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Chapter X

Spatial Narratives in Museums and Online: The Birth of the Digital Object Itinerary

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Abstract [100–200 words]. Museums represent complex layers of place. From carefully managed curatorial spaces, to exhibition environments, to the layout of display cases, to the representation of distant parts embodied in the collections of the great encyclopedic collections, the negotiation, representation and presentation of place has always been central to the mission of any museum. This chapter will examine the history of how museums (especially museum catalogues) present place, from early origins to the Internet. A set of case studies will be examined as a means of exploring how, where and in what form art objects and artefacts first began to be transported from non-Western to Western nations for display in the museums of Western capitals, thus representing the origins of what Cuno has called our “basic and inevitable cultural interrelatedness”; and what others have called “object itineraries” or “object biographies”. A comparison will be made of the same museums’ online representation of the same places today. It will thus be possible to present a framework for considering object itineraries – historic and modern - as a subject of both history and historiography.

Introduction

Historical and archaeological museums are physical sites of narrative, telling the stories of diverse pasts of different regions of the world, contextualizing material culture in its tangible forms and at the same time acting as venues of research and conservation. These stories are conveyed in a number of ways, including the selection and classification of objects for display, the ways in which artefacts are categorized and organized into groups, and how information is formatted and communicated in labels and catalogues. These methods of narrative creation form systems of interaction between humans, artefacts, and information in a contained physical space; and they are dependent on several socio-material factors such as the museum’s legacy of the past, its location, the artefacts themselves, curatorial input and guidance from educators in the museum. At the same time, the *digital* realm, whose currency is information and binary data rather than physical objects, has adopted the vocabularies of the museum space. The prefix “digital” places terms such as “curation”, “preservation”, “catalogue” and even “object” alongside terms such as web “page” and web “site” in a liminal vocabulary which links the physical and virtual in one single interface. Similarly, the digital has penetrated the physical and conceptual space of the museum, and in the process revolutionized accessibility and our ability to understand the artefacts they contain.

In the context of these shared lexical spaces, the World Wide web (WWW) can also act as a medium of narrative creation, but one whose narratives are constructed in an *unphysical* and *unlocated* manner. Rather than establishing sited narratives about cultural heritage (or indeed anything else), the WWW facilitates structures of both power and description by creating unconstrained, multidirectional insubstantial networks enabled by Web standards and technologies (Castells, 2011). In the last ten years or so, museums and their curators have woken up to the possibilities of telling the stories of their collections through digital media. “Digital storytelling”, which frequently crosses platforms and formats, is entering museum discourses (Wyman, Smith, Meyers, & Godfrey, 2011), employing different platforms and media, and taking advantage of (now) widely available infrastructures such as Wi-Fi and RFID. As well as providing a means of driving and developing excellent visitor experiences in an age when, in their daily lives, such visitors are constantly interacting with digital culture, these allow curators to tell entirely new kinds of stories (Kahr-Højland, 2010). This

chapter offers a brief literature and concept review of how we might approach the trajectories of objects through time and space in the digital world, and how the idea of the “object itinerary” drives narrative creation in both physical and virtual space.

Museums and spatial narrative

It can be argued that digital narrative in museums is, first and foremost, a *geospatial* concept. Physical objects and digital data have very different relationships with place and space: the former is tied to a particular location at any one time, the latter exists as a constellation of electrons which, while located in the global physical infrastructure of cables and servers, is theoretically locatable, readable and viewable anywhere, at any time. For example, a south Pacific culture represented in a Central European museum as a collection of artefacts produced by that society, is far removed from the geographical location of the museum, as well as being removed in time, meaning that the objects in their collections have undergone an itinerary, with a start, intermediate waypoints, and an end. This, in itself, invites an obvious invocation of narrative structure. In such cases the focus of the narrative is not a plot, or a character, but the travels and handling of the object itself. The concept of the “end” of the narrative is rather problematic. Does this refer to the end of the object’s use in its original context, its discovery or re-discovery (and by whom), its acquisition by, or arrival in the museum, and so forth. For these reasons, some have preferred the term “object itinerary” to “object biography” (see below) which, with the metaphorical allusion to the object having a life, equates its end with death (Gillespie, 2015).

