20 MULTIMEDIA, MUSEUM STUDIES - A BRIDGE

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The Muses of Greek Mythology are said to be nine sister goddesses who presided over learning and the arts. The Muses were associated with learning in both the realm of the university and museums. In fact, the word museum is derived from the Latin form of the Greek Museion, a sanctuary for the Muses (Beniger and Freedman-Harvey, 1987). While both the university and the museum are watched over by the Muses, it is here, given their separate approaches to learning, that these two institutions find themselves divided. Museums rely on the strength of the actual object for educating and communicating with their audiences. Universities are dedicated to the realm of the library and printed word. Research and education, however, are the ultimate goal for each.

The division between these two houses of learning runs quite deep. The use of actual objects in traditional classrooms of learning has never been viewed with much favour. Further, when one probes the "traditional reward structure" universities engage in when evaluating faculty for professional advancement, the rift deepens. Faculty who serve as guest curators and publish comprehensive catalogues are not valued equally with a colleague who has published a book or contributed to a text. Similarly, faculty who engage in the development of electronic instructional resources, (J. Paul Getty Trust and The American Council of Learned Societies - summary, 1993), often have their work devalued when compared to a faculty who produces along traditional lines.

Change comes slowly to institutions of higher learning. This paper proposes to examine a crossroads that has been arrived at, and has the potential to bring about significant change. It can be credited to electronic technology. It is the forging of a new expanded relationship between the university and museum studies, and ultimately, museums as well. Technology, but specifically multimedia is here to stay. As time evolves it is becoming increasingly accessible and affordable. It is proving itself to be an influential and powerful tool for learning.

How can the arts and humanities contribute to the technological tide? The possibilities, among others, include the development of courses to teach multimedia; the integration of multimedia into classrooms as resources; the use of the tools to make significant contributions to the advancement of scholarship. If the decision is to sit back and wait for the sciences or the private sectors to dictate what is available for adaptation to the humanities, then many opportunities utilising multimedia to its fullest potential will be lost. I believe that there can be harmony between the Muses of the museums and universities. Multimedia is the important bridge. For computer initiatives to succeed they will require support of the universities, a willingness of Museum Studies Programmes to enlarge their focus, and support for faculty willing to vest time in development. The

barriers between these two institutions of learning can be characterised as artificial, and it is time to bring them down. If we can think of computerisation as permitting humanists to work on large, integrated projects, along the model of experimental sciences, we need then to bridge the cultural division between scholars, librarians, programmers, technicians, (J Paul Getty Trust and The American Council of Learned Societies - Summary, 1993), and I would add museum professionals.

Museum and museum training

Museums have been curious about computers and their applicability for several decades. Hampered by lack of funds, availability of affordable equipment, and the necessary personnel to run the machines, museums have further been hindered in their desire to become technologically oriented because of fear that the equipment they finally select will be obsolete before it is up and running. Museums, unlike libraries, have grown up as separate and distinct entities linked by their commitment to preservation and education. As a result no one single software can serve all museums nor allow for the same kind of interface that libraries experience. Museums have often had to adapt their collections to pre-existing software, and not vice versa. The reality is that not a lot of companies have developed museum software for collections management because it is not highly profitable. However, with increasingly greater ease of interface with a variety of software and hardware, the future is looking brighter for computerisation in museums. A recent publication of the Archives and Museum Informatics (Wright and Bearman, 1992), lists over 50 companies who have developed software for all types of museum and archive functions.

At the same time that computers were evolving from mainframes to minicomputers to personal computers, Museum Studies Programmes were also taking on new significance within the museum community. Museum Studies Programmes have become the training ground for learning not only the history, theory and role of museums (museology), but also the methods and techniques employed in museums (museography) (Kaplan, 1992). Now the definition of museography can be expanded to include training in multimedia.

With the awakening of the humanities to the importance of technology to increase one's ability to advance and keep current in today's academic environment comes other benefits. First is the greater recognition of the contribution that Museum Studies can make to both the university and the museum community. Second, the computer industry is recognising that museums and universities are viable clients. Several companies are now investing in the development of image based applications that can be used by both. If we accept the premise that Museum Studies Programmes can serve as realistic bridge between the academic realm of ideas and the physical stuff housed in museums (Kaplan, 1992), then it is possible that Museum Studies are also a safe harbour for exploring the integration of scholarly endeavours and technology.

Image based applications

Image based computer applications are changing the way we think about the "real" thing - the object. Images surround us now as never before. Society today often associates ideas with images as with works. Students of today almost all arrive at college already computer literate. Those who are not, quickly become orientated to the function and use of the computer. The majority of faculty on the other hand, are still reluctant to tackle new approaches to teaching involving technology. Further, without support from the university a faculty is not apt to devote the time necessary to develop an electronic based project or become computer literate. there have been pioneers among faculty who are

willing to seek out and use technology. Generally, they have come from institutions that are supportive of campus wide computing initiatives. That is, that priority has been given to acquiring equipment and to encouraging faculty to develop models. In addition several organisations have made it to goal to disseminate information about technology research in the humanities (J. Paul Getty Trust and The American Council of Learned Societies - Summary, 1993). There must be a renewed commitment to collaborative relationships both across disciplines and organisational boundaries. This new understanding of information technologies must be inclusive of senior faculty, administrators, and all levels of students, graduate and undergraduate. Just the same, it must also be embraced by museums from the level of the broad and director, to that of the museum staff and the museum audience.

