MUSEUM MAKING

NARRATIVES, ARCHITECTURES, EXHIBITIONS

EDITED BY
SUZANNE MACLEOD,
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ROUTLEDGE

MUSEUM MAKING

Over recent decades, many museums, galleries and historic sites around the world have enjoyed an unprecedented level of large-scale investment in their capital infrastructure; in building refurbishments and new gallery displays. This period has also seen the creation of countless new purpose-built museums and galleries, suggesting a fundamental re-evaluation of the processes of designing and shaping museums.

Museum Making: narratives, architectures, exhibitions examines this re-making by exploring the inherently spatial character of narrative in the museum and its potential to connect on the deepest levels with human perception and imagination. Through this uniting theme, the chapters explore the power of narratives as structured experiences unfolding in space and time, as well as the use of theatre, film and other technologies of storytelling by contemporary museum makers to generate meaningful and, it is argued here, highly effective and affective museum spaces. Contributions by an internationally diverse group of museum and heritage professionals, exhibition designers, architects and artists, with academics from a range of disciplines including museum studies, theatre studies, architecture, design and history, cut across traditional boundaries including the historical and the contemporary and together explore the various roles and functions of narrative as a mechanism for the creation of engaging and meaningful interpretive environments.

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Museum Meanings

Museums have undergone enormous changes in recent decades; an ongoing process of renewal and transformation bringing with it changes in priority, practice and role as well as new expectations, philosophies, imperatives and tensions that continue to attract attention from those working in, and drawing upon, wide ranging disciplines.

Museum Meanings presents new research that explores diverse aspects of the shifting social, cultural and political significance of museums and their agency beyond, as well as within, the cultural sphere. Interdisciplinary, cross-cultural and international perspectives and empirical investigation are brought to bear on the exploration of museums' relationships with their various publics (and analysis of the ways in which museums shape – and are shaped by – such interactions).

Theoretical perspectives might be drawn from anthropology, cultural studies, art and art history, learning and communication, media studies, architecture and design and material culture studies amongst others. Museums are understood very broadly – to include art galleries, historic sites and other cultural heritage institutions – as are their relationships with diverse constituencies.

The focus on the relationship of the museum to its publics shifts the emphasis from objects and collections and the study of museums as text, to studies grounded in the analysis of bodies and sites; identities and communities; ethics, moralities and politics.

MUSEUM MAKING

Narratives, architectures, exhibitions

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INTRODUCTION: MUSEUM MAKING

The place of narrative

Laura Hourston Hanks, Jonathan Hale and
Suzanne MacLeod

Scene

Museum making in the twenty-first century is challenging, creative, complex and, ultimately, collaborative. Operating across different scales of activity from the level of the object to the level of the building, city or landscape, museum making also cuts across a range of professional practices from curation to design and from architecture to theatre and film. In the twenty-first century, the reality of museum design is multidisciplinary, multifaceted and as complex as the variety of exhibitions and interpretive approaches we see across the contemporary museum landscape.

The context for the recent reformulation of museum design is of course partly economic. Recent decades have seen many museums, galleries and historic sites around the world enjoy large-scale investment in their capital infrastructure; in building refurbishments and new gallery displays. The period has also witnessed the creation of a series of new purpose-built museums and galleries. This massive investment has received significant media coverage, including the often sensational reporting of occasional high-profile failures. It has, however, overwhelmingly been a period of much-needed and often very successfully utilized investment which has changed the face of culture, drastically improving the standards of museum and gallery facilities, the quality and variety of displays and media employed in museums and, in very successful cases, driving positive organizational change.

It has also, then, been a period of fundamental reinvention in the design and shaping of museums. Fascinating examples of 'the new museum making' include high-profile and highly communicative buildings, evocative landscapes, sophisticated and emotive exhibitions and, sometimes, small and quirkily interpretive interventions within existing museum and gallery spaces. What unites many of these approaches is the attempt to create what might be called 'narrative environments'; experiences which integrate objects and spaces – and stories of people and places – as part of a process of storytelling that speaks of the experience of the everyday and our sense of self, as well as the special and the unique. Driven by the availability of significant funding, but also by advances in digital technologies and a shared awareness of the role of museum maker as storyteller, the field of museum design has become a varied, media-rich

and highly interpretive landscape. Most would agree that above all, this period of investment and expansion has had a significant impact on the ability of many museums and galleries to offer up consistently engaging, meaningful and memorable experiences to a broader range of visitors. In the current economic climate, cultural institutions are thinking more cautiously about smaller-scale, less capital-intensive and increasingly sustainable solutions to the maintenance, production and regeneration of museum space. Similarly, as many museums anticipate cuts in their provision of learning and education services, the interpretive effectiveness of their displays take on added significance. It therefore seems especially relevant to ask what we have learned from this recent process of re-making and re-telling.

Dialogue

This volume has emerged from a vital conversation over a number of years between museum and heritage professionals, exhibition designers, architects and artists, with academics from a range of disciplines, including museum studies, film studies, theatre studies, architecture, design, animation and history. Initially sparked by the international conference *Creative Space* held at the University of Leicester's School of Museum Studies in 2004 and the book that followed,[1] the shared exploration of theories and practices of exhibition and experience making continued with, *The Museum: Meanings + Mediation*; a professional network and seminar series hosted by the University of Nottingham's School of the Built Environment between 2007 and 2008. The culmination of the network's activity came in 2010 with *Narrative Space*; an international interdisciplinary conference jointly hosted by the Universities of Leicester and Nottingham and from which the chapters in *Museum Making* are distilled. Through this extended dialogue the theme of *narrative* emerged as the strongest of a number of shared preoccupations – a potential 'common language' linking the interests of researchers and practitioners in both architecture and museum studies with the realities of museum experience. Evident within the chapters that follow, then, is a collective ethos, the result of a larger organic but framed discourse. This said, as with all edited collections, the presence of multiple voices provides animation and even divergent viewpoints.

Nowadays the term 'narrative' appears ubiquitous, having been appropriated into diverse spheres from politics to the media, and often tarnished by its associations with the 'spin' of grandiose conceptions and post-rationalized excuses; tall stories and cover stories. In museums, narrative has come to be associated, negatively, with 'top-down', macro histories; linear interpretive frameworks which present a dominant version of history, silencing the experiences and values of others in the process. However, in the context of contemporary museum making, we propose to reclaim the term narrative as it appears to offer a way forward. Museum space and its production are traditionally compartmentalized: disciplinary boundaries between curators, graphic designers, script writers, architects and developers, for example, are entrenched, and perpetuated by professional and institutional amnesia. These discrete professions of course derive from the inherently different 'stuff' of which the museum is composed: artefacts; textual, visual and audio interpretation; digital media; and architecture. Within this spectrum of material and activity, the largest disconnect – between the worlds of museums and architecture – requires a strong linking dialogue, and narrative may enable this. As a broad currency, narrative can facilitate the collaboration of professionals and the integration of media, and could therefore play an important part in the creation of powerful and embodied museum experiences.