Narratives can also be primarily spatial in character (Bodenhamer, Corrigan, & Harris, 2015). Caquard (2011) a notion that develops this theme, distinguishing between physical and nonphysical interaction via “grid maps” and “story maps”, where the former describe objects, persons and events in terms of their geographical (physical) location, and the latter are discursive events which take place in space, but are not “mappable” in a physical sense. In this context, maps (especially widely available digital maps, such as Google Earth) are both stimulators of narratives, in that they encourage people to think spatially, but at the same time they limit them due to the restrictions imposed by the base map (Caquard, 2011: 6). And, of course, these maps themselves are constructed, often following a Western tradition of representing space that might be different from lived experience (especially in non-Western communities and societies). Telling the spatial stories of cultural objects in museums, and thus understanding their shifting biographical significance as they travel through time and space, depends on their literal history (where they are now, where they have been), and the unphysical historical and curatorial context available for them. The aspatial WWW has the potential for transformative impact here.

The first part of this chapter reviews debates around the geographical patterns of communities, the objects they create, and cultural institutions which house collections which include those objects. The second part examines digital approaches to place, and how these approaches inform the kinds of developments in digital storytelling referenced above. The third and concluding part suggests a set of high-level discussion points for future research into the relationship between “the digital” and “the physical” in museums, which makes use of the connective powers of the WWW, especially through methods of Linked Open Data [only need LOD], which will help scholars, curators and the wider public (including museum visitor) better understand and develop the idea of the spatial narratives and cultural geographies of the “object itinerary”.

Museums and physical (spatial) narrative

The physical transfer of an object or artefact from one geo-cultural context to another is a significant attribute of that object's historical and spatial narrative, promoting the establishment of extrinsic statements about its history and context (which may or may not have colonial undertones). One key feature of the "Wunderkammer" ("Cabinet of Curiosities") collections of the early modern period was that they provided discreet, sterile environments in a physical place in which visitors – usually members of the educated elite – could be presented with object narratives, and create new, interpretive ones of their own. In the Wunderkammer, the "polyhistor", or polymathic, scholar with expertise in multiple subjects, philosophies and regions, was the main audience, and the main type of visitor (Westerhoff, 2001; see also discussions of the Museum of Jurassic Technology in Weschler (1995) for a modern, constructed and destabilizing version in Los Angeles). The position of such a scholar as the author and promulgator of narratives which told "truth" about the regions represented in the collection conferred upon them intellectual and cultural authority, and status and cultural power on the collection itself. This was only enabled because the collection was located and curated in such a way as to facilitate interaction with the objects' culture as a process of detached critical research in the polyhistor's "home" environment, rather than any process of immersive engagement with the culture in question. This inevitably reflected economic, social and political power imbalances at both global and regional scales (Ajana, 2015).

Major national institutions with "encyclopedic" collections, i.e. those which deal with the material of many cultures, present collections of material organized geographically and represent especially complex examples of such networks. The early history of large, national Western museums of this type is thus inevitably bound up with the cultural preoccupations of what such societies consider to be important in relation to their own history. In many of the major museums of Northern and Western Europe for example, this preoccupation manifests itself with a great emphasis (in national-level collections) on the history and archaeology of Greece and Rome (Elsner et al., 1996). Historically, the stories of such museums are closely bound up with colonial and postcolonial narratives, and the commodification of "otherness" for domestic consumption (Coombes, 1986). Edward Said's famous analysis in *Orientalism* characterized this in terms of critical separation between the student and the studied, where "the Orient" and the material cultures of non-Western countries was characterized as an abstraction, which are intellectually subject to the Western corporate institution for dealing with the Orient" (Said, 1978: 3). Such a "reduced status" was, at least in part, legitimized by the physical separation of the artefacts from the geographical context in which they were produced, and the reproduction, or at least the remediation, of that context elsewhere, under the host institution's curatorial direction. For Said, this is cultural appropriation and or oppression; but for others it is a legitimate part of the presentation, understanding and valorization of heritage in a world which is more globally connected than ever before. Making this point, James Cuno, argues that the present-day location of a museum collection, as "the result of collective, national intelligence", is at best irrelevant because all culture is global and interconnected, and at worst calls to "repatriate" artefacts of major significance to their regions of origin represents "an attempt to deny the truth of our basic and inevitable cultural interrelatedness" (Cuno, 2010: 161).

