

A Theory of Psychotherapeutic Object Dynamics

An Examination of the Psychological Underpinnings of
Human-Object Relationships with Implications for Museum Exhibitions

Phase III. Case Study with Object Donors and Visitors to The War Childhood
Museum, Sarajevo Bosnia-Herzgovina

Objects of Resilience, Defiance and Endurance: Healing Self and Society via a Museum



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Introduction

The intent of this research is to define and examine the psychological underpinnings of the intrinsic relationships between people and objects, and from that understanding develop impactful strategies for generating museum exhibition experiences that explicitly promote health and opportunities for healing. Our premise is that exhibition experiences are potent and unique in their ability to foster wellbeing and contribute to psychological healing, and that by identifying and articulating the inherent role that objects play in our everyday health and wellbeing we can design experiences with objects that explicitly foster healthful outcomes. This document reviews the theory of Psychotherapeutic Object Dynamics (Cowan 2015) and provides summaries of the first and second phases of research, complete documentation and analysis for the third phase case study with the War Childhood Museum, and concludes with implications and direction for future study.

Background and Body of Scholarship

This research is founded upon the irrefutable knowledge that objects are both deeply meaningful and necessary in the lives of people. The journey of the study begins with the question why. It can be said that people have an innate and primal dialogue with objects, an inextricable meaning-based relationship that functions in the manner of a continuous and often subconscious or unintentional nonverbal dialogue. Objects can extrinsically communicate our own concepts and thoughts with intent; conversely, they can internally translate complex concepts, thoughts and actions; they can prompt memory, connect us with others, access subconscious experiences and emotions; they can foster transpersonal experiences that include heightened creativity, spirituality, and self-awareness, and they can prompt us to action. This study seeks to understand and articulate the reasons people attribute these characteristics to objects and have such profound object experiences. Moreover, the study delves into the underlying psychological underpinnings of human-object relationships and explores the premise that at its core, the human-object relationship is necessary to psychological health and wellbeing.

This study was prompted by foundational work in the museum and material culture professions particular to the phenomenological and evocative nature of objects, the influence of everyday objects in the lives of people, the nature of object-based meaning making and the defined characteristics that shape those meanings. Essential research in the human-object relationship are provided by philosopher and education theorist John Dewey and his landmark work with the interconnections of Self, objects, identity and activity (1934), and likewise, the more recent work in semiotics by Taborsky who looks at the formation of meaning-making through object engagement (1990). To understand the nature of visitor relationships in the museum environment, we look to the fundamental works of Lois Silverman (1999) and George Hein (2000) whom provide us with a framework for studying object relationships within the museum environment and examining the role of the exhibition to foster meaning making where objects hold the power to illustrate, explain, captivate and enable visitors to relate to content in a personally significant manner. Eileen Hooper-Greenhill looks at the relationship between the

'seer' and the 'seen' (2000) where an exhibition space is the forum for union between an individual's life experiences and interpretations provided by the museum. This lens is very relevant to the broadened scope of this case study with the War Childhood Museum that includes interviews with visitors and the question of the therapeutic benefits in passive exhibition

engagement. Latham and Wood present to us their essential work, the Object Knowledge Framework: (2014) a means of identifying the multidimensional people-object relationships in museum environments. Their study looks at interrelationships between work in phenomenology and the ways in which humans on an instinctual level seek to make meaning out of objects, as explored in museum-based research. In their Object Knowledge Framework, Wood and Latham have contributed the definition of 'Unified Experience,' that asserts four key characteristics of object experiences including Unity of the Moment (fusion of the visitor's 'lifeworld' and object world in a moment); Object Link (objects as repositories); Being Transported (the transpersonal); and Connections Bigger than Self (numinous qualities including reverence, spirituality and connections with higher things).

Additional foundations for our research are found in psychoanalytical, cultural and sociological theory in which objects signify human factors such as self and identity, the relationship of individuals to family/society (Rochberg-Halton, 1984, Fowler, 2010), and personal power/primal self (Nguyen, 2011). Cultural theorist Meaghan Morris brings us 'Critical Proximity' (2006) which defines the relationship between a lived past and its representation in the object where the convergence of the two effect change. The work of developmental psychologist Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi has provided an essential guiding definition of overarching object characteristics, including power (vitality and energy), self (personal identity and continuum), and society (relationship and hierarchy) (1984). Social theorist Sherry Turkle's work with objects contributes the theory of 'Evocative Objects' (2012) as silent partners and life companions, repositories for memory and history, and as provocateurs of thought and action. Of additional particular interest is the work of Pierre Lemmonier who describes objects as being multidimensional devices of non-verbal communication that perform social intercourse, or communication that is a part of everyday life yet not always consciously recognized. The object converges, or instantaneously activates a coalescence of feelings, circumstances, and domains of experience in the context of its making or use. Lemmonier refers to objects in this respect as "perissological resonators" (2012) whose material use triggers emergent, nonverbal statements speak what words cannot and can communicate "unspeakable truths." In his work, historical anthropologist Greg Denning explores human-object actions that are prompted by emotionally disturbing prior experiences or history (1996). This theory is very applicable to the War Childhood Museum case study as well, and provides significant underpinning to defining the newly emergent dynamic of 'Synergizing.' Of particular relevance to the object dynamic of 'Making' is Dudley's concept of 'materiality' (2010), where sensory engagement can be the leading factor in the development of interpretive value, even when in the absence of content knowledge.

Finally, two researchers of note provide information on the relationship between therapy and museums, each suggesting that exhibition visitation has a direct healing impact on audiences.

The insightful work of Andree Salom (at the Center for Transpersonal Studies in Colombia) defines the 'numinous characteristics' (Harding 1961) in certain objects, and the emotive quality of exhibition spaces, as kindlers of transpersonal experience in exhibitions, opening up visitors to flow states, spiritual inspiration, self reflection, deepened awareness and mindfulness (2009). In similar fashion, "Muse Therapy" is the term used by Manoru Adachi at the Nagoya University

Museum, where he has studied the healing impacts of arts-based museum programming – in conjunction with object-based exhibitions – on primary and secondary school-aged students (2003). He focuses on mental stress in students, and how multiple visitations and multi-sensory interaction with museum specimens indicated "recovery from the problems" (of mental stress). Altogether, this groundwork has encouraged three phases of research defining the theory of Psychotherapeutic Object Dynamics, and will continue to underscore the work towards practical museum-based applications.

Psychotherapeutic Object Dynamics

Psychotherapeutic Object Dynamics refers to the inherent relationships between an object and its characteristics, the dynamic actions between the object and a person, and the resultant psychological impact of those actions. The theory suggests that objects are, on a fundamental level, essential to psychological health, wellbeing and healing. The theory also explains why objects have undeniable and common evocative and phenomenological characteristics inherent to meaning making. Furthermore, the theory illustrates broader sociological concepts of power, self and society.

Psychotherapeutic Object Dynamics was originally defined by five dynamics resulting from initial field research in a wilderness therapy facility, and a second phase case study in a museum setting. As a result of the most recent phase of research on which this paper is focused, a sixth dynamic has emerged as a substantive and equal element of the theory. The six dynamics are as follows: Releasing/Unburdening, Giving/Receiving, Composing, Associating, Making and Synergizing. These highly interrelated and multidimensional domains coalesce around fundamental scholarship in the disciplines of material culture, museum studies, psychology and psychotherapy. In application, the theory suggests that object-based exhibitions can be explicitly designed to enhance the psychological healing capacities of museum visitors and to attend to the everyday psychological health and wellbeing of museum audiences and participants. The individual dynamics are defined as follows:

Releasing/Unburdening

The action of releasing an object from a state of highly associative ownership into a place or state with the intent of entirely and permanently removing it from its former association (meaning) and state of ownership.

Making

The action of generating an original or newly-formed object as a means of experiencing and implementing the fundamental creative process, and in doing so undergoing progressive stages of psychological growth and healing.

Associating

The action of maintaining – and keeping within close physical proximity to – an object in an effort to perpetuate the knowledge/memory of the associations attributed to the object, including experiences, emotional states, places and people.

Giving/Receiving

The action of donating or offering to another person or people an object with the intention of its being accepted, and the resultant act of its being received with its attributed meanings being mutually understood and held intact.

Composing

The action of bringing together and juxtaposing objects with the intent of forming and expressing concepts or ideas so as to coalesce, examine and convey meanings that cannot otherwise be fully or entirely explained or expressed.

Synergizing

The action of contributing an object to a collective whose components produce a meaning greater than the individual's alone.