The narrative vehicle of the museum is particularly powerful because of its multi-dimensionality. Whereas storytelling in literature is determined and confined by the linear arrangement of text on a page; in cinema to visual images on a screen; and in traditional theatre to the static audience with its singular perspective, the museum represents a fully embodied experience of objects and media in three-dimensional space, unfolding in a potentially free-flowing temporal sequence. This inherent richness and potential of the museum was acknowledged by internationally acclaimed film director Peter Greenaway, in a one-off 'performance' for *Narrative Space* when he stated, 'cinemas aren't good enough for cinema anymore, but museums are'.[2]

With all this in mind, *Museum Making* takes an approach to the experience and interpretation of sites, buildings, places, objects and people, which recognizes the inherently spatial character of narrative and storytelling and their potential to connect with human perception and imagination. Through this uniting theme, the following chapters explore the power of stories as structured experiences unfolding in space and time, and critically assess the potential of museums, galleries and exhibition spaces to act as integrated narrative environments. The book also encourages a critical engagement with the potential limitations or multiple manifestations of narrative. It charts the emergence of a new range of interpretive approaches to experience making which cut across architecture, film, theatre, design, digital media, interior and graphic design, literature and art, and addresses notions of visitor experience, questions of authorship and the role of theatre and performance in the making and experiencing of museum space. At its heart is a vision of the museum as theatre, as dramatic ritual, as a telling of the world in miniature, and as a site where space and place making connect with human perception, imagination and memory.

Narrative

One reason why notions of narrative and storytelling have been so persistent is the fact that these ideas seem to capture something quite fundamental about what it is to be human. The philosopher Daniel Dennett in *Consciousness Explained* famously put forward one definition of the human self as a 'centre of narrative gravity', while questioning the common assumption that the human subject is a single stable and unified entity.[3] Dennett proposed instead that the sense of a self-conscious thinking and feeling 'I' with a history of past events and a 'project' for the future is, in fact, an abstraction, an effect of the 'web of discourses' we are constantly spinning around ourselves. This idea contains an echo of an eighteenth-century Empiricist notion, that – in the words of the philosopher David Hume – the self is nothing more than a 'bundle' of properties and perceptions.[4] In Dennett's version, the centre of narrative gravity becomes, like the physical force of gravity itself, a 'remarkably robust and almost tangible attractor of properties', and its effect is to create a subjective centre from which 'strings or streams of narrative issue forth'.[5]

Consciousness and cognition are narrative 'all the way down' in Dennett's account and this idea has proved highly influential across a number of fields. An important recent collection of writings on the nature of the self contains a useful survey of recent thinking written by the philosopher Marya Schechtman. She distinguishes between two ways of understanding *The Narrative Self*, one in which the self is inherently narrative in structure, and another in which narratives are what selves appear naturally programmed to produce, i.e. to both create and pick out from within the ongoing flow of perceptual experience. The

latter version implies that we have a natural narrative capacity that helps us make sense of the actions and events happening in the world around us. While citing recent proponents of what might also be called the 'hermeneutic self' – such as the philosophers Charles Taylor and Paul Ricœur – Schechtman also refers to the work of the psychologist Jerome Bruner, who, in his book *Acts of Meaning* from 1990, could be said to have produced the classic description of a self that is instinctively predisposed to perceive, create and communicate narrative.[6]

Conflict

Our perception of ourselves and the world around us is structured around stories, then, and this influence of narrative extends into the museum: as a common language for diverse professionals involved in exhibition making; as a means of creating empathetic links between the subjects and audiences of museum displays; and as a glue which plugs temporal, geographical and cultural gaps within the museum. However, narrative is also – as implied above – fundamentally a human construct, necessitating a process of exclusion and editing, with all the accompanying risks of bias and distortion. Any pretence of completion and resolution is therefore intrinsically open to question: 'Life does not tell stories. Life is chaotic, fluid, random; it leaves myriads of ends untidied, untidily. Writers can extract a story from life only by strict, close selection, and this must mean falsification. Telling stories is really telling lies.'[7]

Historically, this 'telling lies' – or, more kindly, *editing* or *packaging* of infinitely complex issues – has often resulted in the dominance of an overarching meta-narrative, which in its certainty, linearity and singular perspective, provides an at times dangerously simplistic lens on the world. In so many cases the inherently fragmentary, complex and ambiguous nature of life and its incomplete and sometimes inconvenient stories is suppressed in the name of, at best, clarity, and at worst, control. In creating a coherent story to tell, contested narratives and dissonant voices are quieted, and the heterogeneous and ultimately unknowable truth is left behind. The 'objective facts' – traditionally so important within the realm of the museum – are only partially revealed through a series of explanatory fictions.

In reaction to this, in recent decades the museum has frequently embraced the micro-narratives of multiple personal stories, engaging in a 'bottom-up' telling of tales, rather than a 'top-down' imposition of curatorial voice and institutional ethos. As a result of this general shift in approach, plurality and democracy within the space of the museum has sometimes gained at the expense of clarity and focus. In line with concurrent developments in media technologies such as social networking and 24-hour rolling news, the personal perspective or 'eye-witness' story has been accorded new status, whilst the traditionally anonymous and respected author – the curator – has been increasingly challenged. Paradoxically, perhaps, the curator has never had more freedom or better methods and resources to mediate the authentic artefact, which in itself is arguably less prized than in previous eras. Mediation may not have quite become the message – as Marshall McLuhan suggested[8] – but the balance of power has undoubtedly shifted, with curatorial decisions operating on a sliding scale between liberation and misrepresentation. Above all, though, it is apparent that the use of narrative in contemporary museum making is manifestly multi-layered and always open to challenge – and therefore it cannot be regarded as an easy panacea.

Resolution

The museum as a space with so much narrative potential is, so to speak, inherently full of voids: temporal gaps between some other past and our own present; geographical gaps between remote locations; cultural gaps between opposing world-views; societal gaps between different groups of visitors; professional gaps between the various occupations involved in museum fabrication; and physical gaps, between the diverse media employed in the museum. Narrative is so pervasive and promising as a mediating strategy precisely because it allows us to bridge these gaps – persuasively and with immediacy in the embodied medium of museum space. Narrative has real value.

However, we must not forget that all narrative is constructed, and therefore contested. It is useful yet problematic, universal yet divisive, and fashionable yet timeless. It means different things to different people, and it is in these very contradictions that its significance lies. If narrative is a construct, it is open to creativity. It is almost deliberately provocative and engaging, and therefore rich with creative potential. Just as we can denigrate the term 'narrative', so we can denigrate narrative itself, for imposing an artifical layer of order on the chaos of random reality. But this very artificiality is part of what makes it valuable. The 'lie' of the story produces a creative spark – narrative is provocative and antagonistic, engaging the 'reader' in a creative dialogue both inspiring and revealing. Narrative within the museum can often be taken issue with, but that capacity for provocation is precisely where its creative potential lies.

