

# Coda: ad peritos

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The examples of professional practice via the university museum that have been brought together in this volume reveal, as we might have anticipated prior to this exercise, a diversity of pedagogies operating through an organisation (museum) within a larger organisation (university). The essays show that materiality can act as different forms of cognitive pivot point: they can be the anchor of an idea, a physical manifestation of the metaphysical; they can be a bridge, metaphor, allegory or even creative inspiration. The technology of a museum collection structure, by virtue of the inter-relations and interactions of component parts, establishes epistemic frameworks that can, in the right hands and right context, both enable and enliven multiple pedagogies.

What was perhaps not anticipated, at least for me, was the diversity of audiences for whom the pedagogic practices of the university museum are designed in contemporary higher education. It is generally agreed that many collections in higher education first developed to serve specific and singular teaching purposes (SIMPSON 2019). The disciplines of geology, archaeology and anthropology, for example, have a tradition of object-based pedagogy, and these collections served no other purpose than instruction for enrolled students, the collections being something akin to a three-dimensional textbook. Perhaps the era of these specialised, fit-for-one-purpose and one-audience-only university collections is over? Those that still exist in the academy no longer have a singular utility or a singular audience. The pedagogies used through the university museum now serve multiple audiences.

As the essays in this collection show, there are learning experiences designed for primary and secondary students, future professionals, current professionals, life-long learners and the general community. The university museum can support all areas of university business activity with its education and learning programs. It is also apparent from the essays that materiality in higher education is both the obvious interface for opening up interdisciplinary learning spaces for different audiences, and for the development of cultural production, innovation and creativity. These may well become important functions of higher education in the future. There are some significant implications for both the professional community of academic museologists and UMAC itself from this.

We have published UMACJ as an open-source journal now since 2008. Initially, issues were housed on a Humboldt University server; more recently on our own website. It has been four years now since we abandoned the exercise of producing conference proceedings and aimed instead to be an open-call academic and professional journal about museology in higher education. This was the first time we compiled a thematic issue of the Journal and, given the origin stories and history of many university museums and collections, it is appropriate that the theme should be pedagogy. It is the first time also that we have published under a Creative Commons licence. What has been learnt from this experience?

Did the thematic focus allow our authors to explore issues and analyse case studies in more depth than is usually found in conference proceedings or the open call, non-themed journal editions? The essays began within the UMAC project *Professionalising museum work in higher education: A global approach* undertaken with partners that aimed to develop a global perspective on how the university museum was being used for the training of future professionals. At different stages of essay development, we requested authors explore certain lines of argument and analyse and reflect on certain outcomes, as a way of strengthening and aligning theoretical content with the prescribed theme of pedagogy. In many ways our role was more curatorial than editorial. If it has produced a more interesting and more professionally useful volume of writings, then there will be more thematic editions in the future, possibly even including the current theme.

Furthermore, the increasing higher education interest in, and deployment of, object-based learning, as apparent in this collection of essays and elsewhere in the literature (e.g. THOGERSEN et al. 2018) raises a couple of interesting specific issues. One is related to the idiosyncratic institutional setting; the other is related to technology.

If museums and collections make such a fundamental contribution to the work of universities, not just in teaching, but in a range of other functions as well, why are they not simply ubiquitous throughout the higher education sector? If they can be used in many different ways, why is it that many legacy collections in higher education are simply discarded once they are seen as being of no further use?

Probably one of the most famous incidents was in 1755 when Oxford University, on the order of university authorities, burnt the natural history collections of the Ashmolean Museum (BOYLAN 1999), including the stuffed extinct giant flightless pigeon of Mauritius known as the Dodo (NOVAK-KEMP & HUME 2017). At the time Oxford University's leadership didn't anticipate the Linnaean and Darwinian revolutions in understanding the natural world that would require large natural history collections to underpin teaching and research progress. Perhaps a wise and visionary academic leader at the time, with or without a crystal ball, could have foreseen the folly in such an abrupt administrative decision, but alas, the pragmatists won the argument and had their way, as they often do.

A number of essays in this collection clearly demonstrate that objects can be reused and recycled through different types of learning and teaching utility. The pedagogic uses of university museums and collections change over time as do the audiences using them in learning programs; they are iterative and constantly evolving in response to institutional needs. Yet, even though text and object are both seen as dialogic enablers of learning, when it comes to economic decisions about resources, cuts to museum programs will almost always come before cuts to library programs. Is this simply a result of the traditions of textuality in higher learning, or are other factors involved in shaping such familiar outcomes?

More cynical observers of the contemporary corporatized academy might claim it is a reflection of the fact that the decision making of leadership groups is more informed by hedge fund management and property development principles rather than any understanding of how learning works. The need to advocate on behalf of the value of museums and collections to the constant churn of personnel passing through the revolving door of higher education leadership positions seems to be an eternal challenge (MARES 1999).

The technology issue and where it could lead us in terms of learning perhaps provides us with exciting and optimistic potential in contrast to the somewhat sanguine reflection on the nature of the institutional setting above. The ability to reproduce accurate digital avatars of objects from photogrammetry is becoming ubiquitous. There are examples, both in this collection of essays and the broader literature (e.g. NELSON 2014, ECCLES 2019) where digital objects themselves and the process of converting objects into digital data, are being increasingly incorporated into higher education learning programs. It could even be claimed that the easy and infinite replication enabled by an analogue–digital intersection is becoming a new pedagogy dialectic itself.

The educational potential for university museums and collections is immense. Imagine a future where you could enlist access to objects in some of the best university collections from around the globe for curriculum design and direct incorporation into classes. This could forearm educators with powerful tools to really bring the delivery of subject matter alive. If digital avatars of objects from the university museums of the world are made readily accessible to education developers and curriculum designers, the higher education experience for an increasing number of audiences could become a truly transformative one. Such developments would undoubtedly take time to build resources and require evoking the collaborative capacity of higher education networks.

Perhaps there is a role here for UMAC and perhaps also many more themes to be explored in the journal?

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