This debate is more muted in the context of museums which are situated in local communities and display culture that is specific to that group. These are by definition not "encyclopedic" collections. Rather than the detached organizing of the culture of "other" societies according

to parameters that make sense to their visitors, and thus perpetuating the processes of cultural separation that implies, such museums can act as hubs of inclusivity and agents of the construction of local identities (Hoobler, 2006). They stand in contrast to the “phenomenologically detached” status of Western encyclopedic museums, as described by Said. This distinction, and possible tension between the roles of different kinds of museums revolves around the situatedness they have in relation to the region(s) from which their collections are drawn. This in turn highlights the fact that all museums represent complex multilayered and multi-scalar geographies. More obviously, it highlights the fact that in order to be presented in a museum, an object has to *travel*. How far, over what cultural boundaries, and as a result of what (im)balances of power between cultures determines the character of the museum. It is for this reason that the idea of the “biography” or “itinerary” of the artefact has garnered so much interest, especially in the post-processual discussions of archaeology and museum studies (Gosden & Marshall, 1999). The artefact emerges as a material manifestation of cultural and geographical interaction.

An even more fundamental debate is the epistemological nature of the object itself, and the significance it gains when transported to, and displayed in, a particular geographical location. This shapes the kind of knowledge that is/can be created about collections of objects by third parties, such as visitors and scholars. The Wunderkammer-like, and indeed the colonial-era museum, model assumes that artefacts of far-removed cultures are static and unsympathetic “things” to be analyzed from a standpoint of critical detachment and scientific empiricism. Such empiricism provided the background for the creation of “scientific” typology, and structural categorization of material culture, both contemporary and from the distant past.

Nineteenth century Britain, a period of significant economic and cultural success, as well as colonial expansion and consolidation, saw archaeologists such as Augustus Lane Fox Pitt-Rivers developing “scientific” typologies for cultural artefacts based on precepts of Darwinian evolution, where one “class” of object can be seen to evolve inevitably in to another. The processes by which this happened were observable, repeatable and predictable; a viewpoint which laid the way for uniformitarian, or processual approaches to archaeology which were widely accepted until the mid-twentieth century (Hamilakis, 2007). This approach assumes a heavy rationalist and materialist basis for the evolution of human culture. Indeed, many saw the curation and presentation of artefacts according to rigid structural logic to be an essential palliative to “irrational” thought in contemporary politics and society – which was perceived as being dangerous to prevailing social order. “There is no use in exhibiting, if we do not educate”, wrote Pitt-Rivers in 1857. In 1891, he pressed his case even more forcefully: “The masses are ignorant ... The knowledge they lack is the knowledge of history. This lays them open to the designs of demagogues and agitators who strive to make them break with the past, and seek ... drastic changes that have not the sanction of experience.” (Lane Fox Pitt Rivers, 1891). A scientific, Wunderkammer-like commodification of the past into a rational series of sequences and predictable processes, progressing from an unsophisticated state to a sophisticated one, unevolved to evolved, barbarism to civilization, acted as a model for order and enlightened reason in the contemporary world of the nineteenth century.

Physical geographical situatedness was therefore important to the emergence of the Western museum as a means of creating narratives about histories of “otherness”. This is hardly a new observation, and it forms a key part of discussions about the relationship between museums and colonial histories, and the story of their adaptation to the postcolonial

present (Aldrich, 2009 – and it must be acknowledged that most such museums take active steps to help their visitors access and understand those histories). In more recent history, museology – and, of course, museums themselves – has pushed back against such empiricist and ultra-rationalist views of the past and sought to engage more empathetically with their artefacts and audiences, and with the cultures behind them. Such views recognize that the geographical and cultural diversity which make up their nuanced histories are, in themselves, desirable subjects for discussion and sharing. Among the most notable of the ideas embracing this post-processual approach – a movement in archaeological theory that emphasizes the subjectivity of archaeological interpretations – to objects to emerge is that of “object biography”, a label which imbues an archaeological artifact or a museum object with the characteristics of a living thing, which garners experience of the world as it travels across cultural and social boundaries. As Gosden and Marshall state in their introduction to a special issue of *World Archaeology* introducing the idea:

“The notion of biography is one that leads us to think comparatively about the accumulation of meaning in objects and the changing effects these have on people and events. This central thread of comparison, however, makes the variety of relationships between people and things in different cultural contexts even more apparent. Ultimately, the utility of the metaphor of biography will depend upon its role in revealing this variety” (Gosden & Marshall, 1999: 173).

