

How to Tell a Story?

Narrative Research on Museum Exhibition

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ABSTRACT

With illustrations of Chinese museum exhibitions, this study explores the value of the new concept "storytelling" in museums. It can be divided into linear story deduction and nonlinear story deduction, depending on the cooperation of various elements in the exhibition. The finding further shows three applications of "storytelling" in museums: combined display of exhibits, restoration of exhibits, display of isolated exhibits, indicating that the combination of dynamic and static display can make the exhibition truly "live".

Keywords: Museum, "Storytelling", Linear story deduction, Nonlinear story deduction.

1. THE CONCEPT OF STORY

"Story" is a literary genre that quotes detailed facts and emotions to describe hypothetical experiences. Its purpose is to promote the audience to have immersive imagination. "Storytelling" is people's description of this coherent, vivid and complete plot or hypothetical experience process. In terms of exhibition "storytelling", which refers to using the unified arrangement and adjustment of various equipment and exhibits, to form a comprehensive integration of visual, auditory and tactile sense of the exhibition^[2]. By reproducing the true colors of events in this way, the audience can fully contact the past, present and future of human beings, feel their deep meaning more strongly, and better inherit the memories and experiences.

2. THE NECESSITY OF TELLING STORIES

2.1. Why Tell a Story?

2.1.1. "Story" is Easy to Understand also Attractive

The story generally starts from the listener's psychological habits, narrows the distance with others in a simple way, strengthens communication with others, and makes the memory and experience easier to understand, to impact people, life, and modern society positively.

The story focuses on describing the event process, often by the interlocking of vivid and exciting plots. They can fully express the causality and logic of the story, making it become attractive and stimulating people's curiosity to continue reading or listening^[1].

2.1.2. People's Boredom With Traditional Exhibition

Nowadays, the concept of the museum has realized the importance of interaction with people, which shows that the exhibition space should be both artistic and humanized. The traditional entity listing can no longer meet people's needs. People are bored with the traditional way of exhibition, and they hope to know the story, the value from it. This requires the museum to focus on the feelings and needs of the audience, through the performance of the story, the interaction with audiences, they can obtain diverse spiritual experiences in limited space^[3].

2.2. What are the Benefits of Telling Stories?

2.2.1. Changing Tradition and Innovating Exhibition Means

The use of exhibition storytelling has brought a new look to the museum display, enhancing the museum's role in communicating with the audience and even the public, and combining the equally important role of "entertainment" and "education". While relaxing, the transmission of information and the construction of

meaning can also be proceed smoothly. Baleno^[8] mentioned that many thematic exhibitions have a fundamental narrative clue, enabling the audience to get a richer experience. A story can connect all exhibits and perceptible exhibition factors, which is much more beneficial than a simple theme of exhibition. Exhibition "storytelling" integrates the exhibition information, gives more consideration to the interests of the audience and their acceptable degree, and changes one-way evolution mode of the traditional exhibition. In this way, it is easier to mobilize the enthusiasm of the audience, fully realize the interaction between the audience and the exhibition, so that the audience can have a full range of perception and experience^[12].

2.2.2. Optimize the Exhibition Line to Make the Exhibition Truly "Live."

The scope of architectural space limits traditional exhibitions, therefore, the exhibition lines can not be reasonably arranged. The audience often have to follow the lines arranged by the curators, otherwise, there will be a chaos. This mandatory single-line mode is easy to trigger audiences' antipathy, thus they will not fully appreciate all artwork in the exhibition. If the exhibition is integrated by storytelling and rational spatial sequences, audiences are more likely to be attracted by the storyline to avoid the aesthetic fatigue caused by the difficulty of identifying the exhibition line and the disordered visiting sequence. After the visit, the audience will feel more about the exhibition, sincerely appreciate the role and significance of the exhibition, and transmit the influence of the exhibition^[4].

2.2.3. The Exhibits are Fully Integrated into the Modern Environment

The exhibits in the museum are objective. The archaeological relics are separated from the original environment and embedded in the contemporary social life. How to ensure the integration of the modern environment and the historical relics is a problem that the museum needs to further explore. The use of the storytelling reshapes the exhibition line, takes the exhibits as a narrative unit, restores its historical scene, and rearranges it with other exhibits. In this way, a logical story context is formed, a place for telling stories is generated, and the sense of conflict between the exhibits and the modern environment is alleviated^[13]. Additionally, it also ensures the value of the exhibits, so that the exhibits can fully integrate into the modern environment and have the soul of modern life. This is the value embodiment of storytelling and the inevitable requirement of the development of the times.

