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# **Authenticity, Authentication and Experiential Authenticity: Telling Stories in Museums**

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## **Abstract**

This article examines how different types of authenticity and authentication work together to inspire museum stories, and personal identification with them, in ways that encourage experiential authenticity. It begins by outlining conceptions of object and existential authenticity and demonstrating how they are bound up with processes hot and cool authentication. I argue that museums deploy all of these mechanisms to encourage experiences which visitors perceive as authentic. This perspective supports a concept of ‘experiential authenticity’ which connotes the belief and sensations of having experienced something genuine and real. This concept’s value is illustrated by examining storytelling in Anne Frank House. Key museum stories are outlined before exploring how different forms, and degrees, of authenticity and authentication work together to enlist visitor imaginations in the storytelling process and to thereby inspire personal identification as well as embodied connections with them. Four key mechanisms for telling stories are analysed (objects, texts, photographs and videos), and their combined capacity to cultivate experiential authenticity is demonstrated. This is important because experiential authenticity heightens visitor receptivity to museum stories, and is thus both a source and an agent of power.

## Introduction

In 2017, ‘fake news’, ‘**alternative facts**’, and ‘mispeaking’ entered the public lexicon through the unlikely auspices of an American President. These developments are cause for concern about the value of authenticity, understanding of what constitutes a ‘fact’, and the importance of truth. In *Sincerity and Authenticity*, Trilling (1972) asserts that, historically, societies only become interested in authenticity when the truth is under threat. Paradoxically then, authenticity is made visible by its absence. In broad conception, this article is a clarion call about the universal value of *principles* of truth and authenticity, even as the precise *meaning* of these terms remains fluid and contested.

In the belief that broadly significant knowledge can emerge from case studies, this paper explores intersections between authenticity and personal identification in the context of museum storytelling. Anne Frank House is but one small museum in Amsterdam yet its stories of personal suffering - and growth - amidst Nazi persecution, continue to resonate with perturbing foreboding in a world where bigoted populism and authoritarianism are on the rise. Ideally, the following exploration of how convincing stories are told will inspire critical analysis of (and resistance to), efforts to devalue the principles of something called ‘truth’ in the pursuit of discrimination and injustice (rather than as part of honourable intellectual inquiry).

Pursuing these aspirational goals begins from a focused and manageable place. My immediate objective is to analyse how museums use authenticity and authentication alongside imagination and personal identification to communicate particular stories.

Clearly, audiences are neither homogenous nor a *tabula rasa* and thus stories are mediated by individual positionality and experience in both the long term and short term (Edensor, 2000; Garden, 2006; Rickly-Boyd, 2015). Still, it is also important to recognize that the *raison d'être* of museums is to convey specific information and that a lot of work goes into ensuring socially organised readings of the stories that define them (Bruner, 1994; De Lyser, 1999; Hall, 1994). Normally these stories are presented as a reasonable approximation of at least some truth: without this, museums would lose cultural authority. As this suggests, matters of *intention* and *trust* are also fundamental to both the telling and reception of stories (including their critical evaluation), especially where difficult or contested histories are involved (De Lyser, 1999; Rickly-Boyd, 2015).

When it comes to museums, understanding how the present imposes itself on the past, constructing it in ways that resonate with contemporary ideas and perspectives (e.g. Chronis, 2012; De Lyser, 1999; Lowenthal, 1985; MacCannell, 1979), is as important as understanding how stories of the past are used to inform opinions in the present; sometimes in ways which affect the future (cf. Chronis, 2006). Exploring *how* museums encourage individuals to respect, accept, and sometimes even internalize and adopt, the perspectives that they advance is a study of power. Here, I argue that the effectiveness of museums in conveying particular stories, and successfully advancing 'truth claims', derives from two interrelated elements. The first is how museum contents are selected, represented, configured and/or created, to relate museum narratives, and the second is authenticity. More specifically, I argue that the ability of the substantive elements of museums to convey intended meanings convincingly, is directly related to visitor perceptions – and experiences – of authenticity. It is widely

acknowledged that the belief that something is ‘real’ or ‘original’ matters to people and other scholars have explained this as the importance of personal ‘connection’ (Bruner, 1994; Chronis 2006) or ‘engagement’ (De Lyser 1999), or ‘empathy’ (Gnoth & Wang, 2015). More powerfully still, authenticity influences the level of personal identification with, and internalization of and/or embodied connection to, the stories being told. This is critically important because it has the capacity to affect not only immediate visitor experiences, but also attitudes and actions *after* they have ‘left the building’. Accordingly, understanding how personal identification is inspired, is fundamental to understanding museum power .

To develop these arguments, I begin by discussing the complex concepts of authenticity and authentication, their capacity to inspire personal identification, and the significance of this relationship to the production of convincing museum narratives. Building on the work of Rickly-Boyd (2012), I argue that authenticity takes multiple forms but, unlike her, I contend that *what it is* continues to matter, alongside her concerns with what it does, by and for whom. In part this is a question of logic because we need to know what it is that is being deployed and/or experienced but also because the ultimate efficacy of authenticity may be a product of its very conceptual and material variability. Rather than seeing one conceptualisation or form of authenticity as more accurate or valuable than others, I argue that they are more productively seen as working together, in contextually varied ways, to inspire a sense of ‘experiential authenticity’.

The remainder of the paper then draws on the example of Anne Frank House (henceforth AFH), to develop my arguments about how various kinds of things can be deployed to tell stories, and the role that authenticity and authentication, often via

personal identification, experience and embodied connections, play in their success. I review events that lend significance to AFH before introducing the museum's stories, and their protagonists. Next, I analyse how AFH skilfully combines objects, images, text and technology to tell its stories and, in the process, to encourage visitor identification with them. As becomes apparent, personal identification is bound up with a sense of experiential authenticity: namely, the belief and sensations of having experienced something genuine and real - something authentic. This has value in its own right but it also matters because it has the potential to enhance visitor receptiveness to other museum messages and predispose them to alter attitudes and behaviour in ways that are consistent with museum perspectives.

The research that informs this work included some twenty-five visits to the museum over a decade of field course teaching, always recording new observations, including changes to displays and entries in the guest book. Where no other substantiation is provided, it lies in these notes and experiences, along with 'post-museum de-brief' discussions with the students. The frequency and focus of my visits means that some of my observations may commonly be overlooked, especially those facets of the museum that work subliminally rather than through engaged awareness. As becomes clear, both phenomena influence the promotion and perception of authenticity. Additional research methods included semi-structured interviews with key museum personnel; observation of an introductory class for Dutch primary school children; and tours of parts of AFH that are normally off-limits. Where interviewee knowledge made it easier to distinguish between authentic and inauthentic parts of the museum proper, and to understand how and why this has shifted over time, the 'back stage' exposure underscored the extensiveness and complexity of museum operations.