The emergence of “biographical” approaches to objects, of which this volume was a key milestone, had much to do with the development of object studies in the social sciences, and an increasing, post-processual concern with the contextual importance of physicality, and the stories that physical objects contain and express, in society more generally. Object biography is directly related to the study of museums and narrative. Narrative is, after all, the process of telling of stories; and the concept of narrative has frequently been used as a vehicle for forming and conveying the historical and archaeological events as a sequence of processes (Hodder, 1993; Pluciennik, 1999). Indeed, the concept of an “event”, an occurrence that is bounded and causes change, is central to the idea of narrative itself.

Recognizing the importance of the story behind the object means understanding that an ontological separation between human actors and objects, and the assumption that the former has agency but the latter has not, is a product of rationalist/materialist traditions (see relevant discussions in Westin, Foka and Chapman 2018): the kind of material rationalism exemplified by Pitt-Rivers. The distinction becomes even more important for an empathetic view of the place of objects in societies *outside* of the post-Enlightenment West with its approaches to materiality. Wallis points out, for example, that aboriginal Australian rock art cannot be understood with reference to Western assumptions about the distinction between human and non-human actors, such as animals and objects: “[t]his reluctance to step beyond a rational materialist standpoint positions indigenous animic ontologies as incorrect; material objects are dynamic (“participate”) only insofar as they “affect us” (Wallis, 2009: 51). Similar theoretical inroads were made in Sweden in relation to the indigenous Sami cultural heritage (Mulk 2009: 194-21). It is worth re-stating here therefore that the empiricist nature of the contemporary museum environment, by default, privileges the physicality of the object, and potentially obscures stories which are narratives in a non-Western sense.

Any attempt to address this must, of course, focus on the non-physical attributes of the objects in a collection. Here, the (nonphysical) background to an object that a museum a) has and b) displays to its audience is essential. The availability of contextual information attached

to objects varies greatly according to a number of factors. These include the date of the object, the amount of provenance gathered at the time of its discovery and/or acquisition, the amount of relevant historical research and documentation available, and so on. Some engaged with the field of object biography research draw a distinction, for example, between objects produced by prehistoric societies and those of literate cultures. In the former, there is no historical information to provide context about either the object or the society which produced it. In the latter, however, it is possible to access information about processes, rituals, activities and so on that that object was involved with (Joy, 2009). To take one example, the Parthenon Sculptures in the British Museum are imbued with the complex historical contexts of the 5th century BCE in Athens (and a controversial contemporary one), but this background can only be fully appreciated and analyzed with an understanding of the historical texts (mainly those of Herodotus) which describe the rationale for their commissioning in Athenian military victories against Persia earlier in the 5th century. There is also the religious context for the mythological scenes on the pediments, the cultic significance of the civic procession, and so on. One could add to this scenes from the sculptures' later biographies, for example the explosion in the Parthenon of 1687, which wrought major damage to them; the conditions of geographical transportation of these marbles; and the circumstances of their appropriation by the Earl of Elgin from the occupying Ottoman authorities in 1801 (St Clair, 1998); their reception in the 1819 painting by Archibald Archer that depicts the exhibition of the marbles in their first, temporary space in the British Museum; their role in constructing and sustaining National/European narratives (Hamilakis, 2007). In contrast, again for example, the faience "Snake Goddess" from Neopalatial Crete, discovered by Sir Arthur Evans in 1903, and now in the Heraklion Museum, is an iconic material cultural representation of Late Bronze Age Crete in the present day; yet very little is known of its history or original significance. Indeed, it has been a subject for debate as to whether it in fact represents a goddess, or a priestess. The lack of any cognitive or historical context renders the process of explicating its biographical narrative one of interpretation and, in many cases, informed guesswork (Herschman & Lapatin, 2017).

Other museum, particularly those at sites of historical importance, explicitly seek to mediate between the materiality of the objects and intangible significance of the site itself. The museum at Delos [figure 1], for example, curatorially presents the site of the Delian Treasury, whose removal to Athens in 454 BC symbolizes the start of Athenian hegemony in the northern Aegean, and the train of event which led to the Peloponnesian War. Upon entrance to the island visitors tangible, foldable paper guides designed by the archaeologist P. I. Chatzidakis, in Greek, English and French. The guide, entitled 'A TOUR OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE OF DELOS' includes maps of the island, narrative and pictures of artefacts and temples on site [such as that in figure 2]. The first picture one sees when acquiring the guide is a Romantic reconstruction of the sanctuary, made by H. P. Néno 1882). This guide displays the space of the site and the museum as an encultured entity, presenting a variety of routes to visit the site with annotations of landmarks, and art (mosaics, frescos, sculptures). If one unfolds the whole guide, on the one side there is a 2D pathfinding sketch of the site, with three 'itineraries', and on the other there is an explicit 3D reconstruction of the Sanctuary and the ancient town by Francesco Comi (1995, as seen in Bell' Europa) that is annotated with about 100 landmarks on site. There are also two smaller 3D reconstructions on the same side of the leaflet: 1) the reconstruction of the sanctuary by the French School of Athens (1996) and 2) the reconstruction of a block of Delian houses by Peter Fister, in 1970). The guide has also instructions on how to use it as an 'itinerary' to navigate. It is in itself a mini model (prototype) study of town planning, an annotated town map, and it offers a