A case study: California State University, Long Beach (CSULB)

So how might a collaborative partnership be established, for example, within an art department? How might a department bring reluctant faculty into such a project: How does one create a project that can go beyond the model stage and become the springboard for bringing a non-technologically oriented department into being one? Further, how can this project not only become generated by the faculty, but be of benefit to both the undergraduate and graduate students? For the students it is important to consider whether the expected outcome is only to provide them with access to knowledge, or is there the greater implication of using this as on opportunity for a university to be in the forefront of teaching students about multimedia? Such an undertaking needs to be approached with sensitivity and the understanding that such a project will most likely rest on the shoulder(s) of one or two willing faculty who will lead the charge for their department.

What would be an expected outcome of such an endeavour? How would Museum Studies Programmes and museums come into play in this dynamic? The answer is multifacted. These are complex issues for which many of the answers are a matter of timing and often are controlled by forces outside the best laid plans of the faculty involved. At a very basic level, universities have an opportunity to contribute to the training of Museum Studies students in the area of multimedia, a "skill" that is being sought more and more by museum and arts related institutions.

The fine arts department of CSULB determined that it needed to become technologically oriented. A modest goal was set to develop Art History tutorials as a starting point. The tutorials were envisioned as a means of providing a diverse undergraduate population with a comprehensive self-study learning tool individualised to each Art History Course. The tutorials would serve as a vehicle for bringing reluctant faculty into the arena of computing by authoring the tutorials; graduate students in Art History and Museum Studies (often one in the same), would actually build the tutorials. Training was at the heart of the proposal. An essential ingredient was to create more than one model using a variety of software that would meet the individual needs of the faculty, but the tutorials would be built using the same multimedia tools. Thus the graduate students would become conversant in the language of multimedia, not just a particular program. The model project would need to be accessible to 30 - 40 students at any given time working at individual terminals in the student computer labs. The images and data would be accessed from a central server. Finally, the model had to have the potential for expanding beyond the discipline of Art History and become a viable model for university wide use. This the hook that gave the project University support.

In the CSULB scenario two junior faculty had a vision and a chair committed to integrating technology into the department. After a year of working with academic

computing, the Art History faculty, and their own belief in the validity of image based computer projects, the pilot was on-line: a tutorial for the History of Prints and Drawings. The pay-off was that they had successfully converted (very slowly) one reluctant faculty to the validity of such a venture. The faculty member had become not only literate with the application, but was comfortable enough to take part in actually building the database. She became an advocate both within and outside the University with other faculty about the value of such an endeavour. Time and progress have moved the project from the pilot stage of one faculty and two graduate students, to five faculty, and a commitment from each faculty to have their graduate assistants build their tutorials.

Other developments have happened over this two year period. The University has endorsed the development of a multimedia course, which will be taught in the Fall of 1993. The department will offer the course to graduate students in the Fall. The department has agreed to take up discussion about making multimedia training a requirement of the Art History graduate degree program. The Museum Studies Programme plays heavily into this equation. The Art Historians recognise that Museum Studies is a strong pulling card for the department. The terminal degree at CSULB is an MA and the students are attracted by the combination of Museum Studies and Art History. Formalising the multimedia component of the Museum Studies program strengthens the program, and affords the Art History discipline to be on the cutting edge. Museums in the community are finding out about our expertise and we are beginning to look into forming mentoring relationships between the university and the museums.

The overall outcome after two years of working on the project has been positive. Academic computing has embraced the project and the university administration has given it their endorsement. The two faculty are becoming involved in large and larger computing arenas that the CSU system as a whole is venturing into. Word has 'gotten out' about the project. Informal networking is taking place on a weekly basis, with other universities and museums.

The time has come for Museum Studies Programmes to become leaders in the field of multimedia, and break down the artificial boundaries which exist between and within departments, universities and museums. Museum Studies offer students and museums the link to multimedia training. Museums are conveyors of information and can offer to universities the highest standards for documenting, researching and preserving objects to use as guideposts in developing databases. Through multimedia the strengths of two institutions of learning can be brought together to create powerful tools of learning. It is time to be at the forefront of the next electronic wave. The Muses would once again be allowed to relish the position the arts and humanities have taken in being on the cutting-edge. Electronic interfaces as proposed in this paper can only help to strengthen the position of Art History and Museum Studies within the university community. In a climate of diminishing resources and greater competition, more visibility for a department and/or programme is becoming essential to survival. Finally, in the ideal situation the university museum would round out the equation by serving as a hands-on laboratory of learning for these projects. Thus allowing for the development (faculty), training (graduate students and museum professionals), utilisation (undergraduates) and implementation (museum audiences) of multimedia as an integrated whole in the process of learning. Technology provides us with tremendous opportunity to think and create in new ways (J. Paul Getty Trust and The American Council of Learned Societies - Summary, 1993), and forge new relationships. The time is "ripe", right now, for change and to create "the" new.