Phase I Field Research Summary

Conducted June – July 2015, Cowan

This first phase of research examined potential areas of confluence between object interpretation and meaning-making in museum practice with objects as used in therapeutic practice. Grounded in the body of scholarship defining the phenomenological and evocative nature of objects, their influence in the lives of people, and the characteristics that shape those meanings, the purpose of the research was to explore the reason for those meanings, their fundamental psychological underpinnings. Converging the disciplines of museum and object studies, psychology and psychotherapy, the study followed the premise that people have an innate and necessary relationship with objects I refer to as primal dialogue, that is essential to personal meaning making and to an individual's psychological health. To explore this premise, object-based therapy was determined to be an appropriate and unique arena for study, leading to primary research in the use of objects at an adolescent therapeutic wilderness program (Trails Carolina), and with a psychologist and psychotherapist expert in the making of objects as a means of self-discovery and actualization (Professor Ross Laird). The therapeutic work with objects at each venue correlates with research in the roles and interpretation of objects in museum exhibitions, as well as objects in relation to sociocultural identification, self-identification, power, and humanity. The study's focus was placed on self-made objects and those found in nature, as opposed to branded and commercially mass-produced objects. At Trails Carolina (Lake Toxaway, North Carolina), interviews were conducted with the facility's Clinical Director, Director of Students and Field Manager. Additionally, two days were spent in the field with a group of adolescents engaged in the therapeutic process where observations were made of object-based individual and group therapy sessions, as well as wilderness lifestyle practices. At the Museum of Cultural Anthropology (Vancouver, British Columbia) Professor Laird was interviewed about his approach to creativity-based therapeutic practice and his expertise regarding the psychological impact of objects. The primary research findings resulted in a new theory of Psychotherapeutic Object Dynamics that illustrates how objects are inherent to an individual's wellbeing and psychological health. The theory's five primary dynamics include Making, Associating, Releasing/Unburdening, Composing, and Giving/Receiving. Phase I research documentation can be accessed at: <https://www.fitnyc.edu/cet/cowan-b-dynamics-report12-16.pdf>

Phase II Case Study Research Summary

Conducted June 2016, Cowan, Laird, McKeown

The intent of the second phase of research was to seek evidence for the theory of Psychotherapeutic Object Dynamics by way of concrete examples in a museum environment. In coordination with the National September 11 Memorial & Museum (New York, NY), a case study was conducted with object donors to the institution's collections. Performing the case study were Brenda Cowan, Associate Professor of Exhibition Design, School of Graduate Studies at SUNY/FIT, Ross Laird, PhD, Interdisciplinary Creative Process, MA, Counseling Psychology, and Jason McKeown MS, LMFT, CPE, DCC, Director of Clinical and Family Services Trails Carolina. The National September 11 Memorial & Museum was selected because of its unique collections-donor relationship that suggested explicit demonstrations of Psychotherapeutic Object Dynamics. Eleven in-depth interviews were conducted between June 8th and June 11th, 2016. Participants included five widows, three survivors (including one who also lost a husband and one who lost a cousin), one mother who lost a son, one first responder, and one on-location journalist. The case study explored the therapeutic impacts of the participation of the object donors in the institution's acquisitions, the personal identification of the donors with their donated objects, and the psychological experience of the donors through the process of donation. The interviewing methodology utilized a heuristic approach focused on generating qualitative data that captured participants' reflections on the idea of donation, the event itself, the meaning(s) of the donated object(s), and what if any, healing/meaning was found in the dynamic object experience. The data collected reinforced commonly held understandings of the meaningfulness of objects in everyday life, the potency of objects within museum environments, the value of participation, co-creation and open-content generation in exhibitions, and identified particular modes of design that are psychologically and interpretively impactful. Multiple subjects referred to their objects as "witnesses" to the event and to their own experience, and as the means by which the story of the event and their roles within it will be told. Most subjects referred to the need for the objects to keep the memory of their loved one alive, and/or the need for the objects to provide an accurate accounting of their experience. Most subjects referred to their objects as carrying a great deal of weight (responsibility). Subjects referred to the Memorial & Museum as a place where their objects will be kept safe, protected, and in that regard the institution is a "therapeutic ally." In the profession's current discourse regarding empathy, the role of participation and co-creation, as well as the responsibility of museums to their communities, the importance of that message cannot be overstated. Our review of the data collected revealed multiple examples of all five Object Dynamics: Associating, Releasing/Unburdening, Composing, Making and Giving/Receiving. Anecdotes from the subjects regarding the meanings of the objects, their relationships with the objects, their decisions for and actions of donating, and the impacts of the experiences provided supportive illustrations of the dynamics as well as further information regarding the healthful and healing impacts of the donation process. Throughout the interviews, subjects also provided information that firmly represented established object characteristics and experiences including: objects as repositories

of experience, bearing witness, perrisological resonators, life companions, calls to action, self identity, life continuum, and primal power. Phase II research documentation can be accessed at: <https://www.fitnyc.edu/cet/cowan-b-dynamics-report12-16.pdf>

Phase III Case Study Overview: The War Childhood Museum

June-July 2017, Cowan, Delibegovic, read by Laird, McKeown

Introduction

The third phase of research was conducted to further examine, contribute to and refine the theory of Psychotherapeutic Object Dynamics via case study in a museum environment. Building upon the data collected from the National September 11 Memorial and Museum case study, the researchers sought to broaden the subject and geography of their empirical work, and expand their sample to include museum visitors and staff in addition to object donors. The War Childhood Museum (WCM), Sarajevo Bosnia-Herzgovina (<http://museum.warchildhood.com>) was identified as a logical collaborator with which to further the study. The WCM is a new and unique institution whose collection is solely comprised of personal objects donated by individuals who were children during the war in Bosnia (1991-1995) and whose intent is to contribute to healing and wellbeing in its participants:

The vision of the War Childhood Museum is to help individuals overcome past traumatic experiences and prevent traumatization of others, and at the same time advance mutual understanding at the collective level in order to enhance personal and social development.

Between the dates of June 18th – 23rd, seventeen in-depth interviews were conducted at the museum site with ten object donors and seven post-visit audience members, followed by an informal interview with five members of the museum staff and leadership. Performing the case study on site were Brenda Cowan, Associate Professor of Exhibition & Experience Design, School of Graduate Studies at SUNY/FIT, and Exhibition Design Graduate Associate Melisa Delibegovic. Data analysis was conducted and synthesized into this report document by Brenda Cowan, and Melisa Delibegovic. Ross Laird, PhD, Interdisciplinary Creative Process, MA, Counseling Psychology, faculty Kwantlyn Polytechnic University, and Jason McKeown MS, LMFT, CPE, DCC, Director of Clinical and Family Services Trails Carolina reviewed the therapeutic outcomes of the new dynamic of Synergizing generated from this study.

Overarching Findings

Profound expressions of pride, ownership, agency, resilience and community overwhelmingly emerged as the most prevalent and coalescing themes of this study. Throughout the seventeen

interviews with object donors and visitors these feelings and convictions were strongly and repeatedly described, and they were likewise echoed in the subsequent informal interview with museum staff and leadership. Interviewees expressed strongly felt beliefs that the War Childhood Museum is an agent of personal and societal change where their singular contributions, stories and voices altogether express an impactful message of fortitude, endurance and strength unique to their unifying experience of a war childhood. Their participation with the museum is seen as a means of illustrating the innocence and endurance of childhood, and projecting a message of

resilience and power specifically to and for the people of Sarajevo and Bosnia, as well as to others currently experiencing the tragedies of war elsewhere in the world. Their contributions of personal objects and stories, and the broader work of the museum, are not viewed solely as markers of historical events, but as vehicles through which to engage in positive civic action.

“This museum shows we are stubborn children of war. We showed them! This museum will show kids are kids. We are all one. We weren’t Muslim or Christian or Serbs or Croats, we were children! All the same.” - *Donor (collection of chocolate candy wrappers picked up off the streets)*

“The museum is really important and has a lot of meaning for the world. It is important because of other people – for the world.” - *Donor (handmade cookbook/journal)*

“My scream (object) is a small scream. Together in this whole picture with the other objects it’s one big message to never do this again. The things, they scream so people – the decision-makers - don’t do this again. This is a process of waking up this empathy.” - *Donor (Photo of self as child and hospital discharge form)*

“Going from object to object it gets harder and harder and I thought of war today. I’m not very patriotic but it’s weird because it became very personal and it’s about all of us. These objects I took very personally and it made me feel so many things...it’s totally different when you see the actual object. History becomes different.” - *Visitor*

“The museum has helped me realize I want to do work with refugees. In Norway we have a lot of refugees, kids, and now I realize what I want to do for myself and for others. I had an idea of that before but now I know for sure. It’s become more real. I want people to see this place and experience the feeling I did so we can make a better place for others.” - *Visitor*

“I thought it’s a wonderful new experience for Bosnia and the world. I was a child during the war and I was motivated to visit so I could learn about others.” - *Visitor*

“The museum tells you life goes on. That’s the intent, even though you cry you realize life can be good. This is our history, but it’s more than our history. Even younger children should come here; you become more mature. You become enlightened. I

would make this a part of the required curriculum because it teaches you about life.” -
Visitor

Interviews with object donors revealed common dialectical interpretations of the war childhood experience: childhood was taken away from them, yet childish joys and happiness sometimes persisted. There were moments of being a child despite the violence of the adult world. Many object donors explicitly wanted to show through their objects that “bright” and “happy” moments occurred amidst the tragedies. Some objects represent escapism from or defiance against the “ridiculousness of war.”