## **Authenticity, Authentication and Personal Identification**

Various authors have traced the development of conceptions of authenticity (e.g. Handler, 1986; Trilling, 1972; Zukin, 2008), and explained its interpretation by different intellectual perspectives (e.g. Castéran & Roederer, 2013; Vannini & Williams, 2009; Wang, 1999). This work confirms that understandings of authenticity vary widely, frequently reflecting the theoretical predilections of authors and/or their empirical interests. As Bruner (1994, p. 401) asserts, “the problem with the term *authenticity*, in the literature and in fieldwork, is that one never knows except by analysis of context which meaning is salient in any given instance”. This makes authenticity a difficult concept to work with.

What most scholars do agree on is that authenticity is a social construct of the modern western world and one that remains culturally contingent (De Lyser, 1999, p. 662; Handler, 1986, p. 2). Despite this contingency, there is also widespread agreement that authenticity matters to people: they value, and are moved by, things and experiences that they believe to be ‘real’ (e.g. Bruner, 1994; Chabra, 2008; DeLyser, 1999; Rickly-Boyd, 2012). Herein lie the kernels of two widely recognised *types* of authenticity and of the kinds of *processes* involved in their social construction. The first type of authenticity relates to *genuine objects*, things that combine an originating causal process – how the thing came into being as an entity – with its historical continuity (Katz, 2002, p. 200). As institutions whose *raison d’être* is to collect and preserve ‘original’ objects, and inform visitors about those on display, object authenticity is the *sine qua non* of museums. By the same count, this type of authenticity also applies to things like places/sites and performances: they have material qualities even though these may not be permanent or unchanging (Dudley, 2010).

The second widely acknowledged type of authenticity is variously labelled – and variously understood - as phenomenological, performative, or, most commonly (at least in tourism studies) existential. Steiner and Reisinger (2006, p. 299) define existential authenticity as “a human attribute signifying being one’s true self or being true to one’s essential nature”. Confusingly (but importantly), this form of authenticity cannot be understood by simply transferring the essence of the concept of object authenticity (genuineness or realness) to the self. This is because, unlike with objects, it is absolutely impossible to determine when someone else is being their true self, or indeed if they even have one enduring self to aspire to or attain (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006, p. 302). Accordingly, “authenticity” indicates a very personal and momentary state of being; it offers a glimpse of a fundamental self-understanding that gives rise to a feeling of existential truth (Cary, 2004). This type of authenticity is involuntary and spontaneous, not the result of a psychological, cognitive, or behavioral moment when one *decides* how to respond to an experience or what to do (Steiner & Reisinger, 2006, p. 306, emphasis added). Importantly, experiences of existential authenticity can be inspired by interaction with authentic objects, powerful symbolic representations or resonating truth claims and, conversely they can have a momentous impact on perceptions of things and claims *as* authentic (DeLyser, 1999; Kidd, 2011; Witcomb, 2010).

In relevant literature, it is also common to identify a third *type* of authenticity, often following Wang (1999), which is referred to as symbolic or constructionist. Here, authenticity is viewed as a socio-cultural phenomenon that is not fixed or binary (e.g. fake vs. real), but always in a state of construction and contestation. According to this conceptualisation, authenticity is not a property inherent in any one thing or existential



moment but is constructed and deployed in different ways and by different interests to assert a particular view of the meaning and/or significance of these things. This means that it is possible to generate “various versions of authenticities regarding the same object” (Wang, 1999, p. 352; see also, Brown, 2013, p. 177; De Lyser, 1999, p. 622). As close reading of this description makes clear, this notion of authenticity is better seen as connoting *processes* whereby “truth claims” are advanced and contested, rather than as a *type* of authenticity. These *processes* constitute the social construction of the two *types* of authenticity just outlined (i.e. object and existential) (Cohen & Cohen, 2012).

To avoid perpetuating this confusing misconception, Cohen and Cohen advocate the use of the term ‘authentication’ (instead of authenticity) to connote the social *processes* whereby “something – a role, product, site, project or event – is confirmed as “original”, “genuine”, “real” or “trustworthy”” (2012, p. 1296). Further, they identify two modes of authentication – ‘hot’ and ‘cool’ - which they summarize as follows:

“Cool” authentication is declarative, often based on “proof”; “hot” authentication is implicit, based on belief. “Cool” authentication is enacted without the participation of the public - its effectiveness depends on the credibility of the authenticating authority; “hot” authentication is not explicitly enacted, but socially produced in a participatory process. “Cool” authenticity tends to be static, independent of the visiting public; “hot” authentication is dynamic, maintained and augmented by the visitors performative practices. “Cool” authentication is typically constituted by a single act: ‘hot’

authentication is built up gradually, in an ongoing [affective and self-reinforcing] process (Cohen & Cohen 2012, pp. 1300-1301).<sup>1</sup>

The analytical value of these conceptualizations of authentication, and their relationships to object and experiential authenticity is demonstrable through their capacity to explicate the effectiveness of storytelling in AFH. Both forms of *authentication* work, independently and together, to stimulate (or indeed, undermine) personal experiences of object and existential *authenticity*. In AFH, the single most important example of object authenticity is Anne Frank's original diary. This object *is* her diary whether or not anyone (else) knows about it, reads it, or values it. This object is discrete and bounded; it is real, genuine, original and there is only one of it.<sup>2</sup> The first thing pupils ask when they see a replica of the diary is if it is 'real', and they are visibly disappointed to learn that it is not (Huitema-de Waal, 2015). Similarly, other visitors are reduced to tears when they encounter the original diary in the museum. Students consistently affirmed the importance of seeing the original, partly because it was the basis for the museum and its stories, but also because it provided a direct connection between Anne and themselves. For students, a replica would not have the same effect because it could not produce this same closeness. This view is shared by others who visit when the original diary has been removed temporarily. They say:

“well, we would like to see the original but we understand that you use the facsimile, because, you know, you have to preserve things ... but they all say they would like to see the original ... they prefer the original” (Maas, 2015).

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<sup>1</sup> These notions of *authentication* draw on Selwyn's (1996) distinction between 'hot' and 'cool' *authenticity*, which is, in turn, indebted to McLuhan's (1964) notions of *media* hot and cold (chapter 2).

