themes, and then related Renaissance topics. The latter features some object from the collection of the National Library of Medicine (usually a book or an illustration), though these are presented through reproduced images, text, and ideas drawn from the resources rather than the material artifact itself. In this way, the main technique of communication (and thus visitor engagement) is text and graphics printed on six standing panels. It should be noted that there are no images from the Harry Potter franchise at all within the exhibit or the website.

In terms of the physical mode of engagement, viewers stand and read the panels at their leisure. Depending on the host location, these may be placed in different configurations or orders. The value of having traveling panels, despite the fact that all the information is available online, is that these have the potential to engage people who might not otherwise be interested or aware of the historic influences of Harry Potter. Unfortunately, besides the resources provided in the lesson plans and learning module, there is no additional information to be found on the website regarding the exhibit topics other than what is shown on the exhibit panels.

The educational resources are more substantial in content (in terms of volume)

than the exhibit panels; these contain bibliographies as well as ways in which to teach and engage with the topics at hand (e.g. genetics, character development in stories, the transition between natural philosophy to natural sciences). In general these resources focus more on content-based learning; the goal of the plans and module is to acquire knowledge about the given topic. As with the exhibit, Harry Potter is used as a starting point or motivator for learning rather than as content itself.

Mode of Media Engagement

In using Harry Potter as the “hook” to get people engaged in other content, the exhibit and accompanying curriculum works within the mode of pedagogies *with* media. Harry Potter themes, characters and plot are primarily used to introduce as a starting point for exploring “Renaissance traditions, [which have] played an important role in the development of Western science, including alchemy, astrology, and natural philosophy” (“NLM Exhibit” website, 2009, home page). Discussion of these topics goes beyond mere historical fact; “ethical” topics including “the desire for knowledge, the effects of prejudice, and the responsibility that comes with power” are also explored within the text of these panels.

Within pedagogies about media, the relationship between the ‘media content’ and the other topic to be learned can differ across contexts. This other topic might be entirely unrelated to the media text or pop culture form – which itself used either as an analogy (e.g. rhyming in hip-hop as compared to rhyming in Shakespeare) or as a method (e.g. writing “math raps” to learn calculus). The exhibit, *Star Wars: Where Science Meets Imagination* (different than the *Star Wars* mythology exhibit mentioned earlier) co-produced by Lucasfilm and the Boston Museum of Science and funded by the National Science Foundation, is an example of this; within this museum intervention, *Star Wars* is used as the ‘lens’ through which visitors can explore advances in modern science and technology. Topics explored include robotics, space exploration and levitation technologies. While the exhibit also displays props, costumes and models from the films, these are not available for study in and of themselves. Instead, they are used to create a “framework” in which visitors can learn about science and technology. In one exhibit, for example, visitors are invited to sit in a full-sized replica of the Han Solo’s spaceship,

Millennium Falcon, while watching a multimedia presentation about the current and future state of space exploration. Another exhibit compares the fictional robot C3PO (and others from the film series) to actual robots being used in the field for industrial and military purposes.

The topic to be learned through pedagogies with media may also create a larger context in which the media text can reside. For example, the blockbuster exhibit *CSI: The Experience* (produced in part by the Forth Worth Museum of Science and Technology and CBS, and also funded by a grant from the NSF) focuses on the skills and processes of forensic science, the topic in which the television series is also based. Visitors are asked to act as forensic scientists in the same vein as the characters on the show. Other examples of this larger contextual learning may include using graffiti to study formal techniques of visual composition, or watching the film *The Best Years of our Lives* in order to learn about World War II veterans in post-war America. In this case, pedagogies *with* media may also intersect with pedagogies *about* media since the topic encompasses the situation in which the original media text exists.

In either of these cases, pedagogies with media may serve not only to motivate learning in another area, but also to shift the nature of engagement with the original media text itself. Clearly, this relates to questions of prior experience or expertise. On one hand, if a learner does not already have knowledge of the form, pedagogies with media may lead to a new appreciation of the pop culture text at hand (e.g. going to *CSI: The Experience* may lead new viewers to the show). On the other hand, learning about related topics may enrich a fan's already existing engagement with the media form (for example, learning concepts of artificial intelligence might increase interest in the histories of robot characters in *Star Wars*, just as understanding the poetic devices

inherent in hip-hop may make the experience of listening to MCs more intellectually enjoyable).