“The memories are nice even though it was a horrible period. It (the object) means running away from the reality of what was happening every day: it means childhood.”
- *Donor (bicycle, humanitarian aid box, drawings)*

“I had other things in the basement but the chocolate wrappers were a part of my happiness at the time. They were normal thoughts during the war. Like these are just like a dream. Everything is ok.” - *Donor (collection of chocolate and candy wrappers picked up off the streets)*

“The bicycle was a source of happiness but ironic. You can’t ride the bicycle because of the shooting.” - *Visitor*

“It’s positive the way children were playing and studying during that time. I think of the Hedgehog’s House book and how positive the story is, and the small Kinder Egg toys and how difficult it was to get them. The playground gym that shows the violence.” (Bomb blasted fragments of climbing structure.) - *Visitor*

“When you are a kid you are playing and you don’t care and then suddenly your joy is gone. Your friends are gone. It (the climbing structure fragments) made me think of my sister who died. You can imagine the kid who got the crayons from Aid must have been very excited.” - *Visitor*

The objects on display made a significant impact on the ability for participants to personalize the history and experience a greater empathy for the people who donated, in addition to experiencing feelings of gratefulness and appreciation:

“I cried a lot here. I laughed a lot here. When you see the objects it feels like you are with the people. Not like other museums where things are artifacts. Here everything becomes alive around you. The objects are familiar. It makes it easier to understand the stories and respect them and suddenly you just want to hug the people who donated; to be with them.” - *Visitor*

“I thought about the people who donated were very brave people. It’s brave to give after so many years. To be able to share their stories is very brave to people you don’t know.”
- *Visitor*

“The apple really stood out. The constant connect between objects connecting that time with today. I’m grateful I am here today. It’s a constant comparison when looking at the objects.” - *Visitor*

“Every object is moving and upsetting and made me think about myself and my family, and how did they (object donors) give them away? I know it’s not easy, even if they’re happy now. How do they give them away?” - *Visitor*

“Maybe I was thinking about being a kid stuck in something that you can’t do anything about. And how do they (object donors) move on? I think about that.” - *Visitor*

“You see these things and they touch me. I see that it was other people in Bosnia too, not just here. I think now how hard it must have been for the small villages. I feel sad for the kids who lost friends and saw death.” - *Visitor*

“I have a lot of respect for the people who donated. I understand how meaningful objects are to people. I think about wanting to hold onto memories and emotions...but also being able to move on from the trauma. I have a lot of respect for the people who donated.”
- *Visitor*

A few object donors expressed doubt or uncertainty regarding the meaningfulness of their personal object; that their object wouldn’t be as important as others that seem to be more “tragic” than their own:

“I feel proud and a bit scared. I feel maybe other stories are more difficult than mine. I always think maybe people see the children who had real tragedies and maybe my story wasn’t as important.” - *Donor (wax apple)*

“I worried if I was a good person for this because I didn’t have the tragedy like the others. I see other object on display have more important stories than mine, but I’m excited when it will come on display.” - *Donor (student-made school magazine)*

“Compared with the war torn ones it didn’t seem as important. It was important to me. I wasn’t sure they would take it.” - *Donor (handmade cookbook/journal)*

Several interviewees described the current socio-political dynamic in Bosnia as not being supportive of survivors, and of the lack of sufficient mental health support services. Similarly,

individuals described how it is not seen as appropriate to talk about the war or to even think about it. To these participants the museum is seen as a much-needed place for healing, openness and sharing:

“I love this museum. It’s the first time anyone asked us to share our childhood. Innocent experiences. In my family we don’t talk about specifics of our personal experiences. These objects brought me back.” - *Donor (class photo, cookbook, diploma)*

“Veterans are poorly regarded in the political climate. People don’t want to talk about the war, but here the objects are important.” - *Donor (journal, food wrappers, brother’s flak jacket)*

“No one ever asked the children their experience during the war. I was eight and fragile and I know of dying friends and my father on the front line. No one ever asked me. I was stuck. Not even when it was finished no one even talked to me. The museum was the first

time anyone asked me about the war.” - *Donor (collection of chocolate and candy wrappers picked up off the streets)*

“This gave a more personal understanding of the war and it’s a powerful healing tool because it’s about people. It’s a healing experience for my mom and her generation. This (museum visit) is a healing process to learn that all children were affected and in that way it wasn’t happening to just the group she was with: all people were suffering. She is not someone who is narrow-minded but when you think about your own loss you can feel protective and defensive. It was helpful for her to know it was others too.” – *Visitor*

“It’s important to tell our stories, because I’m alive and for the coming generations; to tell them about moving experiences. Why keep it in my closet? (object) I can share it. The knowledge can be shared.” - *Donor (handmade cookbook/journal)*

The museum was frequently mentioned as a place where their object will be kept safe and that it enables their objects to have “purpose.” The museum and its creators are viewed as highly respectful and instrumental to the care of the objects, the object stories, and the individuals who donate and experience them:

“I’m proud of the museum; it collects and preserves. It shows how many intelligent and caring people there are in our country. I’m proud that it’s in Sarajevo: the first of its kind.” - *Donor (class photo, cookbook, diploma)*

“I’m glad because they (objects) were given a purpose and if they can help others – and maybe I believe in Utopia – but maybe they will reach someone, someone’s

consciousness. A feeling of hopefulness.” - *Donor (journal, food wrappers, brother’s flak jacket)*

“When you come here – this gave me goosebumps just now – it’s that they treat the objects like gifts.” - *Donor (eyeglasses)*

“The bike got life. Now its story is out there. I’m proud I didn’t throw it away. Now it has purpose. I like that the things are on display.” - *Donor (bicycle, humanitarian aid box, drawings)*

“It changed my perception of how people can be brave. If I had something to donate I would donate. Seeing how they (the museum) treated the objects they know their objects will be safe.” - *Visitor*

Overall, responses and anecdotes from interviewees regarding the meanings of and associations with the objects, their experiences with donating/visiting, and the positive impacts of their individual experiences with the museum collection and its environment provided clear evidence of the Psychotherapeutic Object Dynamics. This data is presented in the Collected Data and Synthesis sections of this paper. Information garnered from the interviews also provided

overwhelming and irrefutable evidence of a new, sixth object dynamic specific to the human-object action of synergizing, which has been entered into the theory’s definition and a delineation of which is provided in the Collected Data and Synthesis sections of this paper. In light of the new dynamic of Synergizing, a fresh review of the data from the 2015 and 2016 research studies was conducted, resulting in an additional example found among the September 11 Memorial & Museum object donor interviewees. This information is included in the Synthesis section of this paper.

Participants’ Relationship with the Institution

The Participants consistently expressed several interconnected themes involving the ways the museum assisted them in their healing journeys. In particular, participants noted how institutional support for their personal objects cultivated and nurtured the participants’ own defiance of harm, resilience in healing, and psychological resourcefulness (such as in the preservation or recapturing of childhood innocence). For many of the participants, the museum provided a bridge between the small, quotidian meanings of their objects and the universal human striving toward a civil and humane society. In many ways, the experience of object donation enables the participants to leverage their healing symbols and messages as tools in the struggle of their society, and by extension, the whole world. In this sense the objects became transpersonal and the context of their expression became holographic: a single individual speaks for everyone, and one object stands for all.

This wholism, or transpersonal association, is a distinctive feature of the stages of trauma healing that indicate the emotional work is well underway. The mythologist Joseph Campbell (adapting the phrase from T.S. Eliot) spoke of this moment as the “still point” in which we recognize the fundamental unity of our distinctive experiences, in which we find “those levels in the psyche that open, open, and finally open to the mystery of your Self...That’s the journey. It is all about finding that still point in your mind...” *

For many participants, the experience of object donation indeed seemed to encourage a deep kind of openness, a perception of the unity of human experience, and an urgency to contribute, in small and personal ways, to healing the world through empathy and connection. These emotions and behaviors from our participants are powerfully indicative of the role that a museum can play not only in healing its visitors but in transforming the world. Finding the impacts and impressions of a unified worldview in our participants is a welcome development during this historical moment of deep fracturing and divisiveness.

* Joseph Campbell, “A Joseph Campbell Companion: Reflections on the Art of Living.”

Subject Recruitment and Protection

On behalf of the research team the institution sent out a voluntary call via mail to a prospective interview population. The researchers prepared a letter of invitation for selected individuals whom the museum determined would be willing and valuable to the purposes of the study (see Appendix A). Each participant was introduced to the inquiry, its purpose, and to the questions so as to make an informed decision. In keeping with NIH Human Subject Research specifications, participants provided consent prior to the interviews. No identifying information was collected or requested of the participants, and consent was also received for audio recording of the interviews.

Methodology

Between the dates of June 18th – 23rd, in-depth interviews were conducted at the museum site with ten object donors and seven post-visit audience members, followed by an informal interview with five members of the museum staff and leadership. Performing the case study on site were

Brenda Cowan, Associate Professor of Exhibition & Experience Design, School of Graduate Studies at SUNY/FIT, and Exhibition Design Graduate Associate Melisa Delibogic. Data analysis was subsequently conducted and the information synthesized into this report document by Brenda Cowan, Ross Laird, PhD, Interdisciplinary Creative Process, MA, Counseling Psychology, faculty Kwantlyn Polytechnic University, and Jason McKeown MS, LMFT, CPE, DCC, Director of Clinical and Family Services Trails Carolina.