3. BASIC ELEMENTS OF EXHIBITION "STORYTELLING"

3.1. Perspective selection

Perspective refers to the perspective from which the narrator or character observes the story. The choice of perspective plays a vital role in the story, which can be said to be the story's root. The bearer of perspective is mainly the narrator of the story, composed of perceptual vision and cognitive vision. In the museum exhibition^[1], the museum must first determine what kind of story it wants to tell the audience and then study how to tell a good story. Therefore, the perspective of the exhibition is the direction and angle of the curator to present and tell the "story" of exhibits. In the whole process of the exhibition, all exhibition elements such as exhibits and equipment become the bearers of the perspective. The audience experiences the stories told by the exhibits through their perception of vision, touch and hearing; Feel the significance and influence of the exhibition through the cognition of the exhibits.

3.2. Establishment of narrator

From narratology, there are three narrative relationships: real author, narrator and implied author. The actual author is the person who creates or writes narrative works; Narrator mainly refers to the actor who tells the story; The implied author is "the author's second self", usually a person who silently designs and arranges the various elements and interrelations of the work^[1]. In literary works, the narrator is not necessarily the author, but it will guide the audience in the telling process. In museum exhibitions, the relationship between storytellers also exists. The exhibition's curator is the real author of the exhibition, that is, the creator of the exhibition "story", who can actively create the "story" for exhibition design and production. The curator's attitude and position towards the meaning conveyed by the exhibition can be regarded as the implied author of the exhibition, which directly affects the direction and effect. The exhibits in the exhibition eventually become the narrator of the "story", telling the story they have or want to tell, strengthening the authority that other words are difficult to refute, and thoroughly ensuring the objectivity of the exhibition.

3.3. The order of storytelling in the exhibition

Like stories and novels, if museum exhibitions are arranged by telling stories, there is a logical order. The museum exhibition is the planning and design of space. However, in terms of time, the Museum exhibition still has the "beginning development climax ending" of the story; From the perspective of space, there can be "flashback, interlude, sequential narration, supplementary narration and classification"^[5]. General

museum exhibitions are always arranged in a balanced and straightforward way, lacking the ups and downs of the story. If the time sequence and space sequence in literature are used here, the exhibition will be full of climaxes, twists and turns, and enjoyable to have a different experience.

3.4. Content of the exhibition "storytelling"

Environment, plot and form are the essential elements to achieve a good story. In museum exhibitions, these also become indispensable elements of the exhibition "story". The environment, plot, and form of the exhibition "story" can only be generated by relying on the exhibition text, exhibits, auxiliary exhibits and facilities, interactive experience, and the audience's cooperation. The exhibition text runs through the whole exhibition and can be used as the guide of story clues. In addition, the cooperation of exhibition text, exhibits and formal art design can create an atmosphere environment to express the connotation of the exhibition; The cooperation between exhibits or between exhibits and auxiliary exhibits and words makes the story three-dimensional and spatial. As the owner of the exhibition, the exhibits tell the story and promote the development of the "story" of the exhibition. The exhibition "story" The narration of the exhibition can also use various forms of storytelling in literature to make the form of "storytelling" of the exhibition dynamic and close to the audience according to the specific content or narration, dialogue or monologue of the exhibition.

4. THE WAY OF "TELLING STORIES."

4.1. Establishment of the Storyline

Dean^[7] mentioned that: Museum exhibition should take its audience as the measurement standard, build an exhibition framework for the exhibits, extend a storyline, and add cognitive and educational elements to the storyline to make the exhibition holistic and the plot continuous, to help the audience make better use of and understand the connotation of the exhibits. Some specialized or thematic museums and exhibitions have transparent narrative forms, so the establishment of the storyline is single. Such a storyline can only be established by time, place, protagonist, and other factors. However, most museum exhibits are large and scattered, and exhibits tell different stories, so establishing a simple storyline is usually not feasible. This requires the curators to study more on extended stories, connecting small stories together to form meaningful and coherent plots.

4.1.1. Linear Story Deduction

Linear narrative is the most basic and direct narrative in the exhibition. It means that the exhibition has a distinct theme, using chronological or causal order to arrange the exhibits. The exhibition is a unity, expresses a unified central idea, and has a prominent storyline This structure of "beginning development climax ending" which has strong interest and affinity. Audiences tend to follow the logic of the story. It can produce profound appeal, facilitate audiences' understanding, and deeply loved by the audience.