number of different types of visualizations as it includes pictures of temples and artefacts and a number of annotated maps and reconstructions of the site [such as in figure 3].

A key part of Gosden and Marshall's biographical approach to objects is that they are deeply embedded in social networks. Social networks are, inevitably, nonphysical in character, yet they are integral to the spatial narrative of objects. In many cases, the biographies of objects and the biography of persons - i.e. a more traditional sense of the word - become intertwined. Mostly however, these are as invisible to the present-day museum visitor (or museum-based scholar) as the original central context of the object, whether it is historic or prehistoric. However, they can be traced where we have primary materials relating to the formation of collections, particularly connections that are closely associated with prominent individuals.

One good example of this is the University of Reading's Ure Museum of Greek Archaeology, which is a major collection of artefacts (mainly) from Greece, with materials gathered from various sources from the early twentieth century onwards, driven by the work of Percy Ure (1879-1950) and his wife Annie (1893-1976). As well as the objects, the museum contains an extensive archive of paperwork related to the establishment and development of the collection, and from this, insights in to the narratives of the objects, and those who came in to contact with them, can be traced. In an account of the museum's founding, written as a foreword to a catalogue of the collection in, Annie Ure notes that the exact date of the museum's inception is difficult to pinpoint, beginning as it did with some Egyptian antiquities given by Flinders Petrie in 1909; with some further objects given by the British School of Archaeology in Egypt a little later. Later on, when Percy Ure came to Reading in 1911, he brought :

"a small collection of sherds and fragmentary vases, most of them purchased or picked up in Greece on various sites, a number of them from Rhitsona [in Boeotia], not from the excavations, but actually from the bushes where they had been thrown away by tomb-robbers, who thought they were not worth the trouble of taking into Thebes or Athens to sell" (A. Ure, 1924).

Annie Ure's account illustrates that, unlike an object, a museum is, itself, not necessarily a narratively complete object with a clear beginning, but that the spatial narratives of the objects that make up collections are oftentimes fuzzy, un-grid like, undocumented (and undocumentable), and subject to the vagaries of human estimations of what is worth preserving and what is not. Further examination of the Ure archive shows that the object-person metaphor is made explicit in a letter dated 10th July 1958 from F. Smuts to Mrs. Ure, from the RMS *Praetoria Castle*, thanking her for the meeting they had had and for the present of a "Corinthian aryballos". This flask, Smuts writes, "will always be a highly valued possession, and I only hope it will not remain too lonely, but gather some friends of its own kind around it" (Smuts, 1958). The formal provenance of this aryballos is not recorded, but the metaphor of it acquiring "friends", itself in the context of an informal social communication between one individual closely associated with a physical museum, and another whom they came into contact with through abstract and immaterial social networks, illustrates perfectly the blending of physical and material histories. It also shows that objects of cultural value will, almost inevitably, pass between social networks through the agencies of gifting, ritual and commerce.

Object Itineraries and digital narratives

The preceding sections sought to provide a brief summary of the significance of materiality in the trajectories of museum objects and cultural artefacts through time and space, and of how narratives emerge from the processes of transfer. Such narratives emerge from objects, whether they are the empiricist structures of Pitt-Rivers, using classification and typology to tell the story of evolution from one class to the next (thus legitimizing larger narratives of progression from an uncivilized state to a civilized one), or the historical narratives around the Parthenon Sculptures, or the personal narratives read in the records of the Ure Museum. What, however, is the role of the WWW in generating and conveying these narratives?