The interviews utilized script instruments: one specifically for object donors and one specifically for post-visit audience members, (see Appendix B) and the duration of the interviews ranged from 30 to 60 minutes in length. The differences in interview duration were due to the personal manner in which individual participants answered each question and the amount of information they were willing or able to share. The script for object donors was the same one as used in the previous case study to ensure consistency and control with data collection, and the visitor script likewise employed most of the same questions with slight adjustments made regarding visitation intent and experience and the elimination of the donation inquiry. For the interviews, each participant was seated with Brenda Cowan and Melisa Delibogic. Brenda Cowan asked the interview questions and both researchers scribed participants' responses. All interviewees spoke and understood English, yet in two cases the interviewees were more comfortable responding in Bosnian, and Melisa translated their information to Brenda. Prior to the interviews, Brenda and

Melisa had a phone conference with Ross Laird and Jason McKeown to receive preparatory guidance regarding how to best identify, prepare for, and manage any moments when interviewees might experience psychological activation as a result of the sensitive content being discussed.

Collected Data

Every object donor interviewed (10/10 respondents) described two or three Psychotherapeutic Object Dynamics occurring within their singular action of donating. Interviewing visitors was a new arena of study and data collection for the researchers and was included in this phase with the intention of learning what, if any, object dynamic experiences occur with museum visitors. This is of particular interest given the passive nature of the exhibition experience: objects on exhibition are not intended to be touched. Despite the lack of direct engagement with the donated objects, 4/7 visitors described object dynamic experiences, 3 of who described more than one object dynamic experience. The take away from those interviews is that more can be learned about visitor experiences with the Psychotherapeutic Object Dynamics theory and it is a valid route for examination.

The preexisting five Psychotherapeutic Object Dynamics domains presented themselves clearly in the War Childhood Museum study, with the unexpected revealing of a sixth new dynamic titled Synergizing. Responses were as follows: Giving/Receiving (6/17 respondents) was dominant among the dynamics experienced, followed by Releasing/Unburdening (4/17 respondents), Making (3/17 respondents), Associating (2/17), and Composing (1/17) to a lesser degree. Of great importance to the study and to the delight of the researchers, the single most common object-based dynamic experience described by participants was one that hadn't clearly emerged in either the initial 2015 field research or the subsequent 2016 case study with the September 11 Memorial & Museum. In the War Childhood Museum interviews, most object donors (9/10) and several visitors (3/7) described their experience of personal object donation and/or visitor (observer) relationships with the objects as a means of joining in or contributing to a collective; a greater message or meaning was seen as being formed and experienced as a result of the many individual object contributions. These individual experiences of contributing to a collective were unanimously described as positive and empowering, healthful, purposeful and impactful, leading to this exciting development in the Psychotherapeutic Object Dynamics' defining object experience domains.

The following data information is organized per interview type (object donor and post-visit audience member) and in order of the interview questions asked. The most representative responses to each question are recorded with defining and qualifying quotes and/or anecdotes.

Object Donor Interview Questions

Why did you choose to donate an object to the Museum?

Subjects interviewed talked about wanting to share and describe what it was like during the war:

“I thought of the apple first because I thought it would send a strong message: that war is hard. You don't have basic things. For me this war was really useless.” (*wax apple*)

I wanted to show what it was like during the war. I want to show kids today what it's like not to have everything.” (*collection of chocolate and candy wrappers picked up off the streets*)

“People can see how happy we were with simple things. It gives meaning of an everyday life. Our experience will teach other people to find satisfaction with simple things.” *(handmade cookbook/journal)*

Several interviewees talked about donating as an opportunity to further/continue meaning-making with the object, and as such contribute to something that would have a greater purposeful impact on others:

“I decided it would be a contribution to something greater. That doll meant a lot to me and because my daughter played with it, but she wouldn’t have the association so I wanted to give it where it would have meaning.” *(handmade humanitarian aid doll)*

“These aren’t a donation in my mind. I was a casualty but the world is in this. This is me putting something in its rightful place. It’s simply going where it belongs. They are among other objects that have a similar cause.” *(Photo of self as child and hospital discharge form)*

“I will help this institution and generations to come about a childhood during war.” *(bicycle, humanitarian aid box, drawings)*

“I couldn’t wait to give the box of things once I knew the museum was collecting...Every museum has value, this one in particular because it’s about childhood and this is about me having been a child at that time. (The objects) would still have meaning but this was special because it was like being transported back home to the childhood I never had.” *(journal, food wrappers, brother’s flak jacket)*

“It’s important to tell our stories. Because I’m alive and for the coming generations; to tell them about my moving experience.” *(handmade cookbook/journal)*

Many expressed donation as becoming a part of the museum – both literally and as part of a community:

“Now I feel like a part of me has helped make this (museum). My small thing is a part of this; a part of me is here. I’m so proud. This museum is special.” *(student-made school magazine)*

“I have some emotion with these glasses and I just want to give some part of me to the museum. I can come here and I have a satisfaction that I am a part of here.” *(eyeglasses)*

"I was happy to donate. I'm a part of the museum. It's like I'm standing with them (objects) at the museum. I love them now even. I'm so proud!" (*collection of chocolate and candy wrappers picked up off the streets*)

"This museum is mine; I participated. It is somehow mine." (*bicycle, humanitarian aid box, drawings*)

Why did you select the object that you did?

Several subjects chose the objects that they did because of their positive associations and the desire to "preserve" those feelings/memories:

"The box of things marks a period of my life. They were bright things. They were humanitarian aid and I wanted to preserve that; these were joyful moments." (*journal, food wrappers, brother's flak jacket*)

"I thought the apple was a funny story and also it represented what we didn't have." (*wax apple*)

"It talks about our positive attitude during the war: you just keep going." (*class photo, cookbook, diploma*)

"I had other things in the basement but the chocolate wrappers were a part of my happiness at the time. They were normal thoughts during the war." (*collection of chocolate and candy wrappers picked up off the streets*)

"I was the journalist for the magazine and it was so great. It was a wonderful time with my favorite teacher. We totally forgot it was war." (*student-made school magazine*)

Subjects also chose the objects they did because they indicated survival:

"The discharge form shows that I got a second chance. It shows what happened and that I've moved on. I got out alive. We need to define the objects as being me: a child wounded." (*photo of self as child and hospital discharge form*)

"I survived and I have more confidence." (*handmade cookbook/journal*)

"My brother's flak jacket saved his life." (*journal, food wrappers, brother's flak jacket*)

Objects were selected because they were considered most representative of the personal story of the donor:

"This place means all of the stories can be together. These three told my story in the best way." (*bicycle, humanitarian aid box, drawings*)

What associations or meanings does the object hold for you?

Several subjects associated their objects with feelings of safety, escapism or of being away from the war around them:

“It means running away from the reality of what was happening every day: it means childhood.” (*bicycle, humanitarian aid box, drawings*)

“Love. More of a feeling of safety and refuge. Finding a place where you can get away from the problems.” (*handmade humanitarian aid doll*)

Some subjects associated their object(s) with a specific challenging event or moment in time:

“I had to wear the glasses because I didn’t have the operation and they strengthened my eyes...They are a superhero from my childhood!” (*eyeglasses*)

“It was a memory from my youth. It’s proof that I was shot. I was the kid who got shot.” (*photo of self as child and hospital discharge form*)

“It was embarrassing because I didn’t realize it was a wax apple. Everyone was laughing when I bit into it. It makes me think how everything was ridiculous during the war. That war itself was ridiculous. That it was ridiculous that the apple surprised me.” (*wax apple*)

Several interviewees specifically associated their object(s) with another person/people who was/were a part of their life at the time:

“Thanks to my teacher the war wasn’t so scary. I see the teacher when I see the magazine.” (*student-made school magazine*)

“The jacket is very meaningful and its association with my brother almost dying and it saved his life.” (*journal, food wrappers, brother’s flak jacket*)

“It is personal because it belongs to my mother. It brings back happy memories but she died which is why I cried. All those cakes we made.” (*handmade cookbook/journal*)

“The box came from children in Japan. A present; it was so precious. The box means I wasn’t forgotten by others who weren’t with me in the war.” (*bicycle, humanitarian aid box, drawings*)

“The cookbook was made by me and my sister. I remember making the food even though I hated it (humanitarian aid food) and my sister was writing the recipes.” (*class photo, cookbook, diploma*)

Can you share the process you went through as you gifted your object to the museum?

Several subjects experienced during the time of their donation a concern or hesitancy that their object wasn't "important" enough:

"I had a dilemma. Would people care enough? I worried what other people would think and it wouldn't be strong enough to be in the museum. Then I decided to give it anyway." (*wax apple*)

"Compared to the other objects like the war torn ones it didn't seem as important. It was important to me. I wasn't sure if they will take it." (*handmade cookbook/journal*)

"I just carried it in my bag. I worried if I was a good person because I didn't have the tragedy like others." (*student-made school magazine*)

Some interviewees described Jasminko (Museum Founder) coming to their home and how that made the act of donation more personal:

"Jasminko came to my home and received them. It was definitely nicer that he came here. I trusted him that he wouldn't misuse them; he was very professional and I knew they would be safe in his hands." (*journal, food wrappers, brother's flak jacket*)

"The decision-making process was worse than actually giving it away. Jasminko came to hang out (family friend) and it was an unexpected moment: he asked about it and it was there and I just handed it over. It was a funny moment." (*handmade humanitarian aid doll*)

Two interviewees had particularly prideful donation experiences and were especially upbeat when describing the experience:

"My dad was so proud about the bike's donation. He cleaned it and fixed the tire before I brought it over. I took pictures of it before giving it: a goodbye." (*bicycle, humanitarian aid box, drawings*)

"I gave a present to the museum. Maybe this is the most important thing for your paper (study). This is not just an object." (*eyeglasses*)

Is public display of the object important to you? If so, why?

