Evaluating Pop Culture Museum Engagements: Pedagogies of, about, and with *Harry Potter*

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Blockbuster museum exhibits which focus on popular media have been on the rise in recent years, ranging from *Star Wars: Where Science Meets Imagination* (2005) to the *Chronicles of Narnia: The Exhibition* (2009). While these exhibits bring in much needed crowds and financing to museums, how well do they serve the museological goal of public education? In this paper, I address this question by examining the pedagogical contributions of a variety of *Harry Potter*-related[1] museum engagements. Questions surrounding these particular museum engagements are inextricably bound to questions regarding the educational value of popular culture and mass media itself. This paper connects recent developments within museum learning and education (namely, an increased focus on constructivist-based learning and interactive exhibitions) and media literacy / new literacy studies (namely, an understanding of media and cultural literacy from a sociocultural perspective). By comparing similarities between these fields, I attempt to explore not only what content is learned through these pop culture museum engagements, but also the methods and processes through which this occurs. In turn, this analysis may enable a reconceptualization of the role of museums within the cultural life of the community as we move further into the 21st century.

Introduction

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 (Heyman *et al.*, 2001, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2007, 2009, 2010, 2011). 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*, 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, n.p.). As a result, the paper

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[1] *Harry Potter* refers to the series of books by J. K. Rowling (1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2007), and the media franchise based on these books.

published another article entitled "Does *Harry Potter* belong at Boston's Museum of Science?," which questioned the relationship between this fantasy-based exhibit and its science museum hosts[2]. Questions in the article included: "what does magic have to do with science?" (Kirshner, 2009, n.p.).

On the one hand, the producers of the exhibit, Global Experience Specialists, Inc. (GES), stated that their focus was on the craftsmanship of the objects rather than any specific educational goal. In press releases advertising the opening of the exhibition, 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," (Warner Brothers, 2011, p. 1) and "A visit to *Harry Potter: The Exhibition* is great for anyone who loves seeing how inspiring stories and blockbuster films become a reality" (Warner Brothers, 2010, p. 2). On the other hand, the directors of the science museums that hosted the exhibit 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" (Museum of Science, 2009, para. 7). Pacific Science Center president and CEO Bryce Seidl added: "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 " (Warner Brothers, 2010, p. 2). Thus, justification for the exhibit resided partially on its ability to attract new museum visitors, 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 views 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 how to evaluate the educational value of this and other media-based exhibits. *Harry Potter: The Exhibition* is certainly not the only exhibit of its kind critiqued for its lack of educational focus. Other popular culture-based exhibitions have also undergone harsh evaluations for their lack of connection to their museum hosts; examples include the traveling *Chronicles of Narnia* exhibit (also created by GES) and *Star Wars: The Magic of Myth* (hosted at the Smithsonian Air and Space museum in 1999). Judgments surrounding these museum engagements generally align with discussions regarding 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, and the British Museum in London. 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. Generally, these shows have been evaluated as being too one-dimensional, exporting one version of culture, and therefore

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[2] The exhibition has been hosted by several venues since its creation including Boston's Museum of Science, the Chicago Museum of Science and Industry, Seattle's Pacific Science Center, the Ontario Science Centre in Canada, and most recently, in 2011, at Discovery Times Square, an exhibit venue in New York City.

potentially closing off the voice of individual museums or curators (Prior, 2006, p. 515). As Conn (2006) states: "Blockbusters can have the effect of 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).