Connected data, digital objects, virtual museums, linked databases and digitally mediated ways of interacting with objects have bought new ways of exploring and telling object itineraries under what might be called the banners of digital museology, or digital art history. Yet these remain far less problematized or researched than (say) the influence of physical (museum or gallery) environments on the conditioning of object narratives (e.g. Coombes, 1986; Moser, 2010), or the impact of social media on visitor and curator practices. In the latter case, while great potential was foreseen in the mid-2000s of the “democratizing” effect of social media in museums, at a time when social media and the interactive internet were becoming widespread in the developed world (see, e.g. Russo, Watkins, Kelly, & Chan, 2008; (Richardson, 2012), the reality is that most museum social media profiles are largely unidirectional, with museum staff broadcasting content with little two-way engagement (Fletcher & Lee, 2012). And while many museums are experimenting with digital strategies in order to increase accessibility and promoted user engagement, bar some experimentation with the Internet of Things in museums contexts (e.g. Hudson-Smith et al., 2012), there has been relatively little engagement with the object biographies literature. And finally, while some museums have drawn heavily on digital practices such as Linked Open Data [LOD] in the management of their cataloguing systems (e.g. Szekely et al., 2013), these have focused on the problems of collection management and, in some cases, integration through various “hub” datasets on the Semantic Web. There is therefore a need for a more deeply theorized understanding of the ways in which the spatial and curatorial narratives that convey object itineraries are formed, theorized, and conveyed digitally. There is also a need for greater consideration of the possibilities of semantic encoding of elements of narrative ontologies (Hargood, Jewell, & Millard, 2012), which would in turn allow for more responsive, contextual generative narratives that better reflect the biographies of the objects described.

A credible starting point for such a theorization is efforts to un-pick colonial and postcolonial entanglements of the type described above. Most obviously perhaps, some have promoted the idea of “digital repatriation”, whereby digital material such as scans, images, 3D point clouds and so on (see, for example, Hess et al., 2009) are provided to the objects’ originating communities. However, while such initiatives have been known to inspire dialogue and communication between regionally-sited communities and cultural institutions containing objects they created, there are obvious objections to the concept of digital repatriation, mostly framed by the relative value of the physical and the digital object itself. The idea that the latter is necessarily a substitute for the former was perhaps most eloquently critiqued by Jim Enote who, quoted by Bell et. al. in their report of their workshop at which he was keynote *Storytelling in a digital age: digital storytelling as an emerging narrative method for preserving and promoting indigenous oral wisdom*, asks “[i]f the digital is so good, why don’t you keep it?” (Bell, Christen, & Turin, 2007). Others, likewise, have questioned whether transferring a digital surrogate of an object from a museum to a

community is in fact either “virtual” or “repatriation” in the accepted sense of either term (Boast & Enoté, 2013). New media, on the other hand (and as acknowledged by Enoté in this Willcox et al), has a co-creative power which can operate across spatial distance. In particular, this has been leveraged in the curation of oral histories of tribal communities, and in the preservation of those histories in digital media (Cunsolo Willox, Harper, Edge, 2013).

Such questions of digital repatriation also raise wider concerns over the ownership of digital assets, and the other media they may replicate or draw inspiration from. Such ownership need no longer be restricted to that of the digital asset itself but rather to any component of it, and ownership might be defined in such a way that access could be relinquished at any time. This presents both legal and methodological challenges. For example, in the case of crowd-sourced datasets used to derive secondary digital products such as photogrammetric models, the single digital asset that is the outcome of alignment and processing of many thousands of inputs is of far less significance than the collection as a whole and potentially of a small subset of input data that had most influence on the creation of the final model. In this case the ability precisely to define ownership at a highly granular level for each input image, perhaps through smart contracts of some kind, would enable this level of control. However, even then one must also consider the need to represent contested ownership or contextual access.

The main objection therefore to processes such as digital repatriation is the *placelessness* of the digital world. It is at points such as this – a key one for the cultural and political situatedness of artefacts, as well as their literal/physical situatedness - that any posited equivalence between digital object and physical object breaks down. One key reason for this is that, by and large, digital “objects” relate to only one, or at most two, of the sensory functions, most often vision (Kleege, 2018). After all, the literal meaning of the term *visualization* is one of rendering information, or objects, into a medium that can be seen, usually through the agency of an electronic screen. There are various ways and methods of ensuring that the processes by which the 3D visualization of an object is true to the evidence that the visualization work is drawing on – on example being the London Charter initiative, which sets out six principles for ensuring transparency in the construction of 3D models (Beacham, Denard, & Niccolucci, 2006). However, while this provides an essential starting point for good curation and model-building practice, neither this, nor most screen-based means for providing access to 3D models, are designed to capture the relationship between formally structured information and the object being visualized.

