# Feeling the Past
## *Empathy, Heritage and the Museum*

*4th December 2018 (09:00-16:45)*
*Studio 2, M Shed, Bristol*

# Feeling the Past
## *Empathy, Heritage and the Museum*

Visitors to museums and sites of heritage are frequently invited to immerse themselves in the lives of past generations. With a fresh emphasis on emotion, feeling and personal perspective, heritage professionals have sought new ways to engage audiences with affective stories about objects, people and places, bringing the past to life, making it more familiar, and making it matter to audiences. But empathy is much easier to talk about than it is to curate. Is it possible to step into the shoes of long dead historical actors and see or feel the world as they did? How have heritage sites and museums built emotional content into the visitor experience, and how have visitors reacted?

*In this symposium we invite scholars, makers and heritage professionals to reflect upon their own experience and practice. How good have we become at feeling the past?*

# Programme

**09:00** *Registration and coffee*

**09.20** *Welcome and Introduction*
Steve Poole (University of the West of England)

**09:30** *Keynote: More than a Grand Day Out*
Tony Berry (National Trust)

**10:15** *Empathy and Objects*
Daniela Petrelli (Sheffield Hallam University)
*Holistic designing for affective embodied experiences*
Maria Economou (University of Glasgow)
*Designing and evaluating emotionally engaging digital stories for interpreting the past: The case of the Hunterian Museum's Antonine Wall EMOTIVE experiences*
Jane Hack (Bristol Culture)
*Past Lives: An empathetic approach to displaying ancient Egyptian mummies at Bristol Museum and Art Gallery*

**11:30** *Refreshments*

**11:45** *Empathy and Places*
Jenny Kidd (Cardiff University)
*Emotional encounters in immersive heritage: Traces-Olion, a case study*
Adam Sibbald (Historic Royal Palaces)
*We all have a role to play: Creating active roles as a tool for empathy-building*
Areti Galani (Newcastle University)
*Making space for reflection: accounting for empathy and inter-subjectivity in exhibitions about migration*

**13:00** *Lunch*

**14:00** *Project Showcase (Studio 2)*

**14:30** *Empathy and Audiences*
   **Luigina Ciolfi** (Sheffield Hallam University)
   *Heritage as a means of social inclusion: aspirations and challenges for the Culture Labs project*
   **Sierra McKinney** (University of York)
   *Inspiring pre/historic empathy through facilitated dialogue about cultural heritage*
   **Silke Arnold-de Simine** (Birkbeck, University of London)
   *Holographic Afterlives: empathetic encounters in new dimensions of testimony*

**15:45** *Refreshments*

**16:00** *Roundtable*: *Heritage Empath: an embodied storytelling experience*
   **Steve Poole** – Project Lead and Roundtable Chair
   **Rosie Poebright** – Creative Director, Splash and Ripple
   **Zodwa Nyoni** – Playwright and Poet
   **Tim Senior** – Project Researcher (UWE)
   **Owen Davies** – Arcfire Games
   **Steve Hellier** – Sound artist

**16:45** *Close and Drinks Reception*

# Abstracts
## Keynote

### Tony Berry
*More than a Grand Day Out*

In its new strategy published in 2015, the National Trust signalled a real step up in its ambition to create deeper outcomes (learning, emotional engagement, personal enrichment) from our visitor experiences.  Increasingly, we are moving beyond our role as an attraction operator (with a primary focus on visitor satisfaction and enjoyable days out) to think about how direct connection with places can deliver benefit in more profound ways – and how empathy can help us our audiences to achieve this. Tony will reflect on more than a decade of experiment with different approaches to unlock the potential of place to create the conditions for empathy – from immersive presentation to storytelling, digital interventions and work with artists.  He will also explore the challenges of disrupting the heritage visit 'ritual' to create the right preconditions for empathy, and audience motivation – how we enable emotional, personal connections for audiences who are focused on primarily social experiences.

*Tony Berry has been with the National Trust since the early 1990s, working regionally and nationally in PR, marketing, commercial development and learning.  As Visitor Experience Director, he's now responsible for the strategic direction of the Trust's visitor-facing operations.*

# Empathy and Objects

## Daniela Petrelli
*Holistic designing for affective embodied experiences*

Visiting a museum or a heritage site is a multi-sensorial experience founded on presence, on the fact of being there. Design can be used to amplify the physical presence and engage visitors' senses creating the premises for a deeper experience: interactive objects can be designed to become symbols of the stories to be told and means for the visitors to "enter the story". Using two examples from very different heritage sites (a fort from WWI and a Tudor house) I will discuss how a holistic design approach that simultaneously crafts the interaction, the objects, and the stories can produce empathy and affective responses. This holistic approach requires co-design and co-creation as different expertise are equally needed for a process that can spur creativity in people that are not used to, but requires commitment. The response of visitors to such crafted experiences is exceptional. However, a holistic approach goes against the tendering system in use today that is based on a commercial transaction rather than on partnership and on a fixed and scheduled process rather than on an open exploration of possibilities.