Notes

1   S. MacLeod (ed.) *Reshaping Museum Space: Architecture, Design, Exhibitions*, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2005.
2   P. Greenaway, *The Language of Display*, Keynote Lecture for Narrative Space, V&A, 1 April 2011.
3   D. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, London: Penguin Books, 1993, p. 418.
4   D. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Vol. 1, London: J. M. Dent, 1911, p. 239.
5   Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, p. 418.
6   J. Bruner, *Acts of Meaning*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990, p. 71.
7   B.S. Johnson, *Aren't You Rather Young to be Writing Your Memoirs?*, London: Hutchison & Co., 1973, p. 14.
8   M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964.

PART I

Narrative, space, identity

Introduction

The chapters in Part I explore the complex relations between narrative, space and identity. Through varied case studies and detailed historical accounts, all are concerned with the ways in which the physical material of museums and galleries can be manipulated to generate narratives – to tell stories in space. A number of themes recur throughout the chapters but most particularly there emerges a sense of the tension between political and institutional narratives and the messy realities of life; between sometimes oppressive, totalizing narratives and the multiplicity of identities which make up societies; between disciplinary narratives and the need for atmospheres of imagination as a route to an emotional experience; and, linked to this, between a reading of experience as intellectual and conceptual as opposed to sensory and embodied; factual as opposed to fictive; linear as opposed to labyrinthine. Rather than arguing for one or the other, the chapters chart a gentler line, calling for an embracing of the imaginary, theatrical, fictional and autobiographical characteristics and capacities of the physical stuff of museums and galleries, and the generation of an interpretive approach to processes of museum design. If an understanding of the very direct relationship between memory and physical journeys through layers of history informs many of the chapters, there is also an awareness of the need for gaps, inconsistencies and, most importantly, for use. It is through bodies in space and through use that narrative, space and identity are activated. Across the chapters can be read off a sense of the politics of this making and the need for cultural spaces which enable memory, imagination and anticipation as routes to identity formation.

In Chapter 1 Rachel Morris makes a compelling argument for acknowledging the defining characteristic of museums as places of imagination. Drawing attention to multiple examples of imaginary museums created by artists and writers, Morris explores the magical and fantastical qualities of museums that writers and makers of fiction are attracted to. Morris questions whether all museums have a thread of fiction and imagination running through them and asks, what happens when imaginary museums overturn the basic assumption that museums tell historical truths?

The imaginary and the fictional are taken up in Chapters 2 and 3. In Chapter 2 Greer Crawley explores a series of explicitly theatrical museum presentations which utilize the scenographic as a route to challenging visitors' perceptions and generating 'atmospheres of imagination'. In an approach which consciously harnesses the physicality of the museum to heighten experience, Crawley argues that theatricality is opening up opportunities 'to experiment with forms of performativity, narrative and visual imagery that create new possibilities for interpretation and presentation'.

In Chapter 3 Laura Hourston Hanks turns the focus to that most well-used of museum media, the written text. Picking up Morris' discussion of literature from Chapter 1 and drawing across a range of examples, Hanks explores the 'manifold relationships' between written text and museum space. Using a range of literary devices from meta-narrative and metaphor to plot and characterization, Hanks reveals both the sophisticated spatial stories embedded in her case study exhibitions, and the enormous value of literary or writerly approaches to museum design.

If Morris, Crawley and Hanks focus our attention on the imaginary, theatrical and writerly as approaches to museum making and routes in to our inner selves, Chapters 4, 5 and 6 focus on the historical and the political. In Chapter 4, Christopher R. Marshall discusses the making of the Parthenon Galleries at the British Museum in the 1920s and 30s. Exploring the debates surrounding the various designs and its patron, Joseph Duveen's, desire for an epic presentation which spoke of the importance and worth of the Parthenon Sculptures, Marshall unearths the complex narratives that drove the design project and were embedded in the final built form. Marshall pulls this debate up to the present day through an analysis of Tschumi's Acropolis Museum in Athens, its counter-narratives and the politics at stake in these two archetypal museum displays.

In Chapter 5 Suzanne MacLeod takes Yorkshire Sculpture Park as the focus of her analysis. Exploring its socialist origins, the chapter attempts to get behind descriptions of the Park as 'magical' and 'other worldly' to reveal a history of making based on a delicate negotiation of both a politics of landscape and the politics of sculpture's display. Museum making here is an ongoing process and the chapter raises our awareness of the delicate balancing act involved in physically manifesting mission in a space that navigates the open, the emotional and the imaginary as well as the closed and focused world of the expert.

In Chapter 6 Nic Coetzer analyses three museums in post-apartheid South Africa, exploring the ways in which their physical forms embody the political stance of each institution and reminding us of the oppressive potentialities of museum design. Like MacLeod, Coetzer places a particular emphasis on process, critiquing the demands and outcomes of the contemporary focus on design competitions and a 'design idea' and arguing instead for a process and product that celebrates the mess and chaos of the everyday. These generous museum spaces chart a path between grand narratives and ordinary life, prioritize access and equality and open out space for dialogue, emotion and visitor-driven experience. It is then through myriad uses and myriad narratives that a route towards a democratic museum space might seem possible.

Visitor-driven experience is taken up as the main focus of Chapter 7 where Jenny Kidd concentrates her attention on visitors as the co-producers of museum narratives. In her review of a participatory performance at Manchester Museum, Kidd illustrates the complexity of individual narrative construction and the need for acceptance of a sometimes wide discrepancy between the narratives projected by the museum and those constructed by the visitor. In

the example discussed here the physical museum becomes a witness to the heritage as understood by the participant and also a concrete legitimizer of that narrative.

Part I ends with two very different chapters, both of which are concerned with the creative potential of narrative for museum making. In Chapter 8 Lee H. Skolnick introduces the concept of 'epiphany' as the goal of the museum architect. Drawing our attention to the revelatory qualities of a range of building types beyond the museum, Skolnick asks how museum architects can reach beyond narrative through the choreographing of spatial elements, in order to make meaning manifest. Finally, in Chapter 9 Stephen Greenberg explores the relationships between time, space and memory. Rejecting formed spaces for found spaces, Greenberg considers how the theatrical, atmospheric, multimedia and most of all narrative, can be utilized at the level of the city as a route to built environments that encourage memory and imagination. What emerges in Greenberg's analysis and across all the chapters in Part I is a shared ambition for museums to somehow touch the spiritual and emotional side of audiences and a recognition of the complex relations between narratives, built forms and identity, as central to this endeavour.