Thus, inquiry into the educational value of these exhibits is not only related to its potential to teach visitors but also questions surrounding visitor agency. If fans of media franchises may be posited as consumer "dupes," what happens when they are additionally positioned as museum dupes attending blockbuster exhibits? In this paper, I argue that any potential educational import of these media-based museum events 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 *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 this relationship supported (or not) by the ways in which people deal with these media properties outside of the museum space—in the so-called 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 museums, which have been plentiful within the English-speaking world since the books gained worldwide popularity over 10 years ago. Numerous museums have hosted public events (such as costume competitions, lectures and workshops, scavenger hunts, etc.) and exhibits related to the media franchise. All of these exhibits and events ask visitors to engage with the media text in different ways. Within this paper then, I look specifically at three distinct *Harry Potter*-based museum interventions. First, I address the Warner Brothers-produced exhibition mentioned above. *Harry Potter: The Exhibition* is a traditional museum exhibit of over 200 props and costumes from the *Harry Potter* films, which are on display in themed dioramas. The exhibition has traveled to numerous science and technology centers throughout North America since its creation in 2009. Second, I look at the *Harry Potter's World: Renaissance Science, Magic, and Medicine*, a small traveling exhibit created by the National Library of Medicine. This show highlights Renaissance-based influences of the book series. Also produced in 2009, the exhibit has been hosted by numerous university and public libraries since its debut. Finally, I examine the day-long program *Harry Potter and the Magical Muggle Museum*, created by the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (hereafter Penn Museum). This event, which ran annually from 2007-2009, included workshop classes, lectures, competitions and games, as well as traditional exhibit displays related to the fantasy franchise. 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/participants. In looking at these factors, then, we can arrive at a more complete picture of how they may 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 in 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 versus non-commercial boundaries, but rather is relative to the shaping of visitor experience.[3] The goal of this analysis is to create a general set of guidelines that enable the public to better understand how to compare and evaluate these media-based interventions within the context of the museum. In the end, I hope to come up with conclusions regarding 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 becomes important 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).

In museums, inquiries into theories of learning have generally been encompassed into discussions of object-based versus interactive learning. Traditionally, the role of museums has been to maintain collections of valuable artifacts, 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… [can] yield themselves up to anyone who studies and observes the objects carefully enough" (Conn, 2000, pp. 4-9). Thorough examination of objects is therefore considered the primary mode of learning. Knowledge, as a consequence, is considered to exist outside the learner (Hein, 2006). 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 to 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."[4] In this mode of learning, knowledge is constructed through a person's actions or interactions (Hein, 2006). Rather than being asked to closely examine rocks behind glass, for example, a museum visitor is now asked to create his own fossil 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 most

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[3] Incidentally the Penn Museum event and the National Library of Medicine exhibit are not sponsored by Warner Brothers, but rather implemented under banner of "fair use," or the free use of copyrighted material without corporate permission for educational purposes.

[4] The term "center," as opposed to "museum," denotes less focus on maintaining a collection of artifacts.

definitely 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). Falk, Dierking, and Adams (2006) 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 (pp. 329-331).

Research on media and schooling therefore 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 consequently 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 is often 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) or developing the skills of media analysis and critique (Buckingham & Sefton-Green, 1994). Within the latter category, teachers and students are not only asked to look at the form of media but also 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 also become popular in recent years (cf. Gee, 2007; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). New Literacies Studies looks at literacy from a sociocultural perspective, recognizing that "there is no reading or writing in any meaningful sense of each term outside social practices" (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007, pp. 1-2). Within this field, literacy is expanded and placed within the larger communicative—or semiotic—framework of *Discourse* (with a "big 'D'"), which is defined by Gee not only as the usually acknowledged ways of using language (e.g. reading, writing, speaking), but also use of other semiotic forms (e.g. images, sounds, graphics, etc.), and related "ways of thinking, believing, feeling, valuing, acting/doing and interacting" as recognized within particular social groups (as cited in Knobel & Lankshear, 2007, p. 3). According to Knobel and Lankshear (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 (pp. 7-11).

Media Literacy and New Literacies therefore have different approaches to the *content* of learning—the former (at least the type 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 are media treated within these museum interventions—as content or as ethos?

Media literacy scholars Buckingham and Sefton-Green (1994) discuss different ways of approaching media learning in schools, which they qualify as "teaching *through* media" versus "teaching *about* media" (p. 4, italics original). Buckingham and Sefton-Green describe "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). Hill (2009), who also studies media engagements in the classroom with a focus on hip-hop, further demarcates this difference. He describes three categories of using hip-hop in the classroom: pedagogies *of* hip-hop, pedagogies *about* hip-hop, and pedagogies *with* hip-hop. 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 focuses on hip-hop as a frame to "enhance student motivation [and] transmit subject area knowledge" (p. 123). Examples of this include using hip-hop rhymes to bolster a poetry curriculum, or counting beats in raps to teach algebra.

Buckingham and Sefton-Green's (1994) and Hill's (2009) 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 within 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. Princess Leia's motivations for fighting against Galactic Empire in the *Star Wars* narrative) or the *production* of it (e.g. filming locations chosen by George Lucas for the *Star Wars* films). 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 sampling in hip-hop to examine copyright law) 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). Finally, pedagogies *of* media refer to acts of learning (or rehearsing) the mindset, ethos or associated skills of the media text or technology. Rather than focusing on content, pedagogies of media focuses more on the action and activity of learners. What are the appropriate or successful ways of acting within the space of this media text— whether as a fan or a *practitioner*? All three of these categories (pedagogies about/ with/of media) aid in more precisely categorizing the nature of the relationship between visitor and content within media-based museum interactions.