In this way, discussions about pedagogies with media point to questions of expertise. Who is the expert in this interchange between exhibit-visitor and exhibit-producer? It seems probable that designer or curator of the exhibit knows the more about the outside topic to be learned, whether it is Renaissance science or space exploration. However, all visitors bring their own interests and backgrounds to the encounter; fans in particular may be able to come up with more connections between the media text and the topic at hand. This in turn shapes their educational experience, not only during their museum visit, but also into the future. Thus, pedagogies about media may also enhance the work of an affinity space, through the addition of new content.

Penn Museum's Harry Potter: A Universe of Experiences

While the previous two museum engagements are exhibits, *Harry Potter and the Magical Muggle Museum* is an annual day-long event featuring Harry Potter-related activities. The event, known internally as Harry Potter Day, was hosted at the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (henceforth described in this paper as Penn Museum) between 2007-2009. Aided by museum staff and members of her undergraduate class "Mythology and the Movies," Louise Krasniewicz, an adjunct professor in the Anthropology department of the university, created the event as part of her job as a Penn Museum researcher. The event featured a diverse range of 30 different activities including lectures and classes (on 'real life' historic and anthropological topics including Mayan divination, Etruscan divination, and "Latin for Wizards"), displays (including a petting zoo and small-scale version of Diagon Alley – a setting from the

books), tours and scavenger hunts (where themes from Harry Potter were connected to the Museum's collections and exhibits), activities (including "Bertie Bott's Bean Tasting," and the "Sorting Hat Ceremony"), to arts and crafts (e.g. "Luna's Charms and Jewelry," "Wandshop and Wandworks," and "Transfiguration Face Painting")

Technique of Media Engagement

Interactivity, or "hands on" experience, as defined by Andrea Witcomb (2006), is the most important aspect of media engagement in the *Magical Muggle Museum*. This technique requires the implementation of an activity in which the visitor participates. Exploration of ideas or concepts is generally considered more important than finding the "right answers" (p.358). Witcomb identifies two modes of museum interactivity: the discovery model and the constructivist model. Within the discovery model, participants use this activity as a method to reveal something about the 'real' or natural world (p. 358). Think, for example, of a museum visitor playing with pulleys and ropes as a way to investigate principles of mechanical engineering and gravity.

The constructivist model of interactivity, on the other hand, may similarly rely on activity and exploration, though not with the goal of discovering some external form of information or knowledge. Instead, what is being learned is based within the participant himself; "direct contact is established with each visitor through an appeal to their own human experience" (p. 359). Examples of constructivist interactivity include exhibits that focus on people's "own cultural backgrounds" or "open-ended narratives" which can be completed by visitors (p. 359). The interactivity featured in the *Magical Muggle Museum* is, therefore, more akin to this constructivist model. The objects of engagement

within the program are primarily the experience that they themselves create.

While some of the activities provided in the day connect to other topics outside the universe of Harry Potter (such as Etruscan Divination or learning Latin), most of them are based within the universe of Harry Potter itself. The entire day is shaped not just by the prior experience and objectives of visitors, but also their performance and participation. This is accomplished in a number of ways. First, visitors are responsible for choosing what activities they want to attend (and consequently what activities they must miss). Harry Potter Day lasts from 11am to 4pm; in each hour increment of the day, there are a minimum of fifteen activities in which one can participate. Depending on their desires, visitors can choose to either participate in more 'passive' activities (such as attending a lecture or doing 'arts & crafts') or more 'active' ones (such as a scavenger hunt or "Quidditch practice"). This may be motivated either by their general objectives or how they feel throughout the day.

