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John H. Falk, *Identity and the Museum Visitor Experience*, Walnut Creek, CA, 2009. Pp 302, \$32.95 (paperback) ISBN 978-1-59874-163-6 (PbK), other formats available.

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The museum visitor is the focal point in Falk's book. The author's objective is to provide a practical model that encourages museum institutions to interact with visitors in a manner that is tailored to their needs and identity. His research has examined the visitors' experiences within various types of institutions, from aquariums and botanical gardens to science museums and art galleries. Falk's book is multidisciplinary, combining museum visitor studies, leisure sciences, psychology, neurobiology, and marketing. And if this multi-disciplinarity sounds too complicated or even off-putting to potential readers, Falk's book is far from the traditional, strictly academic publication. Nonetheless, it is educational and informative and includes well-developed ideas. The content is absorbing and the text is easy to follow. Also, endnotes are kept to a minimum, while Falk frequently supports the evidence through mention of his own case-studies.

The book consists of two parts: theory and practice. The theory is the most educational part. It revisits the basics in museum visitor studies and, with the numerous case-studies provided (e.g. interviews with visitors), it would be an excellent educational tool, particularly for students and museum staff who are new to the field.

Chapter 1 is a call to reassess why people visit museums. To do so, one has to comprehend the individuality of museum visitors and examine the specific needs and motivations encouraging them to visit these institutions. Falk argues that although museums are entitled to create visitor profiles based on visitors' identities, museum staff should look beyond demographic and psychographic statistics that are entirely based on age, gender, ethnicity, education, occupation, lifestyle, attitudes, and personal values. This is because these fixed characteristics of visitors' identities do not reflect the motivations, needs, and interests of a museum visitor on any given day. This chapter, which presents research by Falk and other researchers, suggests that many museums have been processing their data without taking into account the wider context and visitors' perspectives.

Chapter 2 pursues this line, discussing how visitors' identity traits, personal experiences, and memories can be motivational for a museum visit. With this in mind, Falk offers the following five categories: 'explorers', 'facilitators', 'experience seekers', 'professionals/hobbyists', and 'rechargers'. For instance, 'explorers' visit museums because of curiosity and because they highly value expanding their intellectual horizons. 'Facilitators', on the contrary, visit museums in order to satisfy the needs and desires of others (e.g. their children's desires and educational needs) rather than just themselves. Additionally, 'rechargers' visit places such as botanical gardens or medieval castles in idyllic landscapes in order to find tranquillity and recharge their physical and emotional batteries. These five groups, with a brief profile for each of them provided in Chapter 3, form the basis for the way that Falk develops his argument throughout the book; however, the more detailed profile of them, given in the second part of the book, creates avoidable repetition.

Chapter 4 refers to visit strategies: Falk argues that visitors arrange their visit on the basis of their identity-related motivations, their prior knowledge and interests, and the objectives they set for their visit. A visitor's objective is to learn something new, but, most likely, the knowledge visitors gain from their visit is selective. For instance, one

chooses what to see and what to ignore in an exhibition, drawn by motivations, interests, and emotions. This idea is not new. Falk builds on Bagnall's concept (2007) that visitors' life stories, emotions, imagination and cognition are important resources in heritage consumption.¹ Through the discussion, the reader concludes that there is no guarantee that a visitor's experience is always predictable, as it can be affected for various reasons, even though, to some extent, its success is determined by the institution.

In fact, as Chapter 5 emphasises, the visitors' level of satisfaction after a museum visit depends not only on their previous experiences and identity-related motivations, but also on what exactly they expected to see, experience, or gain by visiting the museum. As Falk perceptively states (Chapter 6), the ticking of emotional boxes can make a museum visit memorable for years to come.

The last chapter of the theory section (Chapter 7) bridges from theory to practice. Here Falk summarises the main points raised previously, and provides a useful context for what follows, including an introduction to the methodology of his practical model, presented in part II.

Part II, whilst useful for students, is primarily for museum professionals. Simply put, it operates as a 'how-to' manual, although it is written in an engaging way. In Chapter 8, the problem is re-introduced: museums fail because many of them run with 20th century practices adopting a 'one size fits all' position when dealing with visitors. Falk's model promises to attempt to change this, as it suggests ways to customise and personalise visitor experiences, provides ideas for attracting, engaging, and

¹ Bagnall, Gaynor. 2007. "Performance and Performativity at Heritage Sites", in *Cultural Heritage: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies*, edited by Laurajane Smith, 87-103. London: Routledge.

retaining visitors, and discusses how the impact of museum visitor experiences could be measured.

Chapter 9 is about attracting and maintaining old and new visitors to museums, on the basis of advertising agendas for identity-related needs. Falk also includes suggestions for attracting ethnic minorities, under-represented visitors, and individuals who normally never visit these institutions.

In Chapter 10, Falk emphasises that in order for visitors' museum experiences to be satisfying, museums need to cover the needs of all groups of visitors. For instance, suggestions are given on what museum labels, guides, and new technologies would best suit the 'explorer' group; or even, how customised tours would serve the needs of 'professionals/hobbyists'. This approach is extended to the museum shop: for example, products that would impress 'experience seekers' might not impress 'professionals/hobbyists' although there are exceptions to this rule.

In the final chapter of the book Falk criticises his model. Although he recognises that museums are on the verge of declining unless their way of dealing with visitors is reassessed, he does not believe that his set model is a panacea. On the contrary, he sees the strong and weak points of it, and he encourages museums to adopt and modify it through trial and error.

Falk has met his target to present a new practical model for made-to-measure museum visitor experiences. The author gives a clear insight of what museums should look for in order to satisfy individual groups of visitors and the suggested marketing approach is interesting, to say the least. But since modern museums vary in management and exhibition content, and even the term of what exactly constitutes a museum is often debatable, it is likely that Falk's model is not appropriate for every institution. On the contrary, variations of this model might work best in individual cases.

Four years after publication, Falk's model has been applied in museums across the world. Only feedback can determine how effective this model is and how it can be modified for the best results.