<sup>2</sup> This claim to essentialism (to an ontological quality) for this particular object, does not constitute support for all essentialist claims.

Clearly, and as wide-ranging literature affirms, object authenticity matters considerably to most people (e.g. Bruner, 1994; DeLyser, 1999; Kidd, 2011, p. 29; Rickly-Boyd, 2015, p. 897). The fact that the diary is real, and valued as such, is not to say that its physicality has remained unchanged over time (despite state of the art preservation efforts), or that its *meaning* is singular or fixed or uncontested (De Lyser, 1999, p. 613).

As this suggests, authenticity that inheres in an object need not preclude the importance of authentication, as “a *claim* that is made by or for someone, thing or performance” that can either be accepted or rejected by those confronted with it (Peterson, 2005, p. 1086, emphasis added). In the case of Anne Frank’s diary, some people (largely neo-Nazis and other anti-Semites) decried the diary as a hoax from the moment it was published (Barnouw, 2003; Lipstadt, 2000). For these people, challenging its authenticity was important because its acceptance as ‘real’ undermined revisionist historical perspectives and bigoted cultural distinctions which they sought to advance. In contrast, other, newly ascendant, social forces were determined to use the object authenticity of the diary to expose holocaust atrocities and advance very different aspirations for the future. Resolving these contradictory claims of object authenticity had important symbolic, material and emotional significance. Accordingly, a process of cool authentication was initiated which involved a protracted, state sponsored, forensic examination of the diary – hand writing, paper, ink, glue etc. – and resulted in unequivocal confirmation of its genuineness (Hardy, 2003).

The fact that some entities have the power to authenticate while others do not, underscores the importance of power and social process in understanding authenticity. As Chhabra (2008, p. 428) reminds us, “records of the past are often falsified in the

interests of specific individuals or groups” (cf. Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983). The constructedness of authentication – as social processes whereby competing interests advance their own truth claims - means that, had the war ended differently, the outcome of official, cool, authentication might have been different too. Thus, even though the ontological authenticity of Anne’s diary as an object might not change, its promotion, authentication, and acceptance as such are vulnerable to shifts in power. An important dimension of this vulnerability is that the *perception* of authenticity – whether sound or not - can be just as powerful as its actual *presence* (Bruner, 1994; Chabra, 2008; Chhabra, Healy & Sills, 2003; Cohen & Cohen, 2012; Rickly-Boyd, 2012). As this suggests, *beliefs* about diary authenticity also have implications for experiences of existential authenticity and hot authentication among visitors to AFH. For a start, it is not clear that people would even come to AFH, let alone wait for hours in the queue to get in, if the diary was not widely accepted as genuine. The import of this particular object – a diary – is magnified because its contents relate events that occurred in the AFH building. If the diary was deemed inauthentic, its stories and associated museum spaces would also be easier to dismiss as contrived. If officials are trusted, their authentication can help to inspire existential authenticity because, as demonstrated above, people are often deeply moved by their encounters with the diary and the spaces in which its stories took place. These embodied experiences support perceptions of authenticity in ways that encourage the hot authentication of AFH by visitors themselves.

This discussion underscores the usefulness of conceptualising authenticity as claims that need to be authenticated, in addition to being a quality that is ascribed to objects and experiences. It also highlights the importance of intention and trust as

contributories to claims, understandings and experiences of authenticity (Chhabra, 2008; Chronis, 2005 & 2006; DeLyser, 1999). Herein lie the politics of authentication, and to understand these in any given context, it is important to know who is advancing particular claims as well as how and why they are doing so. Importantly, this imperative to ‘consider the source’, also relates to visitors. It is now widely accepted that museums are not “static container[s] of meaning that one enters into, but [... are] made through performance by a set of discourses and texts, bodies and objects, affects and precepts, technologies and mediums” (Rickly-Boyd, 2013 p. 681). In other words, visitors have agency too and the ways in which they interact with museums helps to constitute these places and the stories they tell. This interaction helps to produce meaning, and in doing so, influences decisions about authenticity and authentication (Barthel, 1996; Bruner, 1994; Kidd, 2011)

Clearly, there is no single, unequivocally ‘right way’, to view authenticity and it seldom manifests in a single unproblematic way. Instead the two types of authenticity outlined above, and the processes associated with their construction, contestation, and authentication, are *all* relevant to understanding museum goals and visitor experiences. Indeed, these things work together to produce what might be called ‘experiential authenticity’. This concept refers to the totality of a tourist experience. It arises from interaction between infinite (individually mediated) combinations of objects, places, events, performances, existential moments, and people. These interactions and their embodied constitution of, and engagement with museum spaces and stories, produce meaning through both sensing and thinking. Importantly, their capacity to do so is deeply bound up with whether or not they are *experienced* as authentic (Chhabra et al., 2003, Knudsen and Waade 2010: 13). Sensations and beliefs of experiencing something

genuine – of occupying spaces/places and touching or observing objects that belonged to, or were used by, people whose stories are being told – allows museum visitors to establish personal connections between themselves and the protagonists of museum narrative(s) (Bruner, 1994, p. 410; Chronis, 2005 & 2006; Witcomb, 2010).

These connections – material, embodied, symbolic, emotional, psychological and/or existential – encourage personal identification with both the stories that the museum is trying to convey and the people and things intrinsic to this process. This personal identification is crucial because visitors trust their own first hand experience. When museum experiences become personal and associated narratives are internalized, visitors are more likely to accept the ‘truth’ of the stories being told (DeLyser, 1999, p. 613; Kidd, 2011, p. 31). Thus, experiential authenticity matters because it authenticates (or not) ‘truth claims’ and this, in turn, can affect the retention of information and memories as well as future attitudes and behaviours. The concept of experiential authenticity is useful because it allows analysis of the authenticity of an experience (here, a museum visit) as a combination, in whole or in part, of the different forms that authenticity and authentication can take.

### **Anne Frank House and its Stories**

Publicity for Anne Frank House describes it as “A museum with a story”. This quality, combined with its manageable size, makes it well-suited to analysis of how museum contents and authenticity (in all of its manifestations), work together to tell stories which inspire personal identification. The central story is that of Anne Frank, a young Jewish girl who hid from Nazi persecution between July 6 1942 and August 4 1944. The place where she hid – two upper floors of a Secret Annex located behind her father’s business at 263

Prinsengracht – now comprises part of the museum which bears her name. The diary she kept whilst in hiding is the entity around which the entire museum revolves. It chronicles common teenager preoccupations – changing bodies, problematic parents, love, the future – and this makes it immediately relatable. However, Anne’s diary becomes truly compelling when these normalcies are juxtaposed with a life lived in cramped confinement, while enduring long periods of silence and boredom, alongside a constant threat of discovery and death. It is made all the more engaging by the eloquence of its writer and the astuteness, and often acerbity, of her observations.