Most interviewees felt strongly about the object(s) being on display, in direct relation to their personal stories:

“Yes, it’s important that people know there was a child named Emina that was there during the war.” (*collection of chocolate and candy wrappers picked up off the streets*)

“They belong together; they are pieces of a puzzle. The photo personalizes the form and puts a person to it, to get the empathy from the visitors. They will see this was a child along with the hospital form...me, a child wounded.” (*photo of self as child and hospital discharge form*)

“Yes. They tell my story; all three are equally important. It’s nice to see your item on display. They are nice together but it’s ok if they’re not.” (*class photo, cookbook, diploma*)

“I like that the things are on display. I was proud to see my things in the museum.” (*bicycle, humanitarian aid box, drawings*)

“Yes. It’s important for people to read the story about the doll. All stories are important here: story is the essence. People need to understand the meaning of the objects and how special they were to the children. I had toys after the war but I don’t remember any of them.” (*handmade humanitarian aid doll*)

“It’s most important that they’re here. I would just keep them in the basement, anywhere. They would be hard to explain them to my daughter if they were just at home but at the museum it’s easier to explain their meaning because they’re in context and my children might even be proud to see them in the museum.” (*journal, food wrappers, brother’s flak jacket*)

“I would like to see it on display. I will be happy. If they don’t show it I would prefer to just keep it. People can see how happy we were with simple things.” (*handmade cookbook/journal*)

One subject had somewhat conflicted feelings:

“I am proud it’s on display and a little scared because there are more difficult stories than mine.” (*wax apple*)

Do you feel changed in any way as a result of donating the object?

Most of the subjects expressed feelings of change as a direct result of their donation experience, an unburdening and progression:

“It was a relief giving it away. I think I wanted to preserve the feeling of joy that the doll gave me but when I gave it away I finally realized the gravity of it. The burden of it. And I felt the relief when giving it away. Doing this I feel liberated. It’s peaceful.” (*handmade humanitarian aid doll*)

“It was the final step. From my youth I see that it happen unfortunately, but fortunately I am here. I have moved on. The final part of the process for me was bringing the objects here. Ended. Moving on.” (*photo of self as child and hospital discharge form*)

“I feel more relaxed in a way. Sharing the objects, my stories, makes me feel relaxed. It’s important to hear stories; it helps us forgive. We can’t heal society but we can heal ourselves.” (*class photo, cookbook, diploma*)

“I feel free now. I have distance. I feel better and I feel good. I released something, now I can live my life; like I said everything that I wanted to say. It’s time for something new. I always cry when I come to the museum; when I see the objects. It can be hard that life goes on and I feel angry about that, to just let it go. But we must. We can’t go back. We can’t make another war.” (*handmade cookbook/journal*)

Another very prominent feeling was one of “satisfaction” and pleasure in contributing to a collective experience:

“I feel satisfied that I have given a contribution. The museum is mine. I have participated.” (*bicycle, humanitarian aid box, drawings*)

“Now I feel a part of me has made this. My small thing is a part of this...I’m so proud.” (*student-made school magazine*)

“I’m not feeling like I lost something. This is most important: I don’t feel like I was stealing from myself. I can come here and feel a satisfaction that I am a part of here.” (*eyeglasses*)

“I’m glad because they (objects) were given a purpose and if they can help others – and maybe I believe in Utopia – but maybe they will reach someone, someone’s consciousness. A feeling of hopefulness.” - *Donor (journal, food wrappers, brother’s flak jacket)*

“I feel that I contributed to telling the world that children experience war. People I know that I ask to come see the museum say I’m dark, but I’m not dark and the museum has happy memories and I feel proud. To be a part of a bigger thing.” (*collection of chocolate and candy wrappers picked up off the streets*)

One interviewee has strong feelings of ambivalence and uncertainty within an experience of change:

“Yes I do feel changed. I want to share this with my friends, but not yet. I would feel like it would feel dangerous. I didn’t want people to recognize that the object was mine. I

wouldn't want to talk about it. Maybe my story isn't like the others. Maybe it's an issue with me. I don't have the courage." (*wax apple*)

Post-Visit Audience Interview Questions

What made you decide to visit the museum?

Some visitors chose to come because of they thought the subject and type of museum was unique and interesting:

"My best friend from Norway was here and she told me she wanted to visit so we both came. It was an opportunity to explore war childhood as a type of museum that was very different. You usually don't hear those words together."

Most visitors chose to visit because they wanted to experience and learn about the human/personal aspects of the history:

"It shows the personal perspective of war; how people were experiencing it who are a similar age to I am now. Their lives couldn't be like mine. Their being my age makes me feel closer."

"I knew that it would be interesting because it's about here and my and others' stories. I knew that I would see things that my mother talked about."

"The first time I visited it was just the prototype exhibition. Then I went to the new museum with my friends; it was curiosity. My friend was six during the war...my friend was remembering everything from her childhood and wanted to talk about all of them."

"My friend's story is here. I'm thrilled the museum exists and I want to see if there are other stories like hers. Her family has a lot of objects from her grandfather and they don't know yet if they want to donate. I was thrilled about this museum because it gives you a chance to confront where you are."

"I think it's a wonderful new experience for Bosnia and the world. I was a child during the war and I was motivated to visit to learn about others."

"I read about it online. It was very interesting. It's very difficult to look at it all but it's brave to give it (the objects) after so many years. To be able to share their stories is very brave with someone they don't know."

What content or emotions did you anticipate experiencing during your visit?

Most visitors anticipated feeling sad during their visit:

“I was sure I would cry but I didn’t think I would cry so much. When I came the second time I avoided those objects but there were new ones that made me cry.”

“I tried to even figure out how I would come; should I. I came to the opening and I just cried with every object.”

Several visitors anticipated gaining new perspectives and learning about other people’s experiences:

“I definitely thought it would be emotional and eye-opening. I envy people who have memories because I was 1-4 years old during the war. I thought I would better understand my parents and the people who were there.”

“I can get overwhelmed and I expected it would touch me. It gives me a change of perspective. Our problems are small.”

“I kept thinking about kids today and kids back then. Growing up we hear about it all the time: about the adults but not the kids. I felt a burden knowing that these people are still alive.”

Two visitors had different experiences than they expected:

“Having visited other museums with long boring labels I expected it to be the same, but this was different: simple. Short, powerful. Not what I expected at all. It made it more impactful.”

“I knew I would see some things that I knew about. I never thought I would cry that it would hit me so hard but then it did.”

What do you remember most about the objects that you saw?

Familiarity was a very powerful part of visitors’ experience and memory:

“The magic wand toy. I was so excited because I had one too. The food containers because my mom would tell me about them and also because the packaging was familiar.”

“The Kinder Eggs and how difficult it was to get them during the war. The pointe shoes and how they were saved. I did ballet.”

“The playground equipment makes me think of myself playing and if we were suddenly hit by a bomb like them.”

Another interviewee remembered objects that they thought of as “connectors:”

“The apple really stood out. This constant connection between objects connecting that time with today. It’s a constant comparison when looking at the objects. I was a baby during the war and we received objects from people in Germany and I thought the world exchanged toys. When I got older I realized this was because we were at war and it changed for me. The objects here make me think of my own.”

Emotions were another significant experience that made particular objects stand out to visitors:

“The unfinished letter. I thought about it for days after I saw it. It was so sad, but this was only a small part of what happened. Every object, even the funny ones (stories) are deeply moving. They made me think about people, my family, myself.”

Describe the impact that those objects had on you.

Viewing the objects made many visitors think of the history in relationship to the world today:

“Going from object to object it gets harder and harder and I thought of war today. I’m not very patriotic but it’s weird because it became very personal and it’s about all of us. These objects I took very personally and it made me feel so many things. Seeing the objects it’s totally different...history becomes different.”

Empathy was another significant impact:

“When you see the objects it feels like you are with the people. Not like other museums where things are artifacts; here everything becomes alive around you. The objects are familiar and it makes it easier to understand the stories and to respect those stories. Suddenly you just want to hug the people who donated; be with them.”

“I see that it was other people in Bosnia too, not just here. I think of how hard it must have been for the small villages. I feel sad for the kids who lost friends and saw death.”

“My Serbian friend asked ‘How can you even hang out with me?’ after seeing a photograph of the exhibition.”

“I wanted to touch the dress and the material because you want to become a part of it. When you touch it, it becomes real. This is very personal because it’s about kids and people I know.”

“I remember having all the things a child could have and I had better resources. The older kids had more imagination: a better way than when you get what you want. The donors were able to distance themselves in order to give.”

“I think of how giving things away can be curing. People can move on.”

“The prom dress made me cry but I don’t know why. It was just hanging there alone.”

“It’s a whole different world when you see the objects. In life it’s easier to run away from great losses and that place and the objects that make you think of them.”