Within each activity, the program staff sets up the frameworks for experience. It should be noted here that these staff members may also be considered members of the community of visitors; many of them either outside volunteers or students of Dr. Krasniewicz. As part of their class obligation, the students were responsible for researching and playing Harry Potter characters. In addition, students were also accountable for particular activities within the museum. While some acted as facilitators of already existing events, some created new events from scratch. One example includes "Sprout's Greenhouse", run by an undergraduate playing fictional Professor of Herbology Pomona Sprout, who devised a ritual for handing out small plants to interested visitors. Krasniewicz states that the goals for these students was to consider what the visitors could 'get out of the experience,' to think about how to create the memorable,

meaningful engagements ”) (L. Krasniewicz, personal communication, November 23 and December 2, 2010). Thus, these students may themselves be considered members of the *Magical Muggle Museum* affinity group; like the visitors, they shared the same goals of creating the fullest, most fun experience of the day. It is through enactment of these characters, activities, and thus the universe of Harry Potter that the social value of this program exists.

Additionally, visitors themselves also aid in the production of their experience through the actuality of their participation, performances, and reactions. For example, in the activity “Bertie Bott’s Bean Tasting,” participants are asked to choose a mystery-flavored bean from a basket. Spectators at the table watch as this person tastes the bean. The taster’s reaction (whether shock, distaste, or satisfaction) becomes the main focal point of the experience, not just for themselves but also for the people surrounding them. The “Sorting Hat Ceremony,” in which visitors are asked to wear the ‘magical’ hat and hear its prophesy, similarly relies on the reactions of its participants. Competition and game-based activities additionally depend on the contribution of visitors in order to exist; these include “Harry Potter vs. Twilight” twister, “Snape Bingo,” and “Quidditch Practice”.

Krasniewicz (2010) describes the social value of the program by discussing how it promotes an “Anthropological way of thinking” or ways of understanding culture through the contribution and performance. She states that in Anthropology, “you can’t understand a culture until you act it out, you live it” in the mode of participant observation (2010). Therefore, both the student staff (in studying and acting out as characters) and the visitors (in interacting with the staff, though also encouraged to play their own roles) both participate in the world of Harry Potter through performance and

observation. These interactions may either be based on what they already know about a character (i.e. telling Professor Snape to be nicer to Harry Potter in class) or what they observe within the moment (e.g. seeing that Professor Snape has a grumpy demeanor and therefore staying away from him). In this way, visitors are practicing their ability to enter new communities. This kind of social participation and ‘decision-making’ therefore seems to encourage what Jenkins et al. (2009) describes as the skill of “negotiation” (within the framework of Participatory Culture). Negotiation is defined as “the ability to travel across diverse communities, discerning and respecting multiple perspectives, and grasping and following alternative norms” (p. xiv) and reminiscent of Gee’s (2007) discussion of acquiring new Discourses, or ways of being (p. 203).

In the end, the meaning, or interpretation, of this ‘content’ (i.e. the experience of Harry Potter) is thus created by the visitor, rather than the producer or curator of the program. Krasniewicz (2010) states: “You have a choice in the museum - you can give people the meaning through labels. Or, you can offer them a series of experiences and questions – that is really *making* meaning”. With the program then, visitors are not given strict interpretations of the Harry Potter universe as seen in the Warner Brothers exhibit. Instead, they are provided an open-ended framework through the structure of the event (allowing participation in activities and interaction with staff members and other visitors). By creating their own experience, they consequently create their own meanings for the day. In this way, visitors gain agency, not just through the process of determining their own experience during the program, but also in the potential realization that have this ability: visitors thus becomes producers of their own museum ‘content’.

Mode of Media Engagement

The *Magical Muggle Museum* clearly works through pedagogies of Harry Potter. As Jenkins describes in the Warner Brothers exhibit, immersion is key here – however, this immersion is not based in objects or environments, but rather *social experience*. What kinds of skills and/or mindsets do visitors need to move through this space? What are the elements of the ‘Harry Potter Discourse’?

This “ethos” may be compared to other Discourses: the “hip-hop way of thinking” about neighborhood, gender and race (Hill, 2009, p. 120), or the appropriate ways to think and act as a scientist in research lab. However, there are actually two ways of looking at the Harry Potter Discourse. On one hand, it may be considered the knowledge and mindset required to act as a character *within the fictional universe* (e.g. how to act as Hermione Granger in Hogwarts Academy). On the other hand however, the Discourse may refer to how to be a fan of Harry Potter *within the appropriate affinity space*. Clearly, these different modes are related to one other – being a fan of a media franchise involves knowing the rules of that space, or in other words, knowing how to pick up Discourse of that fictional universe (Krasniewicz, 2010). The ability to imagine alternate universes (perhaps the “Anthropological way of thinking”) is therefore a requirement for being a ‘good’ fan.