1

IMAGINARY MUSEUMS

What mainstream museums can learn from them

Rachel Morris

The history of imaginary museums is a long and curious one. It also has more relevance for real-world museums than might at first sight be apparent. The world, when one stops to think about it, abounds in imaginary museums. There are museums on paper, created by writers and artists; there are virtual museums on the web; there are museum catalogues that amount to museums in themselves; there are conceptual museums, conceived of and designed in every detail before they are built; and there is even the version of a museum that we all carry in our heads when we step into a real one – because just as no two readers ever read the same book so no two visitors ever go into the same museum.

More subtly, there are museums that are real enough – and yet have a distinct thread of imagination running through them. Not surprisingly these are usually the creation of one inspired individual. Take Sir John Soane's Museum in Lincoln's Inn Fields where downstairs in the Monks Yard Soane created the sham ruins of a monastery, with broken arches, pediments and other architectural fragments. It seems clear that Soane was storytelling, using things in three dimensions, and what's more, telling a very particular story, a story about himself. The Soane Museum is a form of autobiography – for ruins, it seems, expressed Soane's feelings of unhappy persecution.[1] Confirmation of his taste for storytelling comes from a short story that he wrote called *Crude Hints towards a History of my House*, in which he imagined visitors coming to his house at some future time when Lincoln's Inn Fields lie in ruins and visitors are trying to make sense of them. Soane, it seems, was a storyteller by instinct – and was creating a museum, as many artists and writers have done since, as a way to tell stories about the world and about himself.

Snowshill Manor in Gloucestershire is another inspired creation by an artist trying to understand himself through things – this time the architect Charles Wade. Wade spent his life collecting and displaying the abandoned mementoes of other ages with such talent that the objects seem to quiver on the verge of life, including, bafflingly, two dozen Samurai Warriors, some of them mysteriously picked up by Wade in a local junk shop in Cheltenham. As at the Soane Museum a thread of gifted imagination and playfulness runs through Snowshill, as well as sadness at the passing of time and, in Wade's case, a yearning for childhood – his favourite room in the house was an attic room called 'Seventh Heaven' which he filled with toys from

his childhood. These threads of feeling – playfulness but also sadness, a yearning for lost times, the sensation of there being a lost paradise at the beginning of our lives – are all themes that occur again and again in imaginary museums.

So there are many kinds of imaginary museums but the two that interest me here are those imaginary museums created by people who would think of themselves as novelists, artists or film makers – and those that have one foot in more conventional museum making, that are often indeed described as museums, but still have a powerful thread of imagination running through them.

Imaginary museums turn up all kinds of interesting questions. They make us wonder why writers and artists use the museum as a metaphor and what it enables them to say. But also, what kinds of imaginary museums do they create? Why do some people storytell with things? Do all museums have a thread of fiction making and imagination running through them? And what happens when these imaginary museums overturn the basic principle of real museums – that they should tell historical truths? And the more I have looked at these questions the more it seems to me that this subject isn't a whimsical divergence from the study of mainstream museums, but that – as the title of this chapter suggests – there is much that real museums can learn from paper ones.

The first thing to be said is that museums and novels share a lot in common. Each affords us the pleasures that come from entering complete and self-contained worlds, and what's more, worlds that have been reduced to a miniature scale, at least in comparison with the universe that they reflect. Even the biggest museum in the world is smaller than the universe it describes – or, to put it another way, all museums are games of boxes inside boxes. Likewise a novel is a world between book covers and small enough to carry in one's hand. Human beings love to enter miniature worlds and the secret pleasure of both novels and museums, is that they allow us to do exactly this.[2]

The second thing to be said is that inventing paper museums is nothing new. The seventeenth-century English philosopher Thomas Browne described in words a museum that he called the Musaeum Clausum, the 'Closed or Secret Museum'. Some of the fantastical, imaginary objects in his museum included 'A large Ostrich's Egg, whereon is neatly and fully wrought that famous battle of Alcazar, in which three Kings lost their lives' and 'A Glass of Spirits made of Ethereal Salt, Hermetically sealed up, kept continually in Quick Silver and so volatile a nature that it will scarcely endure the Light'.[3]

Now it's clear from reading his book that the Musaeum Clausum was a deliberate, knowing invention of Browne's and, what's more, one with a strong thread of playful pleasure running through it. It's the same thread of playful pleasure that one also sees at the Museum of Jurassic Technology in California – which, as everyone knows, is an apparently truthful but actually largely invented Cabinet of Curiosities in Los Angeles, featuring a cast of mostly imaginary characters – although, to the deep and delightful confusion of the visitors, not all of them are invented. Again there is the playfulness of imaginary museums – although the other interesting aspect of the Museum of Jurassic Technology is that it is a deeply old-fashioned display, as well as a deeply beautiful one. David Wilson, the museum's creator, builds all his effects around objects in showcases – which has been the language and grammar of museums for hundreds of years. Showcases, it seems, still have considerable potential for storytelling. But the most curious thing about the Museum of Jurassic Technology is that although its lack of historical truth shifts its appeal into a different area, it does not diminish it at all.

There's another interesting aspect to Browne's paper museum and that is that in the seventeenth century, as Paula Findlen has shown us, books that described museums, whether real or imaginary, were themselves called 'museums' and were thought to be museums just as much as real ones.[4] It is easy to see why. There are obvious parallels between knowledge contained within the straight lines of the page and knowledge contained within the straight lines of the showcase or the room.

But invented museums go back even further than Thomas Browne and the seventeenth century. If you remember Homer's *Iliad* you will remember the long, beautiful but slightly baffling passage in Book 18 in which the god Hephaistos creates a magical shield for the hero Achilles. On this shield the god Hephaistos depicts the earth, the sea and the heavens, and the sun, the moon and all the stars. He also depicts two cities, the one full of dancing, singing and marriage feasts, and the other afflicted by war, battles and the siege of a great city – in other words, a miniature version of the War outside the Walls of Troy. He also depicts fields being ploughed and harvested, vineyards teeming with grapes, a young boy singing, a lion hunt and young men dancing and courting women. In short, he creates an entire miniature universe on Achilles' shield around which he depicts the River of Ocean, to fence it in.

Now what Homer is describing is not a museum – in the sense of a building with objects in it – but it does nonetheless have a distinctly 'museum-y' quality about it, the reason being that the description of the shield shares with museums the feeling of being a miniature world, an entire universe shrunk down and recreated in microcosm. What's more, by putting into a poem that describes the siege of a city, a miniature depiction of a city under siege, he has heightened the 'Russian doll' feeling of miniature worlds within miniature worlds, each getting progressively smaller – a game that seems to have a universal appeal.