*Dr Daniela Petrelli is Professor of Interaction Design at the Art & Design Research Centre, Sheffield Hallam University, UK.*

# Maria Economou

*Designing and evaluating emotionally engaging digital stories for interpreting the past: The case of the Hunterian Museum's Antonine Wall EMOTIVE experiences*

The EU Horizon 2020-funded EMOTIVE project (https://www.emotiveproject.eu/) aims to design and evaluate emotionally engaging digital stories to change the way we experience archaeological site and museum displays. Its key users are both cultural heritage and creative industry professionals designing public interpretation, as well as end users, the visitors of these cultural sites, whether online, onsite or a combination of these. The Hunterian, the museum of the University of Glasgow, as one of the two cultural partners of the project, has designed digital stories to interpret its permanent display '*The Antonine Wall: Rome's Final Frontier'* which showcases the museum's rich collection from the Wall, a UNESCO World Heritage site. Based on a qual-itative and quantitative, mixed-methods evaluation framework, the presentation will discuss how this was implemented in evaluating the emotional aspects of storytelling and its impact on diverse visitor groups. It will present the formative and summative evaluation findings of one the on-site Hunterian EMOTIVE experiences, 'Ebutius's Dilemma', and its online version, and discuss the broader issues and challenges raised when trying to study emotional engagement in cultural heritage settings.

*Dr Maria Economou is Senior Lecturer in Museum Studies / Curator, a joint post at the University of Glasgow.*

# Jane Hack

*Past Lives: An empathetic approach to displaying ancient Egyptian mummies at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery*

When planning a new Egyptology gallery at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery, the project team adopted a different approach in order to challenge popular stereotypes of ancient Egypt rather than reinforce them. The methods used included the creation of a linear gallery storyline based on the life experiences of ancient Egyptian men and women; an interpretation hierarchy that supported the storyline, with well-defined themes and sub-themes; the fostering of an empathetic approach by the inclusion of a level of interpretation where selected objects drew close comparison between the lifestyles of ancient Egyptian men, women and children and the gallery visitors; the creation of a set of ethical principles regarding the treatment, display and interpretation of human remains within the gallery, which balanced the objective of presenting an authentic narrative, yet treated the mummified remains of these men and women with respect.

*Jane Hack is the Senior Officer, Formal Learning at Bristol Culture.*

# Empathy and Places

## Jenny Kidd
*Emotional encounters in immersive heritage: Traces-Olion, a case study*

*Traces* (*Olion* in the Welsh language) is an immersive audio storytelling experience designed to connect visitors viscerally and intentionally with(in) the space of St Fagans National Museum of History, Wales. *Traces* encourages participants to explore the site in atypical ways; ways that explicitly encourage them to feel and to touch. It can be either a single person or partner experience, the latter featuring moments of deep interaction and play. In this presentation I introduce the *Traces* project reflecting on its ambitions as related to emotions in digital cultural heritage work. I overview participant responses, reflecting on the impacts of work situated at the emotional nexus of sites, story and the senses, and reflect on our approach to evaluating the affective dimensions of immersion in *Traces.*

*Dr. Jenny Kidd is Senior Lecturer in the School of Journalism, Media and Culture at Cardiff University.*

# Adam Sibbald

*We all have a role to play: Active roles as a tool for empathy-building*

Are heritage audiences destined to be forever on the outside looking in? As passive observers to games, plays, exp-eriences in heritage spaces, it can be difficult if not impossible for audiences to be anything more than observers. Unless they connect emotionally, they cannot be true participants. Which is a problem in heritage where the discourse of 'participation', 'immersive experiences' and 'engagement' abounds. But what if you give them a role, a genuine part to play? Can they then start to step past a sympathetic regard for the people around them and walk into a life that is different from theirs? Can they feel what it may have felt like to be someone completely different? As Historic Royal Palaces we have long understood the need for empathetic emotional engagement, a thread which runs through our daily offer, and work with young people and school groups. However it is a facet that is generally ignored for the adult audience. In this paper I will look at 2 case studies: *NIGHTWATCHERS* and *The People's Revolt* where adults were invited and encouraged to play. I will discuss how changing the scenario, giving adults an active role, a part to play, has transformed not just the work we do at the Tower of London, but the expectations of the kind of work it is possible to do in a heritage space.