The learning that occurs in the *Magical Muggle Museum* then is more focused on *how* one can learn rather than *what* is learned – the process rather than the content. Krasniewicz (2010) states: “One way of making sense of the everyday world is to make sense of an alternative world”; knowledge then “is not only about absorbing things as they are, but as they could be”. While this perspective is derived from her background in Anthropology, she argues that this kind of thinking can be applied in many other arenas:

creativity and imagination are required “even in trying to solve everyday problems... even within other disciplines... in order to have breakthroughs”. The goal of the “Mythology and the Movies” course (and as a consequence Harry Potter Day) therefore is to “show participants the imagination is not just about fantasy worlds, [imagination] is about a way of thinking.”

Put in another way, the content of the space becomes less important than social thinking and action required to participate. In describing the acquisition of new Discourses, Gee (2007) borrows from Jean Lave in stating learning in general mostly occurs through changes in participation, and thus *identities*, rather than acquisition of specific facts, principles or skills (qtd. in Gee, p. 203); it is learning how to ‘be’. Gee is generally using this idea to speak of the educational value of video games; if video games are less about acquiring content then embodying and participating in different Discourses, then might museum interactions in the vein of the *Magical Muggle Museum* also be considered with this same perspective?

In terms of audience, if the content becomes less important than active participation in this museum intervention, might both fans and non-fans benefit from attending? Fans have an easier time reading the space due to their knowledge, but everybody attending the program still must actively engage in the narrative in order to participate in the universe. Visitors learn how to *be* in the affinity space.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have developed a method for looking at the educational import of media-based museum interventions. This is not to say that all other pop culture-based

exhibits and programs fit neatly into these categories of pedagogies about/with/of media however. Each of the case studies described above may actually work within multiple modes of these pedagogies for example. The Penn Museum *Magical Muggle Museum* engages with both a pedagogy of Harry Potter (in participatory activities including “Bertie Bott’s Beans” and “Quidditch Practice”) and a pedagogy with Harry Potter (in activities that link outside topics with Harry Potter, such as the Scavenger Hunt which links Harry Potter themes to objects within the galleries, or the lectures on Mayan and Etruscan Divination). However, while museum interventions may work in many ways to engage visitors with media, the pedagogical categories outlined in this paper may help to describe the learning that occurs in more precise terms.

Why it is important to think about the educational potential of these media-based interventions generally? As I detail within the paper, the use of popular media may motivate already-existing fans of these media texts. This is not a small thing; the adjective ‘popular’ (as opposed to ‘elite’) speaks to the wide ranging appeal of these topics. Earlier in the paper, I mentioned the importance of considering visitor agency in relation to these museum interventions. By choosing to focus on these topics, museums seem to confirm the importance of visitor choice and desires. In discussing heritage museums, Steven Hoelscher (2006) mentions that “the scope of what is deemed worth preserving has also expanded dramatically, extending now to... activities that, in the past, would have been considered beyond... historical attention” (p.201). In looking at the case studies discussed in this paper then, we can see that it is not Harry Potter itself that is being preserved and upheld as a precious entity. Rather, it is the enthusiasm that people have for these media texts which is being validated, and thus safeguarded. In this way, visitor agency is also being safeguarded through the process of these museum

interventions. Perhaps, then, we can follow Donald Preziosi and Claire Farago's (2004) line of questioning at the start of *Grasping the World: The Idea of the Museum*, where they ask not "what is a museum," but instead "when is a museum?" (p. 3). According to them, we may look at museums as the "essential site... for the fabrication and perpetuation of ... ourselves as autonomous individual with unique subjectivities." Clearly then, a shapers of our modern identity, popular media deserves a place in the museum gallery.