If we now look at contemporary novels it seems that there are four qualities of museums and objects that novelists tune into. The first is to do with the power of objects to help us remember the past. The Turkish Nobel Prize-winning novelist Orhan Pamuk published a novel in 2010 called *The Museum of Innocence* about a man called Kemal who loves a woman so obsessively that he creates a museum to this love affair, filling it with the everyday items that chart the mostly tragic course that his love takes. It's a good novel and it has a lot of interesting things to say about museums and the different ways in which human beings use objects, reaching through the form of fiction some of the same conclusions that academics such as Susan Pearce have reached through scholarship.[5] In particular it talks about objects as carriers of memories and mechanisms to take us back to happier days and to release us from the terrible, forward-flow of time, although, as the story goes on, Kemal's feelings for things also become fetishistic – in other words, he uses objects to soothe and comfort himself while also releasing his secret desires. Pamuk, who is apparently a great museum-goer, knows that one of the great strengths of museums is that they can help visitors go back in time. For Pamuk a museum is a metaphor for the mind as a treasure store of memories and as somewhere where 'time becomes a place' not only for individuals but for cities, cultures and peoples.

In the autumn of 2009 Pamuk gave the Norton lectures at Harvard and in the course of these he made it clear that he believes that the history of novels and the history of museums are linked through the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century which flooded the world with things, giving novels, such as Dickens', a new found physicality as well as spurring on the development of Victorian museums. Now, in a nice twist of his imagination, Pamuk is also said at this moment to be creating a real version of his imaginary museum in a house in Istanbul. From interviews that he has given we can see that for Pamuk, making museums is

an exercise in autobiography, like writing or film making. Pamuk says, 'In building my own museum I don't want to exhibit power but to express my interiority, my spirit. A museum should express the spirituality of the collector.'[6] It's an interesting ambition because it says that museums can do what novels do, that both are the means by which we can explore our inner worlds and express their unique flavour and texture, although the one uses words and the other things.

The second quality about museums that writers love is the apparent 'alive-ness' of objects. In the film *Night at the Museum* (released 2006) the plot is built around the idea that the things in the museum – stuffed lions, miniature soldiers, toy cowboys – come alive at night. It's an idea that works for children in particular – it's how they play with dolls and toys – but it relates closely to the willingness of all human beings of any age to invest objects with innate power. In Wilkie Collins' nineteenth-century novel, *The Moonstone*, the Moonstone is a sacred treasure, holy to the Hindu faith and watched and guarded by generations of priests, but also cursed for anyone who steals it – which of course they do. First, the Muslim emperor, Aurungzebe, steals it and then, after many adventures it arrives at last into the possession of Tipu Sultan, and from him – through the sack of his kingdom, Seringapatam – into the hands of British soldiers and from there to a beautiful and innocent heiress from Yorkshire called Rachel Verinder. The story of the Moonstone deliberately stirs up memories of the Koh-i-Noor, another Victorian jewel with a mythical aura but this time entirely real, also with a curse hanging over it and thus with a worrisome power. My point here is not that objects have mythical powers but that novelists and film makers understand the tendency of their audiences to invest objects with mythical powers.

But museums are not only about individual objects; they are also about collections of things. Groups of things are interestingly different from individual objects – they have a different power over us – and the power of strange collections is the third quality about museums that novelists fasten onto. Angela Carter's classic novel from the 1980s, *Nights at the Circus*, begins with her heroine Fevvers incarcerated inside a late Victorian Museum of Monsters before she joins the strange inhabitants of a circus at the beginning of the twentieth century.[7] Fairs and circuses, of course, are historically first cousins to museums (through the evolution of the Cabinets of Curiosities) and share much in common with museums. In particular, what they share in common is the fact that both are collections of strange, valuable or unusual things, animals or people, who are put on show for the entertainment, education or enlightenment of others. For Carter, museums are as much about stories (tall stories, if you like) as they are about things or people. Her novel is a nest of stories inside stories, and the tensions she is exploiting are the same tensions you sometimes feel inside museums, between the power of the strange objects inside the showcases and the straight, confining, formal lines of the showcases themselves.

Angela Carter's novels are in the same tradition as medieval writings on wonders and marvels – for instance, Marco Polo's descriptions of his fantastical journeys. Each of Marco Polo's cities is a wondrous object collected and confined within the pages of his book – so in a way his book, too, is a paper museum.[8] In the twentieth century Italo Calvino rewrote Marco Polo's travels in a book called *Invisible Cities* – and Italo Calvino is strongly connected to Angela Carter through a style of writing called magical realism that both of them shared. It is noticeable how often it is writers with a taste for magical realism that respond to museums or to objects in museums. In other words, novelists respond to some streak of the irrational or the magical that they detect in museums – and which museums themselves mostly do not notice.

There is a fourth quality about museums that writers tune into, which we see in the short stories of the Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges, born in the late nineteenth century, and who – after he went blind – became chief librarian in the national library in Buenos Aires. It is a strange and fantastical life story (although entirely true) and Borges' stories are similarly erudite, surreal and strangely fantastical. In one of his essays he writes that in a certain Chinese encyclopedia entitled *The Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge* it is said that

> animals are divided into (a) those that belong to the Emperor, (b) embalmed ones, (c) those that are trained, (d) suckling pigs, (e) mermaids, (f) fabulous ones, (g) stray dogs, (h) those that are included in this classification, (i) those that tremble as if they were mad, (j) innumerable ones, (k) those drawn with a very fine camel's hair brush, (l) others, (m) those that have just broken a flower vase, (n) those that resemble flies from a distance.[9]

Now it is not at all clear that the *Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge* ever existed. Many people have tried to track it down, but as far as I know no one has ever done so – and it is always the case with Borges that the more he buttresses his prose with footnotes and erudite references the more likely he is to be making the whole lot up. But this quote, whether true or not, has always caught people's imagination, and it has an obvious relevance for museums which are all about ways of categorizing the world. What's interesting is that the ways in which museums choose to shape and categorize the world can have great poetic power and resonance over our imaginations – particularly when the mode of categorizing is as unexpected as in this quote from Borges. Storytelling in museums resides at this level just as much as in the level of words on graphic panels.

In fact Borges' prose has in general a very 'museum-y' feeling – all his writing, both fact and fiction, blends a very precise style (a taste for dates, titles and footnotes) with a pleasure in the fantastical – which, incidentally, is exactly the same quality we find at the Museum of Jurassic Technology. But why should any of this matter to real museums in the real world? The reason, I think, is as follows and relates to the peculiar nature of museums.

Because for all that they are full of solid things museums are also slippery, imaginative, conceptual places with an innate pathos and poignancy that comes from the fact that their subject is time and the different journeys that things and people make through time. They also bear strong similarities to zoos, botanical gardens, treasuries, bestiaries, libraries, collections of poetry and many more. So fluid is the concept of a museum that you would think that it would slip away through one's fingers – and yet it doesn't because it also has a strong and concrete existence. This double existence in both the physical and the imaginative world and their aura of poignancy means that the museums can be powerful and robust metaphors, through which writers can talk about loss, fear, yearnings for the past, and feelings of un-belonging.