Considering the limitations of digital repatriation in this way highlights the deficiencies of any model which does (/can)not capture the sensory phenomenologies of sound, smell or touch (although experiments in haptic technology have made some headway with the latter). To dig deeper into an object’s spatiality and physicality using formal digital methods, one needs a mechanism of linking data, whether in the form of catalogue entries, or crowd/visitor-generated tags, to the representation of the object. One intriguing solution provided to this is the Harvesting and Aggregating Networked Annotations (HarvANA) system, which allows users to attach tags to 3D scans of museum objects, then allowing those tags to be represented as linkable as RDF datasets (Hunter & Gerber, 2010). This enables those “objects” to be represented and integrated into distributed and linkable datasets, rather than just visualized and transmitted visually.

This takes discussion of the “digital object biography” into the realms of Web and internet narrative creation; and the latter has an altogether different set of political and cultural

implications for objects and their emplacement. (Digital) data and place have a more complex relationship, formed at bewildering speeds over the past forty years or so with the development of the internet and, more recently, the WWW itself (Abbate, 2000). In particular, since the mid-2000s, the development of major web mapping platforms such as OpenStreetMap (2004) and the launch of Google Earth (2005) has ushered in a new phase of human interaction with place, through the lenses of web mapping and, more recently, GPS (Haklay & Weber, 2008). By creating billions of georeferenced data points, a significant proportion of which is generated within cultural sites such as museums, a new disruption to the concept of place itself has emerged. Zook and Graham labelled this “Digiplace”, a “fluid and complex state of being, in which agents and structures are interminably enabling and shaping one another” (Zook & Graham, 2007). The idea of Digiplace situates place as an entity co-created by billions of internet interactions as a set of uncontained (and uncontainable) narratives. Just as physical museums, as described above, can be shown to be situated and sited places of the creation of narrative, the “placelessness”, or ubiquity of the WWW enables the curation of cultural power-narratives of a different kind. The feminist geographer Monica Stephens, for example, has shown that supposedly neutral and open geographic data platforms such as OpenStreetMap are, in fact heavily gendered and racially skewed “places”, whose data, practices, rules and philosophies reflect closely the preoccupations and world-views of those who make up the majority of their user bases – overwhelmingly white, male, Western and relatively well-educated (Stephens, 2013). As such, one might think of the worldwide digital maps that have resulted from over a decade of collective web mapping as *un-curated* spatial narratives.

It follows logically from this discussion that distinction between curated and un-curated narratives is useful when considering the overlap between museums and the Web. This is furthermore born out when we consider ways in which structured information about objects is presented and managed *without* the physical museum at all. The *Arachne* project for example, provides an online dataset which brings together records of collections held at the German Archaeological Institute (DAI) and the Cologne Digital Archaeology Laboratory (CoDArchLab) at the Archaeological Institute of the University of Cologne (see <https://arachne.uni-koeln.de/drupal>). This resource promotes the idea that making connections between objects based on a shared understanding and/or interpretation of their physical attributes must always supersede any local project-based implementation. As the explanatory background information on the Arachne website puts it: “[t]he database design reflects a world model based on two very simple assumptions in archaeology or art history: all objects in the “real world” should be comparable on a very general level, and all objects have a context” (<https://arachne.uni-koeln.de/drupal>). This can also allow “deep digital object” information to be linked to other kinds of Web data.

This relates to efforts by digital scholars of the ancient world to federate information which does *not* derive from a physical object, such as attestations of places in texts. These have shown that the same principles apply there. Examples of ways in which such attestations are treated as *digital* objects, to be connected and federated online, include the Pelagios project (Isaksen, Simon, Barker, & de Soto Cañamares, 2014) [add cite/note for definition], which uses canonical URIs for places provided by the Pleiades gazetteer, to link those places with other places, and with databases of objects, (Elliott & Gillies, 2009); including the Arachne dataset itself. Such Linked Open Data [LOD] structures are thus able to maintain trails of scholarly authority back to original source material, and this form of authoritative connected narratives transcend individual datasets and sources; while at the same time have the Web-like capacity to grow organically. The presence of authoritative sources within

object and non-object derived sets of LOD allows different forms of structured knowledge to emerge. These are very distinct from the top-down, super-curated type of knowledge structures that stemmed from the Wunderkammer, and that was presented to the world by Pitt-Rivers in the 1880s. A key reason for this is that such knowledge develops and persists in cyberspace. It could not develop in the same way in the physical world. This raises the question of how it relates to the “fluid and complex” world of “Digiplace” (Zook & Graham, 2007). For the LOD and the WWW do not exist in isolation from one another. As Isaksen et al put it: “Linked Data is sometimes discussed as though it exists as its own parallel Web, unpolluted by the Web of Documents. This is highly detrimental to its adoption” (Isaksen, Simon, Barker, & de Soto Cañamares, 2014: 200).