By the same count, and as AFH researcher Gertjan Broek (2015) reminds us, Anne’s Diary, and other writings, remain subjective documents.

... the authentic story, as it’s laid down in the manuscripts of Anne Frank, is the best documentation of the hiding period that you can imagine. Although, not in an objective sense because she is biased, just like anyone else, and she is selective about what she documents and what not. But [these manuscripts] are the only thing we have that *truly* documents what happened behind the bookcase, or during and out of business hours.

Occurrences that Anne recounts, her stories, have been affirmed by her father and others with some first-hand experience of these times and events, and they have also been verified by direct correspondence between her writings and concurrent happenings in the outside world (Broek, 2015). This authentication underscores the authenticity of her writings, and the museum stories they inform, but both are unavoidably incomplete: a reminder of the inevitability of partiality, absences and silences, in historical records (Lowenthal, 1985). This dimension of Anne’s stories is not mentioned in AFH.

Despite her centrality to the museum and its stories, Anne did not hide alone or unassisted and it is impossible to tell her story without telling at least three others. The first relates to the seven other *onderduikers*: most significantly, her parents Otto and Edith Frank, as well as her older sister, Margot.<sup>3</sup> The Franks shared their hiding place with Hermann van Pels, Otto's business partner, as well as his wife Auguste and their son, Peter, and one other acquaintance, Fritz Pfeffer. With the exceptions of Otto, who survived the war, and Fritz, who corresponded regularly with his fiancé, the voices of those in hiding are mute; they have no authorship of their own stories. Instead, what they were like, and how they experienced life in hiding, is related almost exclusively by what Anne chose to record about them. More subtly still, their lives and stories are mediated by the museum staff's selection of quotations from Anne's writings, and their decisions about which personal objects to display. Again, these influences on the stories being told are never addressed and, though perhaps a curatorial necessity, this has the effect of reifying museum narrations as complete and unproblematic. These points about partiality and power (and their invisibility), also have salience for all other ancillary stories.

The second set of these stories involves non-Jewish colleagues of Otto and Hermann who assisted the *onderduikers* by providing food and supplies, not to mention companionship and news. The enormous risks taken by these people – Miep and Jan Gies, Victor Kugler, Johannes Kleiman, Bep Voskuijl – explain how it was possible for eight people to hide for so long, and the stories told of them document self-sacrifice, courage and profound decency. These people are commonly referred to as 'the helpers' and they were unquestionably indispensable to the *onderduikers*' survival. Still, Broek (2015) cautions

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<sup>3</sup> The literal translation of the Dutch word 'onderduikers' is "dive below" but it refers to people who go into hiding. I use it here as a useful shorthand for the eight people who hid together in the Secret Annex at 263 Prinsengracht.



about the folly of seeing this as a one way relationship. He notes, for example, that “Bep came from a poor family and she did her share to help these people and they rewarded her by providing lunch every day.” Similarly, “when the hiding period starts, [Kugler] became the director of Gies and Co. It was social climbing for him”. Everyone’s survival – helpers/employees and onderduikers - depended on the solvency of the two companies operating out of 263 Prinsengracht. So, Kugler performed a huge service for all concerned but this was not entirely selfless because he was among the beneficiaries of his actions. The museum never makes these aspects of the story explicit.

Finally, the museum tells something of the broader contextual story: namely, the rise of Nazi Germany and its genocidal efforts to destroy Jewish people everywhere by rounding them up and inhumanely transporting them to purpose-built work and extermination camps, where their labour could be exploited until they died and/or they could be killed. The use of one girl’s story to relate the fate of so many is part of the genius that lies at the heart of Anne Frank’s diary, but also of the museum.

Primo Levi (1986, p. 52) explains this efficacy as follows:

One single Anne Frank moves us more than the countless others who have suffered just as she did but whose faces have remained in the shadows. Perhaps it is better that way; if we were capable of taking in all the suffering of all those people, we would not be able to live.

In discussing the goals and successes of the museum in relating its stories, the Museum Head advanced a similar perspective but also stressed the importance of the personal nature of the stories and the importance of visitor identification with them.

... [the museum is so popular] because it's a story of a young girl, it could be *your* daughter, could be *your* sister ... you know, a relative. It's a very *personal* story. So if you tell a story about six million people being murdered, it's very abstract. People cannot i-ma-gine, you cannot, it's too, too horrible to imagine. But the story of one young girl, who, who could also write an excellent book. Ummmm it *appeals* to people (Maas, 2015).

People relate to Anne, and their identification with her in personal ways makes them receptive to the museum's stories. For this reason, all stories begin with and emanate from Anne herself – or, perhaps more accurately, her diaries. Nevertheless, all the voices invoked to tell these stories have been mediated by museum designers and curators and, less visibly still, by translators and editors of Anne's diary, including Anne herself.<sup>4</sup> These decision-makers are, in some ways, the ultimate storytellers at AFH and this power is perhaps most visible in their addition of a fourth, contemporary, set of stories to the museum's repertoire (AFH, 2006). These stories are told at the end of the museum, and they draw on the experiences of Anne, other *onderduikers* and helpers, Jews more broadly, and WWII in general, to relate an overarching message about the dangers of discrimination in any form and the need for vigilance and resistance to it. This brings the museum's stories into the present and demonstrates their relevance to visitors' own lives. This enhances personal identification with all museum narratives but, as in other storytelling decisions, the pivotal editorial role of AFH staff underscores the importance of understanding how museum space and content are incorporated into this process (*cf.* Bruner, 1994; DeLyser, 1999).

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<sup>4</sup> Anne edited her original diary because she hoped it might be published after the war and when she perished, her father drew on both versions of her work to produce the book that was first published in 1947.

## **Authenticity, Authentication and Storytelling**

When the Secret Annex was raided on August 4, 1944, the commanding SS officer (Karl Silberbauer), ordered Otto Frank to hand over their valuables. Silberbauer then picked-up a briefcase and dumped its contents onto the floor in order to carry away the onderduikers' jewellery and money. The briefcase had been the repository of Anne's diary and other writings (Paape, 2000, p. 34). After the arrest, Miep and Bep returned to the Annex and discovered Anne's writings amongst the ransacked belongings. Given that everything in the Annex was now considered "captured Jewish possessions", they took a considerable risk when they decided to take these writings, and a few other personal belongings, for safe keeping (Gies & Gold, 2000, p. 56-57). Shortly thereafter, the Nazis ordered that the Annex be cleared and when Otto returned in June 1945 he found the rooms abandoned and devoid of most signs of the life in hiding. "For him, that emptiness symbolized the loss of his fellow sufferers who had not returned from the camps. For this reason Otto later decided that the Secret Annexe should remain in this state" (AFH, 2013b, p. 7).