So writers and artists know all about the imaginative power of museums and play around accordingly with this power, stirring up all kinds of emotions in us, including playfulness, poignancy, reverence and fear for the power of objects. Interestingly enough, visitors also understand the imaginative powers of museums. Morris Hargreave McIntyre, the research consultancy, has explored the reasons why visitors come to museums – and has shown that their motivation can be broken down into four main reasons – educational, social, spiritual and emotional.[10] Which of the four reasons is uppermost varies from visitor to visitor and museum to museum but all are almost always there, in one proportion or another. What is

interesting though is that whilst most museums are happy to respond to the need to educate their visitors they are in general less comfortable satisfying the other three motivations. The desire for social, spiritual and emotional satisfaction that visitors bring to museums is closely connected to their desire to use their imaginations, but is very often ignored by museums. In other words visitors come to museums with their imaginations ready to be deployed, only to find that their imaginations are not required.

Morris Hargreave McIntyre have also mapped the steps by which visitors move through museums ready to use their empathy, creativity and understanding in order to reach a state of emotional and imaginative openness. It's a journey that requires museums also to play their parts, by offering back to the visitors atmosphere and opportunities to feel.

This brings us to another interesting observation, this time concerning the Dennis Severs' house in Spitalfields in London.[11] It is a dense and poetic reconstruction of an eighteenth-century merchant's house created in the 1980s by a Californian artist called Dennis Severs. The house works in the same way that films and novels also work, by demanding of the visitors that they use their imaginations. Far from discounting the visitor's imagination Dennis Severs knew that he needed to work with it in order to create his effects – and says as much, in his directions to the visitors as they move around the house. The enthusiasm of visitors to use their imaginations is something that we discovered when Metaphor, our museum design company, created the exhibition of *The First Emperor: China's Terracotta Warriors* at the British Museum in 2008, a show that we wanted to be both rigorously scholarly and deeply imaginative (see also Chapter 9 and Plate 9.1). We aimed to meet the visitors' imaginations half way, and did so by using the layout of the exhibition to turn the content into a story – and then by heightening the atmosphere of the story through lighting that responded to the tomb-like architecture of the space. Audience evaluation showed that the exhibition was hugely successful, both in visitor numbers and in visitor satisfaction.

So writers and artists understand the imaginative power of museums. And so also do visitors who arrive ready to have their imaginations set on fire. It only remains for museums to satisfy these imaginations. And this, I think, is my point – that although writers, artists and visitors all understand the power that museums can have over our imaginations – not enough museums think that the visitor's imagination – or indeed their own – is relevant to the visitor's experience. It should be. It is.

Notes

1 C. Woodward, *In Ruins*, London: Vintage, 2002.

2 J. Mack, *The Art of Small Things*, London: British Museum Press, 2007.

3 T. Browne, 'Musaeum Clausum or Bibliotheca Abscondita: Containing some remarkable Books, Antiquities, Pictures and Rarities of Several kinds, scarce or never seen by any man now living', in C. Sayle (ed.) *Volume III: The Works of Sir Thomas Browne*, Edinburgh: Grant, 1927, pp. 362, 365.

4 P. Findlen, 'The Museum: Its classical etymology and Renaissance genealogy', in B. Carbonell (ed.) *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004, pp. 30–2.

5 S. Pearce, *On Collecting*, London: Routledge, 1995.

6 O. Pamuk, 'To solve Turkey's culture clash, old elite must yield to free speech', *Christian Science Monitor*, 11 November 2009. Online. Available at www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/ Opinion/2009/1111/p09s01-coop.html (accessed 4 April 2010).

7 A. Carter, *Nights at the Circus*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1984.

8 Greenblatt also points out that Marco Polo's writings are paper museums. See S. Greenblatt, 'Resonance and Wonder', in B. Carbonell (ed.) *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004, p. 551.

9 J. L. Borges, 'John Wilkins' Analytical Language', in E. Weinberger (ed.) *The Total Library: Non-Fiction 1922–1986*, London: Penguin Books, 2001, pp. 229–32.
10 Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, *The First Emperor: China's Terracotta Warriors, 2008*, unpublished report, 2009.
11 The Dennis Severs' House, 18 Folgate Street, London E1 6BX.

2

STAGING EXHIBITIONS

Atmospheres of imagination

Greer Crawley

> . . . theatre is precisely that practice which calculates the place of things as they are observed.[1]

This chapter will consider the adoption of a theatrical and scenographic language to inform the aesthetics of contemporary exhibition design. By examining concepts of theatricality, I intend to demonstrate how exhibition is scripted and re-imagined as stage.

In 2007, the exhibition *The World as a Stage* at Tate Modern in London sought to explore the relationship between visual art and theatre. Staged in three 'acts', the exhibition included a range of installations by contemporary artists that made explicit reference to the scenic conventions of theatre; i.e. illusion, stage scenery, curtains, lighting, stage props and scenic devices. In the same year, the exhibition *A Theater Without Theater* organized by the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) and co-produced with the Museu Colecção Berardo in Lisbon, looked at the same subject within a wider historical and theoretical context.[2] The following year, at the 2008 Venice Biennale, the exhibits in the architecture sections were selected by the curator Aaron Betsky for their stagecraft; a 'staging of other worlds in the real world'.[3] This association of visual art and architecture with theatre is not unprecedented but it remains contentious. Gernot Böhme, for example, writes in an essay that accompanied the exhibition *Herzog and De Meuron: Archaeology of the Mind*, 2002–2003, 'Recognition of the space of physical presence as the actual subject matter of architecture moves perilously close to stage design'.[4] Therefore, Böhme asks whether there is a threat that 'architecture might melt entirely into the postmodern art of staging?'[5]

For Arnold Aronson, the stage frame provides one of the unifying structures of postmodern design. Aronson, a professor at Columbia University School of the Arts, has written extensively on the relationship between architecture and theatre design. He suggests that both disciplines are concerned with 'the transformation of space, and the communication of information while manipulating the emotional response of spectators-occupants'.[6] It is these concerns, when manifested in architecture or art, that many have found so problematic. In 1968, the American critic and advocate of modernist art, Michael Fried, wrote in his essay 'Art and Objecthood', a condemnation of what he perceived as the theatrical tendencies of

the minimalist artists.[7] Fried was particularly critical of the spectatorial relationship he saw in minimalist art and which he associated with theatricality. He believed that minimalist work unlike the abstract autonomous art of modernism, was dependent on its relationship with its setting and with the active participation of the spectator and the duration of the experience. It therefore had more in common with the temporal arts, i.e. theatre.

Fried's anti-theatrical stance, however, was soon overtaken by a more positive view of theatricality which was a trend that was to gain momentum. As contemporary society has become more theatricalized, so have its presentations. Artists and designers have adopted the language of theatre and scenic devices as methodologies that allow them to play with the ideas of staging and narrative which are no longer regarded as negative frameworks for discourse and experimentation. In fact, the opposite appears to be the case. Theatre and theatricality have offered the opportunity to experiment with forms of performativity, narrative and visual imagery that create new possibilities for interpretation and presentation.