Works Cited

- Buckingham, D., & Sefton-Green, J. (1994). *Cultural Studies Goes To School*. Taylor & Francis.
- Conn, S. (2000). *Museums and American Intellectual Life, 1876-1926* (1st ed.). University Of Chicago Press.
- Conn, S. (2006). Science Museums and the Culture Wars. In Macdonald, S. (Ed.), *A Companion to Museum Studies* (pp. 494 -508). Wiley-Blackwell. †
- Falk, J. H., Dierking, L. D., & Adams, M. (2006). Living in a Learning Society: Museums and Free-choice. In Macdonald, S. (Ed.), *A Companion to Museum Studies* (pp. 323 -339). Wiley-Blackwell. †
- Feeney, M. (2009, October 24). 'Harry Potter' & the green machine. *The Boston Globe*. Retrieved from http://www.boston.com/ae/theater_arts/articles/2009/10/24/harry_potter_exhibit_banks_on_films_appeal_rather_than_magic_of_science/?page=2
- Gee, J. P. (2004). *Situated Language and Learning: A Critique of Traditional Schooling* (1st ed.). Routledge.
- Gee, J. P. (2007). *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy. Second Edition: Revised and Updated Edition* (2nd ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Greenblatt, S. (2004). Resonance and Wonder. In Carbonell, B. (Ed.), *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts* (pp. 541-555). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Harry Potter: The Exhibition. (n.d.). . Retrieved April 30, 2010, from <http://www.harrypotterexhibition.com/>
- Hein, G. (2006). Museum Education. In Macdonald, S. (Ed.), *A Companion to Museum Studies* (pp. 340-352). Wiley-Blackwell. †
- Hill, M. L. (2009). *Beats, Rhymes, and Classroom Life: Hip-Hop Pedagogy and the Politics of Identity*. Teachers College Press.
- Hoelscher, S. (2006). Heritage. In Macdonald, S. (Ed.), *A Companion to Museum Studies* (pp. 198-218). Wiley-Blackwell. †
- Hooper-Greenhil. (1992). *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*. Routledge. †Pine, B. J., & Gilmore, J. H. (1999). *The Experience Economy: Work Is Theater & Every Business a Stage* (1st ed.). Harvard Business Press. †
- Kirsner, S. (2009, August 17). Does Harry Potter Belong at Boston's Museum of Science? *Boston.com*. Retrieved December 17, 2010, from

- http://www.boston.com/business/technology/innoeco/2009/08/does_harry_potter_belong_at_bo.html
- Knobel, C., & Lankshear, M. (2007). Sampling “the New” in New Literacies. In Macdonald, S. (Ed.), *A New Literacies Sampler*. (pp. 1-24). Peter Lang.
- Jenkins, H. (2009a, Dec. 14). Confessions of an Aca/Fan: Archives: Harry Potter: The Exhibition, or what Location Entertainment Adds to a Transmedia Franchise. Retrieved May 3, 2011, from http://henryjenkins.org/2009/12/harry_potter_the_exhibition_or.html
- Jenkins, H. (2009b, Dec. 12). Confessions of an Aca/Fan: Archives: The Revenge of the Origami Unicorn: Seven Principles of Transmedia Storytelling (Well, Two Actually. Five More on Friday). Retrieved May 3, 2011, from http://henryjenkins.org/2009/12/harry_potter_the_exhibition_or.html
- Jenkins, H. (1992). *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. Routledge.
- Jenkins, H., Purushotma, R., Weigel, M., Clinton, K., & Robison, A. (2009). *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century*. The MIT Press.
- "Magical Muggle Museum" (n.d.). Retrieved December 17, 2010, from http://web.me.com/kraz/Harry_Potter_Day_09/Welcome.html
- National Library of Medicine – Exhibit: Harry Potters World Renaissance Science, Magic, and Medicine. (2008, September 22). Exhibitions. Retrieved May 5, 2011, from <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/harrypottersworld/>
- Preziosi, D., & Farago, C. (2004). *Grasping the World: The Idea of the Museum (Histories of Vision)*. Ashgate Publishing. †
- Prior, N. (2006). Postmodern Restructurings. In Macdonald, S. (Ed.), *A Companion to Museum Studies* (pp. 509-524). Wiley-Blackwell. †
- Witcomb, A. (2006). Interactivity: Thinking Beyond. In Macdonald, S. (Ed.), *A Companion to Museum Studies* (pp. 353-361). Wiley-Blackwell. †