Before moving on to an analysis of the case studies, it is important to look at how fans of popular culture function outside of the museum context. Fans of particular media texts, such as *Dr. Who* or *Twilight*, may find themselves within a 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 with a common interest, endeavor, goal, or practice (p. 85). Media Studies scholar Henry Jenkins (2006) links this concept of affinity

spaces with the efforts of fan communities—who work together (in person and online) to promote their interest in media franchises (like *Star Trek* or *Harry Potter*) through activities such as discussion of the books, the writing of stories based on the series (a.k.a. "fan fiction"), the re-creation of costumes or sets from the films, the organization of fan conferences, or other related pursuits. In general, much of the literature on fan communities focuses on the potential agency of consumers and fans created by these groups through these efforts (Jenkins, 1992). If people (who have an interest in popular culture) have often been characterized as consumer dupes, controlled by corporate interests (cf. Adorno & Horkeimer, 1969), so too have they been posited as museum dupes, controlled by "elitist" museum interests (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992). Scholarship on fan cultures, however, has provided a new perspective on consumer practices, highlighting how fans can become active shapers of their experience (Jenkins, 1992). How might these fan communities, and consequently visitors to these media-based museum interventions, be considered within the same vein? In looking at affinity spaces, Gee (2004) posits the importance not only of understanding what these affinity spaces are "about" (i.e. the content) but also "how the content and interactional organizations [around that content] reflexively shape each other" (p. 82). What then is the relationship between content, learner and community within these interventions? How do these reflexively shape each other? In other words, how do people become active shapers of their own experience of and knowledge created within these mass media-based museum interventions?

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 Global Experience Specialists, Inc. (GES), an experiential marketing group. Initially created in 2009, the exhibition has since traveled to notable science and technology museums and centers including the Chicago Museum of Science and Industry, the Museum of Science in Boston, the Pacific Science Center in Seattle and most recently, the Discovery 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 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.

Techniques of media engagement within the exhibit include: a focus on the object, linearity, and fixed interpretations. Regarding objects, despite the presence of a handful of interactive displays within the show (including the opportunity to sit in Hagrid's oversized chair and throwing a ball through a Quidditch hoop), the exhibit almost entirely relies on the static presentation of costumes and props. In this way, the exhibition follows the traditional object-based format of display as seen within collections-based museums. Here 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 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, [or] 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 or a Rodin statue. The visitor is impressed with the craftsmanship or singular aesthetic value of the object. Resonance, on the other hand, moves beyond the object itself to the 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. Here resonance may be understood as the relationship between the objects to either the production of the films or the fictional universe of *Harry Potter*. After visiting the exhibition in Boston, 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 helps to create a richer picture of the *Harry Potter* universe at large.

Occasionally, there is some tension between the feelings of resonance versus wonder within this exhibit. 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 [what we see as] constructed (through our behind the scenes perspective)" (para. 13). Despite this ambiguity, 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, *Harry Potter: The Exhibition* is very similar to other object-based blockbuster exhibits. As with other popular displays, visitors must buy timed tickets (offered at half hour increments) and wait in line in order to see the show. Upon entering, visitors are invited to walk through themed dioramas (e.g. Gryffindor dormitory, the Dark Forest, etc.). These are arranged in a particular sequence; visitors must walk from room to room in a linear fashion. Before leaving, participants must also pass through the exhibit store. There, people may purchase *Harry Potter*-related merchandise (e.g. 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).

Traditional museum practice generally privileges this kind of linear, unidirectional experience, and therefore particular ways of seeing (and

understanding) the world. As Conn (2000) states: "Museum objects, and the relationships in which they were arranged, were intended to convey a narrative" (pp. 6-8). This shaping of information through classification relates to Michel Foucault's (1995/1977) 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). 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.