For *The Enchanted Palace*, an exhibition at Kensington Palace which opened in 2010, a range of theatrical conventions was used to stage an elaborate visual promenade. The palace was undergoing extensive redevelopment, so the curators were free to take an 'interventionist' approach to the interiors by staging scenarios and installations created by the British theatre company WildWorks and a number of contemporary artists and designers. The presence of live performers encouraged social interaction and playful engagement with the previously remote formal spaces and furnishings. The visitor was given a map and clues about the where-abouts of the key set pieces and the uniformed guides provided further information if asked. Strangely garbed characters played by WildWorks actors drifted about murmuring mysterious monologues. Part fashion show, art exhibition and performance, this original approach to the presentation of historic buildings captured the popular imagination. However, the overt 'staginess' of the production raises questions about the authenticity of the experience. The fabric of the original palace and the true nature of its inhabitants disappeared behind the layers of often obscure visual and aural references made by the new scenic interpretations. An exhibition, as with a theatre production, depends on the credibility of the narrative, the visual representation and the delivery. In this instance, the narrative plays only a supporting role for the visual effects. The staging, with its focus on the means of realization, i.e. artifice and illusion, lacks scenographic continuity and unity. The exhibition, however, has been commended and enjoyed by both critics and the public for its 'theatricality'.

Too often, however, the qualities that are attributed to theatricality are based on superficial and simplistic presumptions about what constitutes the 'theatrical'. This misunderstanding reinforces the prejudice against theatricality which for many still has negative associations with staginess, spectacle, emotionalism and a lack of authenticity. But as William Egginton observed in *How the World became a Stage*, theatricality should not be 'understood as the quality of engaging in overt performance or as emotiveness nor should it be equated with the notion in art criticism of the overflowing of borders'.[8] Instead, he proposes that it is a mode of experience – spatial and spectatorial – those same qualities that Fried had identified as constituting the theatrical.

The central role played by the spectator in the creation of theatricality is also acknowledged in Feral and Bermingham's proposition that while objects, the space and the actor can be the vehicles for theatricality, it is not confined to them but 'is the result of a perceptual dynamics linking the onlooker with someone or something that is looked at'.[9] They go on to suggest that the appearance of theatricality depends on the 'creation of a distinct, fictional space', which can also be created outside the theatre.[10]

The museum has a long-established tradition of being the location for spectacular theatrical presentations. Robert Altick in *The Shows of London* describes the huge variety of elaborate stage-based displays in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries from Loutherberg's Eidophusikon to the Great Exhibition. He also shows how, by the end of the nineteenth century, 'the two great streams of appeal–amusement and instruction hitherto mingled in a single channel . . . diverged, with the age of exhibitions succeeded by the age of public museums'.[11] But as Altick points out, 'the elusive acceptable balance between instruction and diversion is "the magic formula" that is still being sought over a hundred years later'.[12] So once again, curators and designers are taking their cues from the stage, deploying the scenic effects, the mechanical devices and controlled lighting and sound that Altick so evocatively described in his book.

Theatricality is particularly well suited to the museum environment; it is a place out of the ordinary. Already a staged environment, it is a cabinet of curiosities, a *Wunderkammer*, a catoptric theatre, bristling with objects and details, reflections and illusions. In current museum practice, theatricality takes many forms from the use of traditional scenic effects, to digital scenography, to live performance. Designers are changing the visitor's perception and ways of seeing galleries through the use of lenses, gauzes, filters, mirrors, shadows and illusions. The aim is to exploit the inherent theatricality of the museum architecture; to approach the spaces, circulation and atmosphere scenographically and to create contemporary interpretations using scenic devices.

Just as the theatre space influences the reception of a play, exhibits are influenced by the context in which they are viewed. Often they are almost totally enclosed, enabling the spectator to focus on the object in a controlled, staged environment. Sometimes the exhibition flows through a variety of spaces; the spectator has to follow signs, clues to find each element. As the visitors move around the museum, they have to question what is set, what is exhibit, what is prop, museum artefact, who is spectator, who is performer? The scenography of the museum itself is constructed from the numerous smaller scenographies of the exhibits.

Vitruvius in the preface to Book VII describes *skenographia* as a Greek invention associated with the theatre that was exclusively concerned with the species – the external appearance or aspect. Species could also mean apparition or phantasm and is, in turn, associated with the verb *specto*, to watch, to observe.[13] In *Spectres: When Fashion Turns Back*, an exhibition curated by Judith Clark at the V&A in 2005, theatrical and optical devices were used to create a contemporary scenography in a previously undistinguished gallery space. Challenging and enigmatic, it played with ideas of distance, distortion and transformation. As Mark Jones and Sandra Holtby observed in the preface to the exhibition book, it was a 'fascinating scenario where influences, recollections and shadows combine to form a visionary landscape that is as close to the sensations of the nineteenth-century fairground as it is to current trends in museum display'.[14] The structural elements of the exhibition were used as devices to make physical and perceptual connections between objects and ideas. Working with the Russian architect Yuri Avvakumov, Clark devised a spatial arrangement of vertical and horizontal planes that created enclosures and circulation routes through the exhibition. Clark's intention was to 'guide the path of vision'.[15] Optical devices, together with the scenic effects created by fashion illustrator Ruben Toledo and the strangely enhanced mannequins made by the British jeweller Naomi Filmer contributed to a *mise-en-scène* that was spatial, immersive and scenographic. It was a groundbreaking installation that set the precedent for subsequent displays both within the V&A and elsewhere. This exhibition gave curators permission to take risks, to challenge what is possible, to question the curatorial role and procedures and to reintroduce 'theatricality' as a legitimate narrative form of presentation.

In Praise of Shadows, was a low-energy lighting exhibition at the V&A that took place during the London Design Festival in 2009 (Plate 2.1). The curator Jane Withers and producer Kate Bailey chose to stage works by 21 European designers in the V&A Jones Galleries, which were closed for refurbishment. The contemporary lighting designs were exhibited in amongst European artefacts from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. On entering the space, visitors were given hand-powered LED torches so they could explore the darkened gallery and make their own discoveries in their own time. The juxtapositions between the museum artefacts and the contemporary lights which were in themselves highly performative, created a scenographic narrative that was elaborated upon by the interaction of the spectators as they made connections with their torches between the objects in the spaces. A sudden beam of light from a hand-held torch would illuminate some unexpected detail or aspect of the display and draw another visitor's attention to an aspect that might otherwise have been missed. Although the display had a simple curatorial message about sustainable lighting design, it set up a dialogue between objects and spectators that provoked imaginative responses. Witty and highly theatrical, the lighting interventions by the curators and visitors reawakened a neglected gallery and its contents.