With the building badly deteriorating, the furniture removed, and most personal belongings appropriated, there was precious little left with which to tell the stories that AFH sets out to tell. This epistemicide posed a serious challenge to those who first sought to create the museum and it has continued to require the ingenuity of many people to achieve its goals. The remainder of this paper explores four key elements of this representation and storytelling: objects, text, images and video (cf. Witcomb, 2010, p. 46). In each case, I identify issues of authenticity and discuss their impact on both the stories being told and visitor reception of them. In the process, I show how these four facets of

narration have been constructed and staged to work together - drawing on varying types of authenticity and authentication - to inspire visitor engagement and identification such that individual imaginations are enlisted into, and become active agents in, the story telling process (Bruner, 1994; Chronis, 2005; DeLyser, 1999). As debrief sessions with students made clear, this mutual cultivation of experiential authenticity reinforces visitor confidence in both particular stories and their broader messages of tolerance and anti-discrimination.

### ***Objects and Authenticity***

Of all the objects drawn into AFH storytelling, two are paramount: the first is Anne's writing (often simplified as her diary), and the second is the building itself. As discussed above, the diary is the *raison d'être* of the museum: it justifies the very existence of this institution and, as becomes apparent below, it is instrumental in guiding visitors through the building and its stories. At the same time, the original diary itself - as an object - is the *pièce de résistance* of the museum and its positioning marks the climax of the museum visit (Penrose, forthcoming). Maas (2015) explains the deeply respectful engagement with Anne's original writings as follows: "I think it's an emotional thing, that people like the diary, [they] can actually *see* from a very close distance the letters that Anne has written, by hand. That's just a very personal thing."

When it comes to storytelling, the building at 263 Prinsengracht is an object which plays a key supporting role. (Brink, 2015). Despite its restoration and reconfiguration over time, the building continues to mark the place where Anne's diary was written and where most ancillary stories unfolded. As I argue elsewhere (Penrose, forthcoming), this authenticity of place is indispensable to conveying the museum's stories, (cf. Chronis, 2005; DeLyser,

1999; Rickly-Boyd, 2015), and in doing so, to granting visitors a personal sense of the experiences of those who hid and worked here, albeit at one very safe temporal remove. Thus, even though the rooms are largely empty and unremarkable, their authenticity - with their bits of original materials easily shading into the specially commissioned replica wall paper and floorings - transports visitors back in time and predisposes them to be receptive to the stories being told (cf. DeLyser, 1999; Lowenthal, 1985). This figurative journey is assisted by the regulation of light and temperature in ways that subliminally encourage visitors to focus their attention on the building's interior and the past it depicts. Creating this atmosphere sets the stage for layering in other elements which inform visitors but also engage them in storytelling processes and encourage experiential authenticity.

For many people, occupying historically important space is a way of bridging time and recreating past experiences (Kidd, 2011; Witcomb, 2010), but this also requires the active engagement of imagination and it is here that the real genius of AFH becomes apparent. Visitor imagination is awakened by the creative use of genuine objects that are part of the substance of the building, things like sinks and toilets but especially the moveable bookcase that disguised the entrance to the Secret Annex. These things work closely with objects that were owned or used by both helpers and *onderduikers* during the hiding period. After the war, when Otto Frank thought the building would be demolished, he cut out several sections of wallpaper which have since been reinstated into reproduction wallpaper. These originals include a small map of Normandy where Otto had tracked allied advances with small coloured pins; an informal height chart recording the growth of Anne and Margot whilst in hiding; and the photographs and post-cards which decorated Anne's room (Dammer, 2008). Students consistently identified these objects as amongst the most moving items in the entire museum. This power derives from visitor capacity to

relate to them very personally (authenticity of experience), and because they offer visitors a direct connection with Anne, and museum stories, across time but in situ (place/object authenticity). Occupying spaces where onderduiker bodies lived in the past, can grant visitors a physical closeness to them which is capable of inspiring authenticity effects on visitors' bodies, as well as their minds.

In terms of more portable personal possessions, the range of display options is extremely limited but politics of representation are still present. In areas leading up to the Secret Annex, a few original items, like Miep's typewriter and documents about the transfer of company ownership to some helpers, set the context of hiding and helping. In the Secret Annex there is only one item on display for each onderduiker and these are located in the room where they slept. According to former Museum Director Westra, "the use of some original objects belonging to the people who played a role here will reinforce the personal story and the ambience of the rooms" (Westra, 1995, p. 2). Here again the importance of authenticity is evident – seemingly *self*-evident – but this is not enough to explain why so many visitors (including our students), pour over Edith Frank's German prayer book, a page of Margo's corrected Latin lesson, Otto's Dickens book, Auguste's Dutch-German textbook, a short shopping list written in Hermann's hand, or even Peter's board game. Visitors also scour the magazine pictures and post cards that adorn Anne's bedroom walls and according to Maas (2015), this is all related to object authenticity: "I am sure that people are aware that those are the originals and that they are very moved by seeing them." Student de-brief sessions consistently affirmed this interpretation of visitor behaviour.

Their reflections also suggested that the search here may not be so much for meaning as for personal connection. Witcomb (2010, p. 44) expresses this phenomenon as follows:

“[The] object’s impact reaches beyond that of providing a historical narrative... Extending beyond documentation, beyond personal testimony, the object also provides an opportunity for identification, for building a personal link. The way it does this has as much to do with the narrative surrounding it’s making as with its aesthetic characteristics and what it is depicting.”

As this suggests, authenticity helps explain visitors’ deep engagement with quite mundane objects (often in languages they don’t understand), but there is a curatorial hand at play here too, arguably working to cultivate this response. Edith’s prayer book is a case in point: it suggests a certain religiosity, which in turn reminds visitors that religion was a key justification for discrimination against Jews in general and the plight of the *onderduikers* in particular. However, as Broek (2015) explained, this object was chosen over Edith’s copy of Spinoza’s *Ethics*: “and then you paint a very different picture of Edith because, if you are *really* an orthodox Jew, I don’t think you would read Spinoza’s *Ethics*.”