The grouping of objects into certain themes generates a particular way of looking at or understanding the object. Issues of classification then are related to object interpretations. Questions 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 range 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 also relevant to note here that all the objects on display are 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 maintain 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 themselves may 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 pedagogies about *Harry Potter*. The entire show is structured around the epistemological goal of learning more about the universe or the making of the series. Examination of the objects is of utmost importance in engaging the media text. As mentioned earlier, 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). For example, a fan blogging about the exhibition discusses how she learned more about the birth of the Weasley twins' candy business by looking at their seemingly homemade Skiving Snackbox, which looked "as if they'd actually constructed it in their bedroom" (St. Hilaire, 2011, para. 10).

This immersion (as described by Jenkins) into the world of *Harry Potter* 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. 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," or "forensic fandoms") include attending *Star Trek* conventions, learning more about George Lucas' inspiration for *Star Wars* by listening to a DVD commentary, or going on a tour of *Rocky* film locations in Philadelphia.

Thus, despite its conventional use of museum display, the engagement promoted within this exhibit actually diverges from the "traditional" didactic-expository mode of museum learning (detailed by Witcomb, 2006) seen within typical academic, or fact-based, exhibits that focus on topics like climate change or the Silk Road. This is primarily due to the personal stake that many visitor-fans have in the topic. For example, people are likely to feel more passionately about a popular culture franchise such as *Harry Potter* than an academic topic such as the Silk Road. Says Jenkins (2009a): "This exhibit clearly function[s] as a *cultural attractor*—creating shared space for… fans to gather and have common experiences" (para. 14). Because of their prior engagement, then, people visiting the exhibit can be further inculcated into an "interpretive community" of fans (Jenkins, 1992)—something which seems evidenced by the numerous reviews of the exhibition found on *Harry Potter* fan sites online (e.g. Michael, 2009; St. Hilaire, 2011; Schull n.d.).

Rather than merely reporting on what they see in the exhibit, many of these fans provide their own interpretations of objects, and even disagreements about what should be shown. For example, despite liking the overall show, Jenkins (2009a) (who includes himself in the fan community of *Harry Potter*) mentions his disappointment that the exhibit designers did not incorporate Hufflepuff House (or other houses) prominently into the displays (para. 17). Other fans discuss whether or not the wands physically matched the corresponding characters (Michael, 2009, para. 5) or whether the design of prized artifacts lived up to their imagination (Schull, n.d. para. 8). Clearly this type of commentary is a product of previous experience and knowledge that these visitors bring to the museum

experience. As compared with academic exhibits, visitors have greater agency in expressing their opinion due to their high degree expertise on the topic at hand. In other words, while it is difficult for most visitors to question the expertise of a curator on new discoveries of the Silk Road or the biography of Monet, it is much easier for a fan to challenge an exhibit producer on their view of *Harry Potter.* Therefore, the *fixed* interpretations provided by the exhibit may not actually be fixed, but instead open to challenge and debate due to the nature of the content (i.e. a media text in which visitors are emotionally involved). Through their prior engagement with the content, then, visitors of popular culture-based exhibits can become more active shapers of their museum experience.

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 (NLM). The exhibit was designed by the Library (which functions under the National Institutes of Health) in 2009 and has since been hosted at numerous public and specialty university libraries (usually focusing on medicine or the natural sciences). The physical format of this exhibit is six 7-ft tall moveable standing banners with text and graphics (see Figure 1). Each of these is 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, which draws from original medical and scientific texts in the Library collection. It should be noted that there are no objects on display (beside the text/graphic panels), unlike the Warner Brothers exhibit discussed above.

Figure 1. The display banners included in the exhibit. Courtesy of the National Library of Medicine.

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 lesson plans). Designed by Sahar Saddiqui and Annabella Kraut (teachers from Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School in Maryland), the lesson plans 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" (*Harry Potter's World*, 2009, "Educational Resources" page).

These resources and the exhibition content are free and available online. However, the traveling exhibit (of which there are five copies) must be reserved in advance for a 6-week period. The exhibit is currently booked until 2013.

Techniques 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 (as with the Warner Brothers exhibit) or experience (as with the Penn Museum event) 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 exhibit is advertised as featuring objects (mostly books) from the collection of the NLM, though these are presented through reproduced images, text, and ideas drawn from the resources rather than the material artifacts themselves. In this way, the main technique of communication (and thus visitor engagement) is text and graphics printed on six standing banners. 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 physical configurations. The value of having a traveling exhibit of this information, despite the fact that it is available online, seems that it has potential to engage people who might not otherwise be interested in, aware of, and thus not seeking online the historic influences of *Harry Potter.* Unfortunately, besides the resources provided in the lesson plans and learning module, there is little 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 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. As with the exhibit, *Harry Potter* is used as a starting point or motivator for learning rather than as the 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 the exploration of "Renaissance traditions, [which have] played an important role in the development of Western science, including alchemy, astrology, and natural philosophy" (*Harry Potter's World*, 2009, n.p.). 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 (ibid.).