Do you feel changed in any way as a result of your experience at the museum?

Many interviewees described changes in their perceptions of other people and their experiences of the war:

“My perception changed. I gained new respect for my brother and older friends: these stories from their minds.”

“I might take things for granted but this experience is like a reality check. You can tend to forget. I don’t feel changed but I realize more than before: more perspective. You need to remember.”

“I changed my perception of how people can be brave.

“Of course. I remember when I came home and talked to my mom and how strange it felt and I shared with her the objects that stayed with me. When you see the actual objects they stay with you. It’s changed my perception of the war. And I think about the kids and I’m grateful for what I have. When I spoke with my mom she also got a different perspective as a result. Usually when we talk about the war it’s about how hard it was, and then we talked about the apple and the little ceramic dog. That was very emotional because we had one of those.”

Several interviewees spoke about the museum experience as having been healing or healthful:

“This gave a more personal understanding of the war and the powerful healing tool because it’s about people. It’s a healing experience for my mom and her generation. She was very emotional about herself and for people who suffered losses and are struggling to heal through the tragedy. This is a healing process. My mom had tears and she was touched with every story. She is not someone who is narrow-minded but when you think of your own loss you can feel protective and defensive but it was helpful for her to know it was others too.”

“It enriched my life rather than changed it. When you go deeply you realize you have a scar. I want to confront what happens and the objects enable you to be with that experience. It’s a higher level to be able to give it away. The longer you keep something the harder it becomes to confront the experience. The museum tells you life goes on. That’s the intent: even though you cry you realize life can be good.”

Civic/personal action were other post-visit impacts:

“The museum has helped me realize I want to do work with refugees. In Norway we have a lot of refugees, kids, and now I realize what I want to do for myself and others. I had an idea of that before but now I know for sure. It’s become more real. I really want people to see this place and experience the feeling I did so we can make the world a better place.”

“If parents are brave enough to tell their childhood story to their children then maybe their children will understand and be better too. A lot of objects are about play and children weren’t allowed to play. Parents can think now about ‘what if their children couldn’t play?’ They can project.”

Interview with staff

An informal interview was conducted with five members of the museum administration including its Founder, staff and affiliated researchers. Most present had been war children, and worked with the museum in various capacities since before its inception. The following anecdotes from the open-ended conversation are relevant to the overarching content of this study and are included as items of general yet meaningful interest.

When talking about receiving/soliciting objects from potential donors the Founder spoke about the integrity of the institution’s child-focused perspective:

An object received from the parent of a deceased child must have its accompanying testimonial/statement provided by someone who was a sibling or friend of their child at the time. “The story must come from a child to keep things balanced (the voice of the content coming from a child’s perspective).” “The display of those objects must be balanced with other childhood things about happy moments.” Balance of emotional content is very important.

Staff spoke about the emotional nature of relationships with object donors and visitors who participate in the museum:

There is an atmosphere of respect and intimacy with the object donors and the donation process. The experience is treated as the building of friendships. This approach was established by the founding team including a psychologist and trauma expert.

“You make connections with people and you become friends; you build those relationships. I joined the team in October and two people I worked with on their video testimonials became immediate friends.”

The museum Founder and author of the book that initiated and underscored the museum project described the essential role that the book plays as an instrument in establishing the feelings of trust amongst donor and testimonial participants.

Most staff and leadership are themselves war children, which is considered very important:

It's important that personal sensitivity and empathy are a part of the entire museum experience. "This is part of the trust building." "Visitors always ask me if I'm a war child and want to know if I remember anything even though I was very young at the time."

Staff and leadership describe their own emotional engagement with the museum in various ways, and the needs for preparation, supportive relationships and empathy among administration:

The Founder shared that throughout the ten years of his work with both the book and the museum, he has learned how to manage his emotions but sometimes still cries and is able to go to his immediate colleague for support. "We are together in this."

He also described his experience as the creator of the institution: "The atmosphere is very important. I feel protective of the museum and when visitors are unhappy I can feel protective and personal."

A research associate described a time when he was asked impromptu to guide a group of graduate students through the galleries. He was caught off guard by their questions about his personal experiences having been a war child and he found himself activated. Both the environment of the museum as well as his ability to go directly to a staff at the front desk to sit with and talk. "We were both involved with the project and I knew he would understand so I could talk with him."

One staff member described a moment when a visitor connected with her and started to cry and hugged her and didn't want to talk. She just wanted to be able to be with someone who was a war child like herself.

The museum founding team was very mindful of the psychological nature of the museum project and the need for expertise in trauma and mental health as it established everything from the museum design to guidelines and preparatory materials for staff and administration:

"The design of the space is a loop. You end where you began and that seems to help. Like there is a beginning and then a familiar ending; a closure point." Spaces are built into the gallery where visitors can sit and have quiet time if needed. An intimate seating area is also designed at the exit of the gallery where people can sit and be more private.

There are always two staff at the front desk at the entrance of the museum. This is so that one person is always available to leave the desk to assist visitors in the event of any emotional experience where support might be needed.

As the museum was being created guidelines and preparatory materials (guidebook) were established to help educate and prepare staff for emotional experiences with visitors and participants. Specific policies were also created to guide and direct research protocols and policies. These materials were created by a team of founding museum leadership with consultant psychologists, therapists and mental health experts.

After the interview and upon reflection, it seemed that in many ways the staff and leadership were describing object dynamic experiences particular to the dynamic of Making. They described the logistical and emotional process-based experiences inherent to the creative process, and specific to the literal making of the physical museum. It is interesting to think of a museum as an object, which in this example is not a far-fetched notion. This thought has potential due to the highly consistent and collaborative make up of the museum's founding team and the level of collegial intimacy in which they work together. The emotional interconnectivity is as much a part of the creation of the museum as the logistical aspects. In general, it is also interesting and suggestive to think of Making in the collective sense, particularly because in this case study an object donor interviewed also revealed the object dynamic of Making as including engagement with others.

Data Demonstrating the Theory of Psychotherapeutic Object Dynamics

Altogether, the seventeen interviews produced data that specifically illustrated the preexisting five object dynamics, as well as information that prompted the identification of the sixth new object dynamic:

Synergizing

"I think when you're a part of a war, the children who died, they couldn't be a part of the future and I can be a part of the future here, and maybe they can be too." - *Donor (eyeglasses)*

"Our experience will teach other people to find satisfaction with simple things. The museum is really important and has a lot of meaning for the world. It is important because of other people – for the world." - *Donor (handmade cookbook/journal)*

"The museum is a time capsule and you are a part of the time capsule. I can come here and feel a satisfaction that I am a part of here. I have some emotion with these glasses and I just want to give some part of me to the museum." - *Donor (eyeglasses)*

"I have the book and it's like it's my book (because I contributed to it). Now I feel like a part of me has helped make this (museum). My small thing is a part of this; a part of me is here. I'm so proud. This museum is special." - *Donor (student-made school magazine)*

"I was happy to donate. I'm a part of the museum. It's like I'm standing with them (objects) at the museum. I love them now even. I'm so proud! I feel that I contributed to telling the world that children experience war...To be a part of a bigger thing." - *Donor (collection of chocolate and candy wrappers picked up off the streets)*

"I was a casualty but the world is in this. This is me putting something in its rightful place. It's simply going where it belongs. They are among other objects that have a similar cause. They fight; this is our scream, with others all united. My scream (object) is a small scream. Together in this whole picture with the other objects it's one big message to never do this again. The things, they scream so people – the decision-makers - don't do this again. This is a process of waking up this empathy." - *Donor (Photo of self as child and hospital discharge form)*

"I'm glad because they (objects) were given a purpose and if they can help others – and maybe I believe in Utopia – but maybe they will reach someone, someone's consciousness. A feeling of hopefulness." - *Donor (journal, food wrappers, brother's flak jacket)*

"I decided it would be a contribution to something greater. That doll meant a lot to me and because my daughter played with it, but she wouldn't have the association so I wanted to give it where it would have meaning. I'm thrilled it's here. The museum is so important for Bosnia and the world." - *Donor (handmade humanitarian aid doll)*

"Hearing stories helps forgive; stories 'from all sides' as we say it. It can help on an individual level if not collective. I am proud of this museum." - *Donor (class photo, cookbook, diploma)*

"I will help this institution and generations to come about a childhood during war. This museum is mine; I participated. It is somehow mine." - *Donor (bicycle, humanitarian aid box, drawings)*

"This museum shows we are stubborn children of war. We showed them! This museum will show kids are kids. We are all one." - *Donor (collection of chocolate candy wrappers picked up off the streets)*

"The museum has helped me realize I want to do work with refugees. In Norway we have a lot of refugees, kids, and now I realize what I want to do for myself and for others. I had an idea of that before but now I know for sure...I want people to see this place and experience the feeling I did so we can make a better place for others." - *Visitor*

"I thought it's a wonderful new experience for Bosnia and the world." - *Visitor*

“This is our history, but it’s more than our history. Even younger children should come here; you become more mature. You become enlightened. I would make this a part of the required curriculum because it teaches you about life.” – *Visitor*

“It was interesting to contribute to something that helped the whole family.” - *Donor (class photo, cookbook, diploma)*