The power of curators to give stronger voice, or presence, to some objects over others is a reminder of the inevitable selectivity of storytelling and of their hand in it (Chabra, 2008; Chronis, 2012). Equally, a paucity of relevant objects can also force curators’ hands and require them to choose between using facsimiles, tolerating inaccuracies, or displaying nothing at all (Mason & Sayner 2018). Two examples from AFH help to illustrate these complexities associated with authenticity. The first revolves around

small hand-made models of the Secret Annex, which were commissioned by Otto Frank in 1961 (Westra, 2004, p. 254). Although Otto wanted the Secret Annex to remain empty of furnishings, he also wanted to give visitors a clear sense of what the rooms had been like during the hiding period. These models fulfil this function and, despite being amateurish and not to scale, many visitors examine them at great length and with intense curiosity.

The furniture is too small, so the room seems too big and it was much more crowded. But the fact that [Otto] asked someone to make it and helped this person, to explain what it was like, that makes it a very special thing (Maas, 2015).

This is a reminder that inaccuracy does not always affect the efficacy of representations (DeLyser, 1999; Gable & Handler, 1993): students seldom critiqued the substance of these models but they consistently expressed how they helped to prepare them for ‘reading’ the hiding spaces they were about to enter. In addition, Otto’s role as a consultant to their creation can be seen to lend the models legitimacy, if not authenticity at one remove. The models also illustrate the complexity of intersections between different forms of authenticity because they are demonstrably – materially - authentic, even if their representations are not strictly so.

A second example of curatorial challenges of negotiating between object authenticity and effective storytelling (*cf.* Rickly-Boyd, 2015), occurs in the room immediately after the Secret Annex, which documents the arrest, deportation and fates of all of the *onderduikers* (Figure 1). The relevant objects here are part of a transport list (from a train taking Jews to Auschwitz), that includes the names of the Frank family and, in an adjacent set of eight individual display cases, the personal identity cards of all eight



onderduikers. These cards were used by the Nazis to keep track of individuals' origins, movements and, in most cases, their deaths: they were confiscated by the Dutch Red Cross after the war, in order to provide information about deportees (AFH, 2013a, p. 199). None of these documents are originals, a fact signalled by a small, inconspicuous sign on the side of the first case. They are, however, exact replicas of those held by the Red Cross and they are indispensable in grounding this last and harshest chapter of Anne's story and those of her fellow onderduikers. This is because they connect the onderduikers directly with the Nazis, and link their desperate fates with those of countless other Jews. In effect, they bring about closure for all protagonists of the museum's stories – onderduikers and helpers alike.

Figure 1 about here

(AFTER PRECEEDING PARAGRAPH)

Importantly, this representational work, just like that done by all other objects in the museum, does not operate in isolation (Chronis, 2006; DeLyser, 1999; Witcomb, 2010). In communicating information about individual onderduiker fates, the documentary objects (facsimile identity cards) are placed in a perspex case, each of which has a nearly transparent photograph of the relevant person on the front and their name and date of death printed just below. At the back of each case, curators have placed a war-time photograph of the camp where the individual died. In a further nod to the importance of authenticity, the photos selected date as closely as possible to the date of the death they memorialize and their content conveys the manner of death. The only exception is Anne's case, where a short black and white film clip of Bergen-Belsen runs in a continuous loop at the back of the display case, documenting the conditions that

caused her death by typhus and subtly reminding viewers of how difficult it is to locate individuals in the mass murder that was the holocaust (Plan, zolder voorhuis/sjoa, P. 12).

As this suggests, museum efforts to engage visitor imagination, such that they contribute to the storytelling process themselves, are not just apparent in objects; they are also evident in three other intersecting elements of storytelling practices. As with the stories of onderduiker demise - and, in Otto's case, survival - text, photographs and video all work together with objects to prepare visitors to *imagine*, as they once were, the spaces that they are in or about to enter. Students consistently agreed that these media also help visitors to place display objects in context and to thereby inspire behaviour that simulated onderduiker experiences. In all these ways, the visitor is skilfully encouraged to experience deep personal identification, sometimes including close embodied connections, with the people and stories being told. This process is difficult to explain but it seems to involve proprioceptive responses that can lead to emotional and cognitive engagement with the museum space, the objects within it, and the experience of being there.<sup>5</sup> This occurs in ways that stimulate imagination, internalise personal experience, and create meaning. These processes are nonlinear but involve continuous mediation between museum staging, communication devices, personal identification and hot authentication. In combination, they permit a sense of 'experiential authenticity', something which intensifies engagement and deepens the significance of meanings produced. As this suggests, storytelling practices are deployed in remarkable harmony with one another, and quite seamlessly, throughout AFH.

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<sup>5</sup> I am grateful to Andrea Witcomb for her work on this subject and for detailed written exchanges about the complexities of these process and the difficulties of understanding, let alone explicating, them.

Nevertheless, it is worth disentangling them temporarily in order to expose and analyse what each of them brings to representation and the storytelling whole.

### *Text and Authenticity*

Key among these other elements of museum narrations is Anne's voice, which is given expression via the medium of her writings. Text, in the form of short but judiciously selected quotations, provides most of the explanation required to make sense of the spaces and objects that visitors encounter. These quotations appear in every room and they either relate wartime experiences of the onderduikers and helpers that are relevant to the room in question, or to objects displayed there. This technique makes Anne's words – easily, if unconsciously, conflated with Anne herself – into a personal museum guide. This sense of individual connection, alongside the possession of seemingly first-hand knowledge of any given room, can inspire behaviours that replicate the stories being told (Chronis, 2006). For example, the following quotation from Anne's Storybook (August 6, 1943), has been inscribed on the mirror in the small Annex bathroom:

Margot and Mother are nervous. 'Shh ... Father, be quiet Otto, shh ... Come here, you can't run the water anymore. Walk softly!' A sample of what's said to Father in the bathroom. At the stroke of half past eight, he has to be in the living room. No running water, no flushing toilet, no walking around, no noise whatsoever.

In post-visit de-briefs, students consistently reported shifting from whispers to silence when they read this, and some also recalled becoming suddenly and acutely aware of creaking floorboards beneath their feet. This experiential authenticity – borne of place, object and text authenticity, alongside inadvertent embodied responses – often

stimulates deep personal identification and connection with Anne, as well as museum narratives more broadly.

At the same time, the use of diary quotations introduces two complications that are also related to representation and authenticity. First, the selection of text may have been driven by the images or objects that the museum actually has, and can display, rather than their capacity to best relate a coherent story. For example, the Annex display of Edith's German prayer book is accompanied by the following quotation from Anne's diary: "Mother pressed her prayer book into my hands. I read a few prayers in German, just to be polite" (29 October, 1942). Anne's words validate the authenticity of the book on display, and her description of it as part of life in hiding – including her relationship with her mother – gives visitors a sense of honest insight into what it might have been like to be there.