Within pedagogies with media, the relationship between the media content and the topic to be learned can differ across contexts. The media content may be referred to analogously (e.g. rhyming in hip-hop as compared to rhyming in Shakespeare) or be used as a method (e.g. writing math raps to learn calculus, playing an educational video game). In general, museum interventions tend to utilize the former (i.e., comparative look at the media text) rather than the latter (i.e., the media as tool), which is usually reserved for classrooms. Within this exhibit, the fantasy or scientific narrative details within *Harry Potter* (e.g. Harry and his friends handling the animated Mandrake root in Herbology class) are compared with Renaissance traditions (e.g. the discussion of the Mandrake root in the Renaissance botany text, *Hortus Sanitatis)*. Another example of this type of pedagogy can be seen within Boston Museum of Science's exhibit: *Star Wars: Where Science Meets Imagination*[5] (co-produced by Lucasfilm and funded by the National Science Foundation), created in 2005 and currently on tour. In this exhibit, *Star Wars* is used as the lens through which visitors can explore advances in modern science and technology (including robotics, levitation technologies, and space exploration). While the exhibit displays props, costumes and models from the films, these are not available for study in and of themselves (as with the Warner Brothers exhibit). Instead, these objects are used to create a framework in which visitors can learn about the topic at hand. In one display, for example, visitors are invited to sit in a full-sized replica of the spaceship Millennium Falcon, while watching a multimedia presentation about the current and future state of space exploration. This comparative pedagogy with media is also utilized within the blockbuster show *CSI: The Experience*, produced by the Fort Worth Museum of Science and History, CBS, and NSF. This exhibit focuses on the skills and processes of forensic science, the topic on which the television series is also based.

Pedagogies with media may additionally inspire other engagements between the media text and other related topics. Motivated by the approach of the exhibit, for example, many of the library venues created additional related lectures and events that expanded upon the connections between *Harry Potter* and other aspects of the Renaissance world not covered by the exhibit. Programs included: "Why Harry Potter Needs a Classical Education: Latin Spells and Mythical Creatures in the Wizarding World" (at Ohio State University), "Renaissance Science and the Quest for Immortality" (at the University of Texas—San Antonio), and "Some Philosophical Themes in *Harry Potter*: Ethics and the Soul" (at Central Michigan

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[5] It should be noted that this is a different exhibit than the *Star Wars* mythology exhibit mentioned at the beginning of this paper, which focuses more on the production of the films rather than on science or technology.

University). Rather than retaining a passive approach toward the exhibit topics, these library hosts (and their community members) actively created their own links between the media franchise and outside topics.

Additionally, pedagogies with media may serve to shift the nature of engagement with the original media text itself. Clearly, this relates to questions of prior experience. 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 re-engage with questions of expertise, as with the Warner Brothers exhibit. Who holds the most relevant information in this interchange between exhibit-visitor and exhibit-producer? Clearly, the designer or curator of the exhibit knows more about the outside topic to be learned, whether it is Renaissance science or space exploration. However, as mentioned previously, fans of the franchise may have greater expertise than curators or producers in relation to the media text. Thus, visitors and producers bring their own interests and backgrounds to the encounter, mutually enriching (or finding new) connections between the topics. One interesting example of this process can be seen in the opening lecture for the exhibit at the University of Redland's Armacost Library entitled "Harry Potter and the Invisible Hand" (held in February 2011). This lecture, which looked at the Weasley twin characters through the lens of economic structuring and individual agency, actually resulted from the collaboration between Professor Heather King and a student, who taught the former about the media series while co-teaching a seminar with her. While the student and the professor could not strictly be confined to the roles of producers or visitors to the exhibit, both could probably be considered members of the same *Harry Potter* affinity space. In this way, pedagogies with media may actually work to re-imagine the relationship between expert/novice, and producer/visitor through the intersection of different kinds of content: the popular and the elite. This kind of media-based interaction may, therefore, help to create a new paradigm for museum learning and engagement—one in which different kinds of expertise and experience are valued as mutually beneficial.