Releasing/Unburdening

“It was a relief giving it away. I think I wanted to preserve the feeling of joy that the doll gave me but when I gave it away I finally realized the gravity of it. The burden of it. And I felt the relief when giving it away. Doing this I feel liberated. It’s peaceful.” - *Donor (handmade humanitarian aid doll)*

“It was the final step. From my youth I see that it happen unfortunately, but fortunately I am here. I have moved on. The final part of the process for me was bringing the objects here. Ended. Moving on.” - *Donor (photo of self as child and hospital discharge form)*

“My mom threw everything away: my brother’s resistance beret. He was pissed. The war ends and people had hope. It was a process when it ended. They wanted a fresh new start. Cups, furniture, she couldn’t wait to throw it away. Oil lamps; they were like the pride of the apartment but they went.” - *Donor (photo of self as child and hospital discharge form)*

“Giving objects away can be a relief. I think of how giving things away can be curing. People can move on.” - *Visitor*

“I feel more relaxed in a way. Sharing the objects, my stories, makes me feel relaxed. It’s important to hear stories; it helps us forgive. We can’t heal society but we can heal ourselves.” - *Donor (class photo, cookbook, diploma)*

“I feel free now. I have distance. I feel better and I feel good. I released something, now I can live my life; like I said everything that I wanted to say. It’s time for something new. I always cry when I come to the museum; when I see the objects. It can be hard that life goes on and I feel angry about that, to just let it go. But we must. We can’t go back. We can’t make another war.” - *Donor (handmade cookbook/journal)*

Giving/Receiving

“I gave a present to the museum. Maybe this is the most important thing for your paper (study). This is not just an object...When you give something to another person it’s important that they see the object; they treat the object like a present...When you come here – this gave me goosebumps just now – it’s that they treat the objects like gifts.” - *Donor (eyeglasses)*

“Chocolate was priceless. Certain wrappers were priceless. Give them to someone who will hold them as important as you do.” - *Donor (collection of chocolate candy wrappers picked up off the streets)*

“I couldn’t wait to give the box of things once I knew the museum was collecting...Jasminko came here and received them...I trusted him that he wouldn’t misuse them...They were safe in his hands. - *Donor (journal, food wrappers, brother’s flak jacket)*

“There was a meeting point...It was a nice present; a memory of the time; it was a nice present. - *Donor (wax apple)*

Making

“I was a refugee and the magazine helped me form a new identity; it helped shape my identity. Making the magazine was very important. I was so proud...I am in it. It was quite an effort to make: we printed it on a primitive printer. We colored it by hand; we had to color every edition by hand. I spent more time with making the magazine than with my schoolwork. I can’t remember the food I ate but I remember every detail of making that magazine.” - *Donor (student-made school magazine)*

“It was a notebook I took originally to record information for close school friends; teenage girl sharing; kind of like a scrapbook. During the war my mom made it into a cookbook and filled it with war recipes...A friend invented these recipes with the aid food and gave them to my mother...My mom came one day with those recipes and I said ‘we’re gonna make everything now.’ I made the cakes from scratch...All those cakes we made.” - *Donor (handmade cookbook/journal)*

“The cookbook was made by me and my sister. It’s the most valuable object because it’s about our experience...I remember making the food even though I hated it (humanitarian

aid food) and my sister was writing the recipes. It’s handwritten. We made the whole cookbook during the war; it took a long time; the whole time...We inherited the tradition of making cookbooks. I don’t know why we did it, we just did it. It talks about our positive attitude during the war. You just keep going.” - *Donor (class photo, cookbook, diploma)*

Associating

“My grandfather saved some books from the dumpster instead of burning them (for heat). I kept them and didn’t want to throw them away. I’ve held onto them because they make me think of my grandpa and I like keeping him here.” – *Visitor*

“At the beginning I didn’t want to give it away but I said I’d think about it. We have a daughter and she played with it...I decided then to give it because it will always be here (nearby at the museum).” - *Donor (handmade humanitarian aid doll)*

Composing

“They belong together; they are pieces of a puzzle. The photo personalizes the form and puts a person to it, to get the empathy from the visitors. They will see this was a child along with the hospital form...me, a child wounded...It completes a picture.” - *Donor (photo of self as child and hospital discharge form)*

Synthesis

The following information delineates the meaning of each dynamic including: its definition, the predominant object characteristics identified in its illustrative examples, and each dynamic's psychological healthful/healing attributes. The information is drawn from all research work to-date including the initial field research study with Trails Carolina and Ross Laird, the National September 11 Memorial & Museum case study, and the War Childhood Museum case study.

Releasing/Unburdening

Definition: The action of releasing an object from a state of highly associative ownership into another place or state with the intent of entirely and permanently removing it from its former association (meaning) and state of ownership.

The Object Characteristics found within the examples of Releasing/Unburdening include:

- Bearing Witness (Hoskins)
- Unified Experience (Latham, Wood)
- Life Companions (Turkle)
- Critical Proximity (Morris)

The healthful/healing attributes of Releasing/Unburdening include:

- Resilience
- Containment
- Stabilization
- Mindfulness
- Self-regulation
- Self-efficacy
- Empathy

Examples that illustrate this dynamic and its healthful/healing impact include:

- Students carrying Burden Rocks of personal grief (Trails Carolina)
- Widow who burned her late husband's blood-covered wallet in fire pit. (The National September 11 Memorial & Museum case study)
- Widow who donated her late husband's cellphone, watch, suspenders, dollar bills and soccer ball (The National September 11 Memorial & Museum case study)
- Survivor who donated work ID card and bank cards from wallet. (The National September 11 Memorial & Museum case study)
- Widow donated late husband's tie and gun. (The National September 11 Memorial & Museum case study)

- Donated hospital discharge form and photo of self as young child (War Childhood Museum)
- Donated handmade cookbook/journal (War Childhood Museum)
- Visitor consideration of object donor experience (War Childhood Museum)
- Donated handmade humanitarian aid doll (War Childhood Museum)

Giving/Receiving

Definition: The action of donating or offering to another person or people an object with the intention of its being accepted, and the resultant act of its being received with its attributed meaning being mutually understood and held intact.

The Object Characteristics found within the examples of Giving/Receiving include:

- Bearing Witness (Hoskins)
- Life Companions (Turtle)
- Provocations of Thought (Turtle)
- Unified Experience (Latham, Wood)

The healthful/healing attributes of Giving/Receiving include:

- Resilience
- Stabilization
- Connection with family/society
- Perspective-making
- Trauma recovery

Examples that illustrate the dynamic and its healthful/healing impact:

- Phase achievement beads (Trails Carolina)
- Widow donated deceased husband's wine to Memorial and Museum and her relatives. (The National September 11 Memorial & Museum case study)
- First responder whose object wasn't accepted into a different institution's collection. (The National September 11 Memorial & Museum case study)
- Donated collection of chocolate candy wrappers (War Childhood Museum)
- Donated eyeglasses (War Childhood Museum)
- Donated food wrappers and brother's flak jacket (War Childhood Museum)
- Donated Wax Apple (War Childhood Museum)

Composing

Definition: The action of bringing together and juxtaposing objects with the intent of forming and expressing a concept or idea in order to coalesce, examine and convey a meaning that cannot otherwise be fully or entirely explained or expressed to its fullest capacity.

The Object Characteristics found within the examples of Composing include:

- Bearing Witness (Hoskins)
- Unified Experience (Latham, Wood)
- Perrisological Resonators (Lemmonier)
- Provocations of Thought (Turkle)

The healthful/healing attributes of Composing include:

- Mindfulness
- Self expression and communication
- connection with society
- Self-awareness
- Self-identity
- Containment

Examples that illustrate the dynamic and its healthful/healing impact:

- Students constructing found object labyrinths (Trails Carolina)
- Survivor who donated series of items that were with him on the 90th floor through his escape and eventual release from medical care (The National September 11 Memorial & Museum case study)
- First responder donated boots and uniform (The National September 11 Memorial & Museum case study)
- Dual survivor and widow's home shrine with medal and late husband's objects in a curio box. (The National September 11 Memorial & Museum case study)
- Widow donated dogtags and binder outlining safety plans for the World Trade Center. (The National September 11 Memorial & Museum case study)
- Mother who donated deceased son's equestrian ribbons and memorabilia. (The National September 11 Memorial & Museum case study)
- Donated hospital discharge form and photo of self as a child (War Childhood Museum)

Associating

Definition: The action of maintaining and keeping within close physical proximity to an object in an effort to perpetuate the knowledge/memory of the object's attributed associations including experiences, states of being, places and people.

The Object Characteristics found within the examples of Associating include:

- Bearing Witness (Hoskins)

Unified Experience (Latham,Wood)
Life Companions (Turkle)
Critical Proximity (Morris)

The healthful/healing attributes of Associating include:

Self-identity
Self-regulation
Mindfulness
Mindset
Trauma recovery
Self-efficacy

Examples that illustrate the dynamic and its healthful/healing impact:

- Students naming, labeling and marking their bows (Trails Carolina)
- Students taking home dirty and worn mountain clothing (Trails Carolina)
- First responder continuously carries a piece of steel from the site in his pocket, (The National September 11 Memorial & Museum case study)
- Survivor's burned and damaged contents from wallet (The National September 11 Memorial & Museum case study)
- Donated handmade humanitarian aid doll (War Childhood Museum)
- Donated grandfather's books (War Childhood Museum)

Making

Definition: The action of generating an original or newly formed object as a means of experiencing and implementing the fundamental creative process, therein undergoing the progressive stages of therapeutic growth and healing.