The combination of genuine object and genuine text commonly inspires empathy and vicarious experience (Escalas & Stern, 2003). It is so effective that, as indicated earlier, most visitors pour over this object despite their inability to read it. It is its particular history, rather than its physical characteristics, that inspires experiential authenticity (Witcomb, 2010, p. 50). Indeed, student evidence suggests that this happens because they respect its genuineness and can associate with it through the larger experiences (sensory *and* cognitive) of being in the Frank's wartime hiding place. One cannot help but wonder though, how much more powerful (or different) the museum would be if more personal and meaningful objects could have been woven into its storytelling. Equally, it is possible that the paucity of authentic objects, from eight people's lives, underscores the scale of loss that holocaust stories tell.

The second issue of authenticity raised by the use of Anne's writings is one of accuracy. Aside from Anne's original diary (diary A), there is a version that she began re-writing with an eye to post-war publication (diary B), and the first published version that her father compiled by drawing on, and editing, Anne's writings as a whole (diary C). Each document is authentic in its own right and all of them work together to enhance understanding of Anne, as well as her wartime experiences. The authenticity issue in the museum is that some quotations used do not conform precisely to any of these three versions of Anne's work. For example, as visitors move into the original building they encounter the following quote: "The hiding place was in Father's office building. That's a little hard for outsiders to understand so I'll explain (09.07.1942)." This text is closest to diaries B and C, which read: "The hiding place itself would be in the building where Daddy has his office. It will be hard for outsiders to understand, but I shall explain that later on." This small discrepancy helps to illustrate the importance of intention (and sometimes translation) in the telling of stories (DeLyser, 1999; Rickly-Boyd, 2015). The changes made by museum staff improve the ease and clarity with which Anne's meaning is conveyed - in the *museum* context. They improve the extract's capacity to guide visitors and, arguably, experiential authenticity as a whole, but this comes at the expense of object authenticity (DeLyser, 1999). Determining whether or not this matters depends on intention and potential impact on trust.

### ***Photographs and Authenticity***

Photographs are the third mechanism used to tell stories in AFH. The sheer number of photographs that the Franks possessed is testament to their relative wealth but also to Otto's interest in photography (Huitema-de Waal, 2015). This rich body of material makes

it possible to document their lives up to the point of going into hiding.<sup>6</sup> These images allow the museum to explain their migration from Germany to Amsterdam and to establish the relative normalcy of their lives there before Nazi restrictions on Jews cost them their freedom, and ultimately, for all but Otto, their lives. These photographs are supplemented (and complemented) by snapshots belonging to other *onderduikers* and helpers, in ways that convey life in the company offices and its intersections with life in hiding. Although these stories are all focused on the experiences of one small group of people, they are told so skilfully that they resonate millions of times over in others' experiences of Nazi persecution.

A second source of photographs that are used to great effect in museum storytelling are black and white images of the building, taken by Maria Austria in 1954 (to inform a stage adaptation of Anne's diary)(Westra, 2004, p. 4). These images are haunting: they document the deterioration of the building during, and immediately after, the war and convey its abject emptiness and stories of loss. They are placed near the parts of the building that they depict and this allows people to compare the past with the present and to imagine what the building looked like when it served as business premises and a hiding place. Working in conjunction with guiding texts from Anne's writings (as well as other objects and media), these images help visitors imagine the kinds of activities that filled these spaces and connect with them personally in meaningful ways.

In a similar vein, the museum also uses colour photographs of the Secret Annex, which show the rooms furnished, in order to help visitors imagine the rooms as they were when

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<sup>6</sup> There are no known photographs taken during the hiding period (Dammer, 2018 (personal communication, June 06, 2018); Stier, 2015, p. 125).

the onderduikers lived there (Figure 2)(Hirsch, 2001). Again, these images are placed in the rooms they depict or just before visitors enter these spaces. In some cases, refurbishment was done for the express purpose of taking these illustrative images and in others the photos were taken when the rooms were furnished to film Jon Blair's 1995 documentary, "Anne Frank Remembered" (Broek, 2015; Mass, 2015). In both cases, and in the Austria photos as well, subtle text indicates their origins. Astute and attentive students noticed that these are not genuine images from the period of hiding but the vast majority did not. By creating credible facsimiles, and acknowledging this, the museum balances its commitment to honesty with that of providing an authentic visitor experience capable of conveying AFH stories (DeLyser, 1999). In Dieuwke Mass' (2015) words:

"These pictures are only an image from what we think it was like. It's not original but it gives people an idea what the rooms used to be like. They have to try to imagine what it was like to live in this confined space with so many people, that's the idea."

Strangely, this is an example of how the use of 'inauthentic' images can give rise to 'authentic imagining' – if such a thing is possible. This paradox highlights the complexity of experiential authenticity and the often unlikely ways in which it can be stimulated and realized.

Figure 2 about here

### ***Film and Authenticity***

The final form of media that is layered into AFH storytelling is video clips. In total, six short films – none of them more than about three minutes long – complete the curators' narrative palette. The first of these was created to introduce the museum, the Frank

family, and the context which compelled them to go into hiding. The second film that visitors encounter features Miep Gies: faithful employee, helper and protector of the diary. In this short clip she explains these three key elements of museum storylines: she outlines what the companies at 263 Prinsengracht did; relates the circumstances of agreeing to help the *onderduikers*; and recounts her discovery of Anne's diary and its safekeeping. The third film is a museum creation designed to prepare visitors for entry into the Secret Annex, through the famous bookcase entrance to this hidden space. This film is narrated by a young girl reading from Anne's diary and it is noteworthy that her voice shifts to a whisper when she begins to speak about experiences of being in hiding. When someone whispers people generally respond in kind; the sense of danger becomes palpable on an individual level and experiential authenticity is common. The images that accompany this narration blend still photographs with short moving images of the rooms – both furnished (including Figure 2 above) and unfurnished. This combination works, perhaps largely subconsciously, to reinforce the sense that Anne herself is providing a personal tour of the hiding place. It was only when we deconstructed this narrative process as a group that some students realised it could not have been Anne reading from her diary.