Finally, some museums have embraced the physical/digital narrative very explicitly. In the physical context of the museum, these can take the form of interactive exhibits and/or installations, which make use of physical and digital infrastructure, such as RFID tags or WiFi. For example, the “EGO-TRAP” installation at the Experimentarium in Copenhagen is a game-like installation facilitated through interaction with visitors’ cell phones, which guide them through the exhibits and provide interactive tests at each one, eventually inverting the visitor’s assumptions about what they are and are not in control of (Kahr-Højland, 2010). Such instances illustrate how disruptive to the physicality of the museum digital narrative can be.

Conclusion

This brief discussion of the nexus between physically- and digitally-framed narratives highlights a fundamental paradox that lies at the heart of digital museology: as a concept, beginning with the Wunderkammer, the museum is a point of discrete, sited, site-specific creation of narratives deriving from physical objects and their unphysical context. It is culturally and intellectually given to rationalist narratives which structure collections-based knowledge according to positivist frameworks. Conversely, the Web is incorporeal and exists to connect objects together. Such informational context, its history of movement through space as well as time, frames that object’s cultural significance. An object can thus be encultured with social and/or political significance which it might not otherwise enjoy – as, for example, with the Parthenon sculptures in the British Museum, which are up to this day indirectly claimed by the government of modern Greece, after the media campaign for their repatriation in 1984 (<https://www.nytimes.com/1984/03/04/weekinreview/q-a-melina-mercourt-greece-s-claim-to-the-elgin-marbles.html> - last assessed on 11.07.2018). Museums may thus be seen as nodes in networks formed by the trajectories of their objects, and it is from this that the paradox weakens, and idea of the “digital object biography” emerges.

One of the most obvious problems with both the term “biography” and “itinerary” is that these are both terms which imply narratives describing agency, whereas objects, by themselves, have no agency. They are thus subordinate to the human processes which are typically the concern of anthropology and social history. Gosden and Marshall (1999: 169–178) set out to address this by highlighting relations between people and objects. These relationships, they argue, mean that “objects become invested with meaning through the social interactions they are caught up in” This present chapter has sought to update this premise.

A vision of a “digital object itinerary” which addresses the complexities highlighted by Gosden and Marshall, which navigates the ethical polarities of the debate exemplified by the positions of Said and Cuno, and which positions itself successfully in the post-processual world which came after Pitt-Rivers and the kind of museum he envisaged, must have certain attributes. Firstly, and most obviously, it must contain more than simply visual data. The kind of metadata structures which now routinely capture other sensory attributes need to be integrated. Secondly, any collection or scholar seeking to express object itineraries using the LOD web must acknowledge that in Digiplace, many voices may describe that object. As Isaksen et al. note, LOD and the wider Web do not exist in isolation, and indeed further informational contexts from other, un-curated sources, might enrich our knowledge of that itinerary. These might come from other LOD datasets, from open webpages, or capture the experiences of visitors. Above all, it prompts us to re-think what is meant by “creation” itself. Curation of a digital object itinerary probably cannot be carried out by one person, most likely it will cross spatial, institutional and cultural barriers, and most importantly it demands a new kind of critical analysis which draws not only on the discourses of museum scholarship, but also on the wider questions of digital culture and society.

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Figures

Figure 1: Papposelenos from the Temple of Dionysus in the museum of Delos, Cyclades (2nd BCE)

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Figure 2: Vestibule with copy of the mosaic of the goddess Tanit, House of the Dolphins, signed by Phoenician Asclepiades of Arados in Delos, Cyclades. Original mosaic is preserved in the museum of Delos, Cyclades.

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Figure 3: Annotated map of the Archaeological site of Delos Edition sponsored by the Hellenic Republic, Ministry of Culture and the European Community (3rd CSF 2000-2006)

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