*Adam Sibbald is a Producer for Adult Learning at Historic Royal Palaces.*

# Areti Galani

*Making space for reflection: accounting for empathy and inter-subjectivity in exhibitions about migration*

Curatorial strategies that prioritise empathy often underpin exhibitions and museum displays about sensitive, contested and difficult histories, including migration. Conversely, the reliance on empathetic museum displays to engender attitudinal change toward difficult heritage(s) among visitors has also been contested. This presentation draws on two complementary studies that aimed to understand how empathy emerges and is being expressed among visitors to the exhibition Destination Tyneside, at the Discovery Museum (Newcastle, UK). This exhibition employs interpretative strategies to explicitly encourage empathetic responses from visitors on the subject of migration to the region. The first study took the form of an in-depth visitor study with long-term residents in Tyneside; it used glasses with audio-visual recording capabilities to support visitor's reflection on their visit. The second study adopted a Research through Design (RtD) methodology to create a digital 'dialogic' installation for the exhibition, which afforded visitors the space to encounter portraits of past migrants to the region. Drawing on visitors' responses from both studies, the presentation discusses visitors' engagement with the exhibition's empathetic strategies. It particularly focuses on the role of reflective practices and methodologies in accounting for complex affective and empathetic responses to 'otherness' in museum visits, and identity revision processes among visitors.

*Dr Areti Galani is a Senior Lecturer in Media, Culture, Heritage, at Newcastle University (UK) specialising in digital heritage.*

# Empathy and Audiences

## Luigina Ciolfi

*Heritage as means of social inclusion: Aspirations and challenges for the CultureLabs project*

The EU-funded CultureLabs project (2018-2021) has the goal to develop a platform to support those heritage institutions such as libraries, museums and theatres who wish to work with communities from immigrant, refugees or migrant backgrounds to share cultural heritage and understanding. While the importance and value of culture and heritage for social inclusion, empathy and emotional wellbeing are broadly recognised, the project is tackling difficult challenges in understanding and supporting the process of engagement of migrant communities into the work of museums and other cultural institutions, and how such engagement can benefit also the general public so to engender dialogue and empathy. The talk will provide an overview of CultureLabs current activities and initial results from data collection mapping practices of social inclusion in heritage, and will reflect on several open questions and challenges underpinning the work of the project team"

*Dr. Luigina Ciolfi is Professor of Human Centred Computing at Sheffield Hallam University*

# Sierra McKinney

*Inspiring pre/historic empathy through facilitated dialogue about cultural heritage*

While interest grows for fostering empathy amongst cultural heritage audiences, existing practice is often highly problematic—centred on the recent past, assuming positive outcomes, and deploying flawed assessment tools which have the potential to engender the opposite of cohesion and intercultural understanding. In the context of the EU-funded EMOTIVE Project (www.emotiveproject.eu) we aim to overcome these weaknesses via extending current pedagogical models of historical empathy to cultural heritage through the use of facilitated dialogue. Here I summarise preliminary findings from research with young people in informal educational contexts, and with adult audiences in mixed touristic / spiritual settings, where we have adapted the facilitated dialogue approaches used by the US National Park Service, the Tenement Museum, the Museum of Tolerance, and the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience. I reflect here on our modest successes in achieving the three main aims of historical empathy (as defined by Endacott & Brooks 2013), and I discuss the structural barriers which persistently work to quash empathetic outcomes for heritage audiences.

*Sierra McKinney has an MSc in Digital Heritage from the University of York, having previously studied Anthropology and Archaeology*

# Silke Arnold-de Simine

*Holographic Afterlives: Empathic Encounters in New Dimensions of Testimony*

The entertainment, heritage and museum sectors increasingly invest in technologies that create three-dimensional simulations, immersive environments and virtual interactions to enable audiences to invest emotionally and imaginatively in past worlds and experiences. One of the most prominent examples is the so-called 'World's First 3-D Interactive Holocaust survivor' project, which is supposed to enable an empathic encounter and personalised conversation with a Holocaust survivor beyond their actual life-span. The project, called New Dimensions in Testimony, was devised at the Institute for Creative Technologies (University of Southern California) in collaboration with the Shoah Foundation. It is piloted as Take a Stand exhibit at the Illinois Holocaust Museum (Skokie, US) and is also currently adapted in The Forever Project by The National Holocaust Centre and Museum in Newark, UK. I am particularly interested in audiences' ambivalent reactions to these forms of representation and my talk will first and foremost address their ethical implications and challenges.

*Dr. Silke Arnold-de Simine is Reader in the Department of Film, Media and Cultural Studies at Birkbeck, University of London.*