When visitors exit the Secret Annex, the recounting of events after the *onderduiker* discovery and arrest is complemented by an original piece of footage taken at Westerbork Camp. Here, Jews (including the *onderduikers*) were detained until their transport to Nazi concentration camps in the east. This section of the museum also includes a fifth film in which Hanneli Goslar, Anne's childhood friend and co-detainee at Bergen-Belsen, describes her interactions with Anne in these two contexts. The former revolves around the kind of insignificant events that take on meaning with the passage of time: in this case some small bells that Anne liked to play with, which are pictured in the film as Hanna



relates this. Her stories about trying to help Anne in the camp and then, subsequent to this encounter, learning of Anne's death (which occurred one month before liberation), bring home to visitors the finality of Anne's fate and the enormity of the loss of which she was part. This message is reinforced by post-war filming of Hanneli in Bergen-Belsen as she bares witness to Anne's life and its points of intersection with her own. Hanna's first-hand account establishes a connection between life in Amsterdam and death in a Nazi camp.

The final film features a black and white archive interview with Otto Frank in which he discusses his experiences of acquiring and reading Anne's diary. His tone is gentle and subdued and his revelations - that he was "surprised by her seriousness" and that the diary revealed "quite a different Anna than I had known as my daughter" - underscore the subjectivity of all knowing, especially of other human beings. Remarkably, this realization also produces a commonality of experience and, for many, a profound connection with Otto and his unbearable loss. The universality of love and loss, alongside deep personal identification with these human realities, subtly works to validate, through hot authentication, all other narratives that AFH has offered.

Individually, each of these films illuminates different parts of the stories told by the museum. They all lend provenance to these stories – they are validatory - and the use of moving images and personal accounts of eye witnesses is very powerful. Miep and Hanna's testimonial videos also serve to authenticate other aspects of the museum's storytelling by featuring objects and photographs that appear elsewhere in AFH and by being set in refurbished rooms. In combination, the films present six demonstrably authentic voices, all speaking their truths about historical events. This lends authentic reproductions and credible facsimiles a patina of realness that grants visitors a profound

sense of having a *bone fide* encounter with the past (DeLyser, 1999). Here again, there is evidence of how authenticity - and claims to authenticity - come in multiple forms and degrees of veracity, yet work together to produce experiential authenticity.

Perhaps the best demonstration of the efficacy of techniques deployed in AFH is the fact that many visitors (including a number of our students), refer to having been in furnished rooms of the Secret Annex, and speak in detail about what they saw there (Huitema-de Waal, 2015). Mass (2015) confirms this experience as follows:

... you don't know how many people I get that have been here say ten, fifteen years ago ... and they come to me and say, 'what happened to the furniture?' Uhh that was taken a long time ago by the Germans. 'No, but I've been here and I've seen the rooms and they were decorated, I'm sure!!' Then I have to tell them, it's your memory that's playing tricks with you, because they were *never* decorated, the public has *never* seen it. You have seen the models and you have seen the photos. And you have been in the rooms, but you have never been in the decorated rooms.

Through the skilful combination of place, objects, text, images and video the museum draws on multiple voices to tell its stories but also, crucially, to feed the imaginations of visitors such that they become active participants in this storytelling. This powerful combination is pivotal to the authentication of both the museum and people's experiences there.

## **Conclusions**

This paper was borne of the observation that students who visited Anne Frank House were profoundly affected by their experiences, especially those arising from encounters with authenticity. Efforts to articulate this, and why it mattered, consistently revolved around the fact that events described in Anne's diary had occurred in AFH, and that being there brought her story to life. The diary and the building were both 'real' and students experienced these authenticities first-hand. By the time they left the museum, most students had developed some degree of personal identification with Anne and, through her and her story, with the ancillary stories of other *onderduikers*, helpers and Jews, as well as contemporary victims of persecution and discrimination. Their experiences highlight the importance of relationships between authenticity, personal identification and effective storytelling. They also affirm the idea that *principles* of authenticity matter, as do those of its counterparts 'truth', 'fact' and 'integrity'. While the meaning of these and other similar words will never be uncontested, the conviction that they have value is worth upholding.

Whilst firmly grounded in these aspirational goals, the actual outcomes of my work are much more modest. Explorations of the concepts of authenticity and authentication support the argument that these things take multiple forms, each of which – singularly and, more commonly, together – has the potential to inspire personal connections and identifications. These personal affinities promote “experiential authenticity”: namely, the belief and sensations of experiencing something genuine or real. Importantly, this phenomenon can pertain even when the authenticities that inspire it are of uneven quality or provenance, and may not be easily verified. Experiential authenticity encompasses the totality, and the infinite variability, of encounters with “the authentic” in human experience.

These arguments were developed by examining story-telling in Anne Frank House. This began by identifying the stories being told and highlighting their emanation from one single authentic object: Anne's diary. The personal nature of this object predisposes people to relate to it but its authenticity, as a thing, is tempered by subjectivities of both author and 'reader/visitor'. Thus, even though *object* authenticity is constant, and the *claim* to authenticity is overwhelmingly accepted, individual perceptions, meanings and experiences may vary. Still, the parameters of individual agency are influenced by the power of museum designers to determine how the diary and its stories are represented. This makes it important to understand these practices.

Accordingly, the remainder of the paper analysed the multiple forms of authenticity deployed in the telling of stories in AFH. Examining the use of objects, text, images and videos, as key elements of representation and storytelling, revealed how each medium navigates different forms and degrees of authenticity and authentication. It also demonstrated how their mutually referential qualities validated the authenticity of the experience as a whole. Ultimately, their efficacy in story-telling is bound up with stimulating visitor imaginations such that they become active partners in narrative processes. Using a strong, in-situ museum space, a very few authentic objects bearing closeness to the bodies and experiences of historical persons who once occupied this space and, perhaps most remarkably of all, 'emptiness', the imaginations of museum visitors are set in motion. Hot and cold authentication constantly mediate this process. Here, the importance of museum intentions, particularly their honesty and integrity, alongside the accuracy (if not completeness) of the stories themselves, is crucial to allowing experiential authenticity to materialize. Equally important in this regard is the

trust with which visitors approach the museum - it is incumbent upon them to ‘consider the source’ before surrendering their trust to storytellers. Understanding how these processes work together to cultivate experiential authenticity is important because they influence visitors’ receptivity to the stories being told, and this makes storytelling a source of power.

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Figure 1. AFH room documenting the arrest, deportation and fate of onderduikers  
(Plan).



Figure 2. Anne's desk in her Secret Annex room. Photographs of furnished rooms were taken in 1999, when they were temporarily recreated to produce educational material about their use in wartime ([annefrank.org](http://annefrank.org): what is the secret annex? Online) (*accessed 2017.03.06*).

