

Spatial and Fictional Storytelling in Contemporary Museum Exhibition Narratives

Abstract

The museum law and ethical statements of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) highlight the mission of museums in conveying reliable, precise and research-based information. In recent decades, museum exhibition design has developed rapidly, with new types of exhibition narratives emerging and sometimes blurring boundaries between historical facts and fiction in favour of audience engagement. In my dissertation, I focus on contemporary museum exhibition narratives with a literary or fictional approach, such as in cooperation between authors and curators. By combining theories of comparative literature, museology, visitor studies and embodiment, I examine how fictional elements and various narrative techniques work in museum spaces, and what assets and critical challenges fiction brings to museums and their collections. I argue that fictionality, open subjectivity, genre conventions, and changing the narrative role of visitors can be used in museum narratives for several strategic aims. These include promoting interactivity, immersion, co-creation, media literacy, or reflecting the contemporary ideology to discuss and share some of museums' institutional authority with their visitors. By looking at museum narratives, we can also gain new perspectives to story-space-relations. In addition to a novel interdisciplinary approach, the dissertation aims to give practical understanding for the museum field.