The Object Characteristics found within the examples of Making include:

Unified Experience (Latham,Wood)
The Transpersonal (Salom)
Perrisological Resonators (Lemmonier)
Materiality (Dudley)
Primal Power (Nguyen)

The healthful/healing attributes of Making include:

Self awareness
Self-regulation
Stabilization
Mindfulness

Emotional Grit
Resilience
Containment

Examples that illustrate the dynamic and its healthful/healing impact:

- Bow drilling (Trails Carolina)
- Journalist's four books subsequent to the event (The National September 11 Memorial & Museum case study)
- Donated handmade cookbook/journal (War Childhood Museum)
- Donated class photo/school diploma/cookbook (War Childhood Museum)
- Donated student-made school magazine (War Childhood Museum)

Synergizing

Definition: The action of contributing an object to a collective whose components produce a meaning greater than the individual's alone.

The Object Characteristics found within the examples of Synergizing include:

Bearing Witness (Hoskins)
Unified Experience (Latham, Wood)
Life Companions (Turtle)
Critical Proximity (Morris)
The Transpersonal (Salom)
Provocations of Thought (Turtle)

The healthful/healing attributes of Synergizing include:

Perspective Making
Connection with Society
Stabilization
Mindfulness
Empathy
Resilience
Endurance
Transpersonal association
Wholism

Examples that illustrate the dynamic and its healthful/healing impact:

- Journalist's press badge and triage tag (The National September 11 Memorial & Museum case study)
- Donated hospital discharge form and photo of self as a child (War Childhood Museum)
- Donated Student-made school magazine (War Childhood Museum)

- Donated class photo/cookbook/diploma (War Childhood Museum)
- Donated Handmade cookbook/journal (War Childhood Museum)
- Visitor consideration of object-donor experience (War Childhood Museum)
- Visitor working with war refugees (War Childhood Museum)
- Donated handmade humanitarian aid doll (War Childhood Museum)
- Donated food wrappers and brother's flak jacket (War Childhood Museum)
- Donated wax apple (War Childhood Museum)
- Donated collection of chocolate candy wrappers (War Childhood Museum)
- Donated bicycle/ humanitarian aid box/drawings (War Childhood Museum)

Implications and Next Steps

Further Research

Based on the findings of the first three phases of research and the balance of Psychotherapeutic Object Dynamic examples found in each study thus far, it is important to continue collecting additional data and building an increasingly diverse and strong body of evidence.

Having captured data from the therapy-focused venue in the first phase of research, followed by the two museum case studies where trauma was prevalent, it is important to expand the research towards capturing information specifically related to the wellbeing end of the theory's spectrum. Towards this end, the researchers anticipate working in 2018 with institutions in the United Kingdom constituting a part of the Happy Museum Project consortium. The mission of Happy Museum and its affiliate institutions is to promote health and wellbeing through exhibitions and programming, on both the local and global level. The anticipated fourth phase of research would include further work with object donors where appropriate, museum visitors, and staff/participants. Additional applied research opportunities are being considered and are as of yet undetermined.

Applications

Evaluation Instrument

The Therapeutic Object Dynamics could reasonable be utilized as an evaluative instrument. They could be formed into a metric with which an existing institution could measure the therapeutic impacts and outcomes of their exhibitions.

Exhibition Development

The Therapeutic Object Dynamics could be utilized as a strategic methodology for the co-creation of an exhibition(s) with the intent of providing healthful and healing opportunities and outcomes for museum staff, audiences and community constituencies (associating). In this instance the researchers could collaborate with an existing institution, and/or a foundation or trust, and/or a targeted community. The exhibition initiative could customize and use any or all of the Therapeutic Object Dynamics as appropriate.

One strategy to target would be an environment that actively changes over time as a result of audience engagement: open source collecting and contributing (releasing/unburdening); design that encourages composing and re-composing exhibits (composing); creative activity spaces (making) and opportunities for reciprocity within the space (giving/receiving).

Case Study

The Therapeutic Object Dynamics could be further defined and viewed via case study in keeping with the first three phases of research, following the methodologies established with the September 11 Memorial Museum and War Childhood Museum case studies.

Best Practices for Museum Leadership, Staff and Participants

As a result of the two museum-based case studies, it is clear that the Psychotherapeutic Object Dynamics lends itself to the creation of a model or toolkit for museum staff and practitioners. This could include recommendations for staff/visitor interaction and engagement, ongoing staff psychological support services, ongoing visitor psychological support services, policies for object donation, policies and guidelines for research, and frameworks for educational and community outreach programming.

Appendix A

Invitation to Participate - Visitors

May 27th, 2017

Associate Professor Brenda Cowan, Graduate Exhibition Design

SUNY/Fashion Institute of Technology

New York, NY 10001

Dear Sir/Madame,

As someone who has made a visit to the War Childhood Museum I would like to extend a personal invitation to you to participate in a research study about your experience. The purpose of this study is to learn about the reasons why you chose to visit the Museum, what the experience of visiting, and what your feelings are in the time following your visit. The researchers leading the project are experts in museum studies and object-based therapy, and we hope to learn whether the experience of visiting the Museum and seeing its objects has had a healing impact on its visitors. The information learned would help museums and institutions that collect and display objects learn why and how objects are meaningful to people, and the psychological community would gain valuable insight into the healing impact of dealing with trauma through the display of personal objects. We are hoping you would be willing to participate in a private 30-minute long personal interview at the War Childhood Museum. The interviews will take place between June 18th – 22nd to be arranged at times most convenient to you, and your private information will not be shared. If you are able to participate, we will provide you with all of the details of what to expect and the questions that will be asked so as to make the experience as clear and comfortable for you as possible. As you consider whether to participate and if you would like some initial information about who we are, you can learn about each of us online at:

- Associate Professor Brenda Cowan, Chairperson, Graduate Exhibition Design at SUNY Fashion Institute of Technology, www.fitnyc.edu <http://www.fitnyc.edu/exhibition-design/faculty/brenda-cowan.php>;
- Professor Ross Laird, PhD, Interdisciplinary Creative Process, MA, Counseling Psychology, <http://www.rosslaird.com>;
- Jason McKeown MS, LMFT, CPE, DCC, Director of Clinical and Family Services, Trails Carolina, trails-carolina.com/jason-mckeown

Thank you for your consideration, and I hope we will be able to include you in this study that aims to help museums and the therapeutic community, and the many people that they serve. Most

Sincerely,



Invitation to Participate - Donors

May 27th, 2017

Associate Professor Brenda Cowan, Graduate Exhibition Design

SUNY/Fashion Institute of Technology

New York, NY 10001

Dear Sir/Madame,

As someone who has made a very thoughtful and kind object donation to the collections at the War Childhood Museum, I would like to extend a personal invitation to you to participate in a research study about your experience with donating. You were recommended by the museum as a possible participant because of your generous donation and the positive impact it has made. The purpose of this study is to learn about the reasons why you chose to donate your personal object, what the experience of donating was like, and what your feelings are now after having donated. The researchers leading the project are experts in museum studies and object-based therapy, and we hope to learn whether the experience of donating has had a healing impact on the donors. The information learned would help museums and institutions that collect and display objects learn why and how objects are meaningful to people, and the psychological community would gain valuable insight into the healing impact of dealing with trauma through the release of personal objects. We are hoping you would be willing to participate in a private 30-minute long personal interview at the War Childhood Museum. The interviews will take place between June 18th – 22nd to be arranged at times most convenient to you, and your private information will not be shared. If you are able to participate, we will provide you with all of the details of what to expect and the questions that will be asked so as to make the experience as clear and comfortable for you as possible. As you consider whether to participate and if you would like some initial information about who we are, you can learn about each of us online at:

- Associate Professor Brenda Cowan, Chairperson, Graduate Exhibition Design at SUNY Fashion Institute of Technology, www.fitnyc.edu <http://www.fitnyc.edu/exhibition-design/faculty/brenda-cowan.php>;
- Professor Ross Laird, PhD, Interdisciplinary Creative Process, MA, Counseling Psychology, <http://www.rosslaird.com>;
- Jason McKeown MS, LMFT, CPE, DCC, Director of Clinical and Family Services, Trails Carolina, trails-carolina.com/jason-mckeown

I would like to thank you so much for your consideration, and I hope we will be able to include you in this study that aims to help museums and the therapeutic community, and the many people

that they serve. Most Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Elinor O'Connor". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Appendix B

Interview Scripts

Object Donor Interviews:

Why did you choose to donate an object to the Museum?

Why did you select the object that you did?

What associations or meanings does the object hold for you?

Can you share the process you went through as you gifted your object to the museum?

Is public display of the object important to you? If so, why?

Do you feel changed in any way as a result of donating the object?

Post Visit Audience Members:

What made you decide to visit the museum?

1.

What content or emotions did you anticipate experiencing during your visit?

What do you remember most about the objects that you saw?

Describe the impact that those objects had on you.

Do you feel changed in any way as a result of your experience at the museum?