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 Penn Museum between 2007-2009. Aided by museum staff and members of the undergraduate class "Mythology and the Movies," Dr. 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 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 a "potion"-making class, as seen in Figure 2) to arts and crafts (e.g. "Luna's Charms and Jewelry," "Wandshop and Wandworks," and "Transfiguration Face Painting").

Figure 2. Potion-making class at Penn Museum *Harry Potter* event. Courtesy of Penn Museum.

Techniques of media engagement.

Interactivity, or "hands on" experience as defined by 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 (2006) identifies two modes of museum interactivity: the discovery model and the constructivist model. Within the discovery model, participants use the activity as a method to reveal something about the "real" or natural world. An example of this would be a museum visitor playing with pulleys and ropes as a way to investigate principles of mechanical engineering and gravity.

While the constructivist model of interactivity similarly relies on activity and exploration as with the discovery model, the goal is not to discover some external form of information or knowledge. Instead, what is being learned is based on the participants themselves: "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.[6] The objects of engagement within the program are primarily the experience that attendees 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) in a manner similar to the NLM exhibit, 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 is a minimum of fifteen activities in which one can join. Depending on their goals, visitors can choose to either participate in more sedentary activities (such as attending a lecture or doing arts & craft projects) or more active ones (such as a scavenger hunt or Quidditch practice). This may be motivated either by their overall objectives or how they feel during different points during the day.

Within each activity, the program staff sets up the frameworks for experience. It should be noted here that staff members could also be considered members of the community of visitors. Many of them are either outside volunteers or students of Dr. Krasniewicz. In terms of the students, they are obligated (as part of a class requirement) to research and play *Harry Potter* characters during the event. They are also responsible for running particular activities throughout the day. While some act as facilitators for already existing events, some create new activities. One example of this is "Sprout's Greenhouse," run by an undergraduate playing Professor of Herbology Pomona Sprout (a character from the *Harry Potter* series). The student devised a ritual for distributing small plants and gardening tips to interested visitors. According to Krasniewicz, one of the day's goals was getting students to consider what visitors would get from the experience, or "to think about how to create the memorable, meaningful engagements" (L. Krasniewicz, personal communication, December 2, 2010). Thus, these students may themselves be considered members of the *Magical Muggle Museum* affinity group. Like the visitors, they share the same goals of creating the fullest, most fun experience out of the day. It is through enactment of these characters, activities, and thus the universe of *Harry Potter* that the social and educational value of this program exists.

Visitors themselves also aid in the production of their experience through 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 the taster but also the people surrounding them. The "Sorting Hat Ceremony," in which visitors are asked to wear the magical hat and hear its

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[6] This seems implied by the title of the program. As opposed to Warner Brothers' *Harry Potter: The Exhibition* (which seems to emphasize greater focus on precious objects), *Harry Potter and the Magical Muggle Museum* puts more emphasis on the people and relationships involved within the program ("Muggle" denotes non-magical individuals in *Harry Potter*).

prophesy, similarly relies on the reactions of 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.

The meaning of this content (i.e. the experience of *Harry Potter*) is therefore created by the visitor, rather than the producer or curator of the program. Krasniewicz 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" (L. Krasniewicz, personal communication, December 2, 2010). With the program then, visitors are not given top-down interpretations of the *Harry Potter* universe as seen in the Warner Brothers exhibit. Instead, through the structure of the event, they are given an open-ended framework to participate in activities and interact with staff members and other visitors. By creating their own experience, they consequently create their own meanings for the day.

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, or *Discourses* as Gee (2007) calls them, 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. Within this program, there are actually two ways of looking at the *Harry Potter* Discourse. On the one hand, it may be considered to be 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). This is related to what Krasniewicz calls the "Anthropological way of thinking" or ways of understanding culture through contribution and performance. In Anthropology, Krasniewicz states that "you can't understand a culture until you act it out, you live it," as in the mode of participant observation (L. Krasniewicz, personal communication, November 23, 2010). Both the student staff (in studying and acting out as characters) and the visitors (in interacting with the staff and also in playing their own roles) participate in the Discourse of the fictional world of *Harry Potter* through performance and observation. For visitors, 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). On the other hand, the *Harry Potter* Discourse also may refer to the ways of behaving or relating to others *within the fan affinity space*. This mode of Discourse is certainly related to the other: being a fan of a media franchise involves knowing how to leverage knowledge about the media text in order to communicate and act with others—essentially, knowing how to pick up and use the Discourse of the fictional *Harry Potter* universe. In this way, the ability to imagine alternate universes is a requirement for being a *good* fan.