Linear stories can be fully used in museums where historical facts such as history and commemoration are complete, the chronological order is prominent, the storyline is profound^[11]. Due to the single collection, some small and medium-sized museums can also give full play to "linear narration," string the unrelated exhibits into an organic whole and tell a story full of personality and local characteristics.

Art exhibitions with legends can also use this method. The "Pioneer of Abstract Art: Kandinsky" held by West Bund Museum Shanghai in 2021 arranged the story clue of the exhibition as "Beginnings: the years of learning - Murnau: towards abstraction - Russia: the years of transition - Bauhaus: the years of theory - Paris: the years of maturity," which reviewed Kandinsky's creative career. While appreciating the paintings with great vitality, the audience can also feel the tremor that touches the soul.

4.1.2. Nonlinear Story Deduction

In some exhibitions, it is difficult to find the protagonist of the entire exhibition story, there is no series of connected events, complete or even multiple storylines. Such exhibitions are difficult to express in the way of storyline establishment. The way of transforming language into the environment cannot be arranged in chronological or causal order. Exhibitions can often dispense with the original complex and rigid textual materials. The story atmosphere in the space, can trigger audiences' visual, audible, touchable senses to realize the narration of the exhibition story. This way is similar to a theater demonstration, and the audience can choose the part they are interested in to experience. For instance, The Oriental Metropolitan Museum- The 3rd-6th Century in Nanjing has transformed many aspects of the "city," "people," "things," and "beauty" of the Six Dynasties into such form, which can make the audience who are not interested in reading words interested in the exhibition and obtain unexpected visit.

4.2. Exhibit "Storytelling."

In museum, exhibits always occupy the most crucial position. The ultimate purpose of museum exhibitions is

to realize the communication between people and artwork, to understand the true story behind the exhibits. However, many exhibits, especially historical relics, are separated from their historical environment and lose their original role and significance. When they are moved to modern life, they become ornaments. Therefore, in order to make the exhibits express their connotations and values, the exhibition should not only shows visual packaging and arrangement like traditional one, but also studies the evolution of the relationship between artwork and people with the change of time and space, and interprets the significance of the exhibits beyond time and space^[6]. This is the essence of the exhibition "telling stories." The rational combination of exhibits directly affects the success of the exhibition "storytelling", which can be realized through the following reasonable displays:

4.2.1. Combined Display of Exhibits

Some exhibits can be combined with associated exhibits or subtly displayed with other auxiliary exhibits with a storyline. Not only their appearance, but the combination embedded in a story is what we want them to tell. This combination can give this group of exhibits a narrative display to replace the complexity of language, in this way, the exhibits can express themselves with unique stories.

4.2.2. Restorations of Exhibits

A good exhibit display can quickly impress the audience, which is also reflected in the restoration display of exhibit. The restoration and display of exhibits usually combine with certain auxiliary materials to scientifically restore the scene where the original artwork exist, so that the audience can immerse themselves in it and easily have a unique experience. The display of tombs in historical exhibitions, as well as the dinosaur living environment in natural exhibitions embody the restoration and display of exhibits^[9]. Through this mode, the audience can have a visual visit, which is more moving than words.

4.2.3. Display of Isolated Exhibits

Sometimes an exhibit is regarded as a separate "presenter.", an independent form that cannot combine with other exhibits or auxiliary materials within a storyline. That means it needs to be displayed through the "voice over" of "a person." This "character" may be a text description or an interpreter. To show the story of the exhibits, there must be a vivid story for the audience to remember^[10]. Like the "jade cabbage" in the Taipei Palace Museum, it was initially the same as other collections in the museum. There was no particularity in the material and artistry among them, however, it stood out with a story about Zhenfei. The audience was

attracted by the tortuous and moving story and remembered the exhibit as well. It has even realized the oral transmission of stories and exhibits, and the value of exhibits has been deeply reflected and improved.

5. CONCLUSION

Through the concept of "storytelling", this study aims to promote the literary narrative approach of museums to shape exhibitions into a complete "story". The exhibition usually allows the audience to associate "storytelling" with "artwork" and then feel "significance." This is not only to practice the "people-oriented" concept, satisfy the needs of the development of contemporary museums and highlight their characteristics, but also to innovate the exhibition means, reflect the value of exhibits, and promote the combination of dynamic and static display. "Storytelling" can make the exhibition truly "live."

The exhibition "storytelling" can be divided into linear story deduction and nonlinear story deduction, depending on the cooperation of various elements in the exhibition. Therefore, the exhibition text should be based on the story clues, the reasonable arrangement and adjustment of exhibits, through which can enhance the vital role of museums and exhibitions in social life.

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