Compared to visitors of the Warner Brothers exhibit (who expend effort learning about *Harry Potter*), attendees of *Magical Muggle Museum* work on

becoming proficient at moving between Discourses (i.e. the fictional world, the fandom world, etc.). Put in another way, the learning that occurs in the *Magical Muggle Museum* is more focused on *how* one can learn rather than *what* is learned—the process rather than the content. The content of the space becomes less important than the social thinking and action required to participate. Gee (2007) relates this kind of Discourse acquisition to learning at large—whether in video games, classrooms, workplaces, and museums. Borrowing from Lave, Gee states that learning in general occurs not merely through the acquisition of specific facts, principles, or skills, but rather through changes in participation, and thus *identities*, essentially learning how to *be*. Gee (2007) uses this idea to speak of the educational value of video games—asking people to think about power of shifting mindsets rather than learning content. If video games can be thought of along these lines, then might the museum interaction of the *Magical Muggle Museum* also be thought of in the same vein?

One way of thinking about this might be through what Krasniewicz calls "imaginative thinking" (L. Krasniewicz, personal communication, November 23, 2010). She 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" (L. Krasniewicz, personal communication, November 23, 2010). 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" (L. Krasniewicz, personal communication, November 23, 2010). The goal of *Harry Potter* Day, then, is to "show participants that imagination is not just about fantasy worlds, [imagination] is about a way of thinking" (L. Krasniewicz, personal communication, November 23, 2010). Attendees of the *Magical Muggle Museum* are therefore given a chance to exercise their imagination *and* to realize the power of this kind of thinking. Thus, visitors gain agency not only through their social participation in the program, but also through the recognition that this activity itself can create Discourses in which one can participate. People thus create their own museum content.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have developed a method for looking at the educational import of mass media-based museum interventions. However, 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. For example, each of the case studies described above may actually work within multiple modes of these pedagogies. The Penn Museum *Magical Muggle Museum* engages with both a pedagogy of *Harry Potter* (through participatory and interactive activities described above) and a pedagogy with *Harry Potter* (in activities that link outside topics to the series, such as the Latin for Wizards class or the lectures on Mayan divination).[7] While

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[7] The newly announced *Harry Potter* museum in London (a revamping of Leavesden Studios, where all the films were filmed), and the *Wizarding World of Harry Potter* in Universal Studios in Florida are also two examples of media-based immersive engagements that can be examined through these pedagogies. Both focus on the worlds of *Harry Potter* (the former focuses on the production of the films, whereas the latter creates a fictional world of the narrative through rides), and could be thought to

these interventions may work in multiple ways to engage visitors with media, the pedagogical categories outlined here may help to describe the learning that occurs in more precise terms—namely, how learning may be thought of in terms of content *and* ethos. It should be noted here, however, that this paper focuses primarily on how the interactions are set up by *producers*. Future examination into these different pedagogies might include closer analysis of the *visitors* of these media-based engagements. Does the language, performance, and activity of these people actually support the pedagogies of/about/with media within the structure of these interactions? How might museum professionals (and visitors) work to leverage this structure in order to provide the most desirable outcome?

Before concluding, it becomes important to return to the larger discussions regarding the educational consequences of these media-based museum interventions. Earlier, I mentioned the importance of considering visitor agency in relation to these engagements. In discussing heritage museums, Hoelscher (2006) says: "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). By choosing to focus on popular culture topics, museums seem to confirm the importance of visitor choice and desires, thus promoting their level of agency. In general, this focus falls in line with what Jenkins (2006) calls the rise of "participatory culture," or cultures in which the content and interactions surrounding this content are defined primarily through the activities of people involved within the group (p. 331). This way of looking at culture is clearly different than earlier, more "traditional," notions of museum classification and knowledge-building. What is important within a participatory culture is determined internally (by members of the group), rather than by external "experts." Visitor agency is then promoted through a valuing of visitor culture, thus promoting a bottom-up rather than a top-down approach to museum content. Perhaps, then, we can follow Presiozi and Farago's (2004) line of questioning 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 individuals with unique subjectivities" (p. 3). As shapers of our modern identity, popular media deserve a place in the museum gallery.

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