Today the even top lighting of the traditional gallery space is being frequently replaced by dramatic stage lighting. We enter darkened spaces and view spotlit, backlit and highlighted objects. Light loses its association with functionality and becomes a theatrical agent. This is more the case in the temporary installations than the permanent galleries but even here there is growing evidence of the desire for dramatic illumination. Aronson describes this 'selected visibility' as another characteristic of postmodern design where 'what we don't see becomes as important as what we do see'.[16] The architect and theatre designer Pippa Nissen, uses her experience in theatre to test her ideas for architectural and exhibition installations. She works in collaboration with the lighting designer Zerlina Hughes who 'enables our work to become often overtly theatrical as she animates the spaces with changing and hidden lights – a different approach to usual architectural lighting'.[17] Nissen regards her design process for exhibition as being similar to her approach to a theatre project; 'with the objects being the performers'.[18]

The initial brief for the *Telling Tales* exhibition at the V&A in 2009 was to design three stage sets to house a series of contemporary design objects including furniture, lighting and ceramics that had been brought together in three categories with a shared narrative suggested by their form or decoration. There were three themes: The Forest Glade, The Enchanted Castle, and Heaven and Hell. Central to the design was the transition from light to dark. Sound was also seen as a significant component in creating the narrative links so the company Luminous Frenzy, led by the sound artist Frank Frenzy was brought in early in the project to create soundscapes for each space. The first room was The Forest Glade. Here translucent screens printed with photographs of branches were used to layer the space both visually and physically. Moving between these 'scrims' one had the experience of being 'on stage' among the objects/props on display. Passing through a doorway of theatrically exaggerated thickness, visitors then entered The Enchanted Castle, in which mirrors, reflections and the manipulation of scale were combined to produce a variety of illusory effects. In the final room, Heaven and Hell, the designers created a dark world in which the objects were inaccessible and seen only as fragments through carefully positioned small windows. This first corridor led to two further corridors that were in false perspective with a projection of shadowy moving objects on the ceiling. The movement of the silhouetted forms triggered a soundscape of heartbeats and low, machine-like rhythms.

In these theatrical scenographies, the exits and entrances to the spaces become highly important. Doors are key scenic elements signalling beginnings and endings and, as such, they can be used to frame narrative, suggest circulation and mark transition. They demonstrate Feral and Bermingham's argument that 'theatricality . . . is a performative act creating the virtual space of the other'.[19] This transitional space, the threshold (limen), 'clears a passage, allowing both the performing subject as well as the spectator to pass from "here" to "elsewhere"'.[20]

Doors formed one of the key design elements in the exhibition *Madness and Modernity: Mental illness and the visual arts in Vienna 1900*, 2009, designed for the Wellcome Collection, London by Calum Storrie working in collaboration with the graphic designer Lucienne Roberts. The theme of the exhibition was the delirium of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna and the architecture of the city provided the visual metaphors for an exhibition that dealt with the mind, psychosis and psychoanalysis. The curators, Gemma Blackstock and Leslie Topp, had settled on a clear thematic (and largely chronological) breakdown of the exhibition and this suggested the idea of using a series of doorways to mark progress around the space. The designers proposed that these should make reference to various significant and identifiable doorways from the period (the doorway to Freud's apartment house, an Adolf Loos shopfront, a blank doorway from Otto Wagner's church Am Steinhof and others) without being faithful copies. The doorways, while finished in white to their front faces, were left as open unfinished timber studwork, emphasizing the artifice of the setting. According to Storrie,

> The intention of the design of the installation was to engage the viewer in a constant dialogue with the exhibition itself. Architecture that looked solid and substantial from one viewpoint was revealed to be flimsy paper-thin stage sets when seen from a different angle.[21]

When these designers make reference to theatre it is to the artificiality of the arrangements and the choice of clearly identifiable illusions and props. It is important for the audience to be made aware that they are in a theatrical space, looking at staged objects. A certain expectation is created in the spectator by the framing of the spectacle and the act of looking becomes performative. In these installations the spectator becomes explorer, flâneur, actor, director, performer, witness.

There are many paradoxes associated with the return to theatricality. In a digital age, the language and mechanics of theatre may appear archaic. However, many theatre and exhibition designers are combining new technologies with traditional theatre practices to produce inventive forms of scenographic presentation.

Space and Light, the Edward Gordon Craig exhibit at the V&A (2010–2012) is an exhibition that highlights the debate about theatricality which, it could be argued, originated with Craig's work as a theatre designer and theorist. Craig's designs made a break with scenic tradition; for Craig, the scene was not to be imitative or representational. In his experiments with simple block forms representing screens, he created innovative spatial compositions that offered flexible and variable stages. He explored the possibilities of movement and light producing animated, fluid spatial arrangements. As McKinney and Butterworth observe, 'Craig's intention was for architectural space to be harnessed to make a key contribution to the dramatic action in such a way that the audience would be enfolded and thoroughly implicated in the experience'.[22]

To represent Craig's career and his innovative designs, the exhibition includes a display of Craig's woodcuts, an interactive installation and a reconstruction of the St Matthew's Passion model (Figure 2.1). The arrangement of the exhibits within the six-metre-square
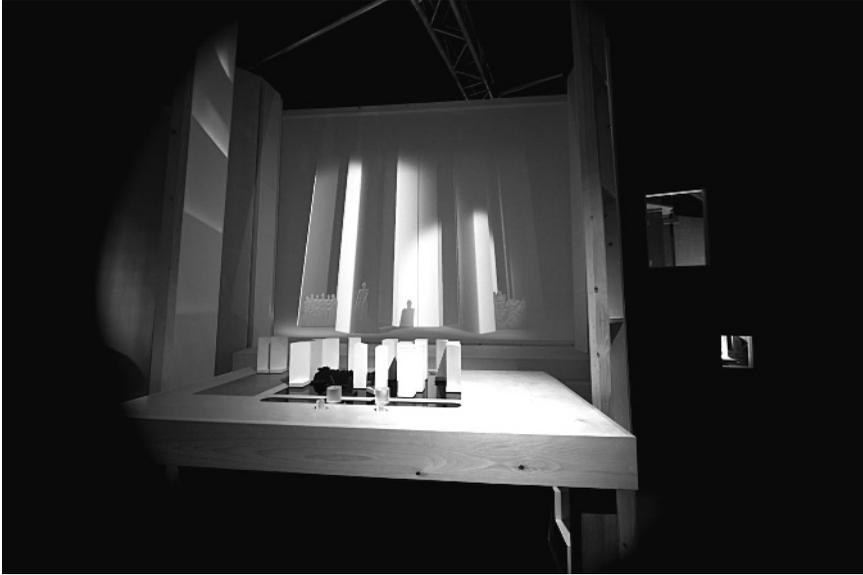
FIGURE 2.1   *Space and Light*, Edward Gordon Craig Exhibition, 2010–12. © V&A.

container is deliberately theatrical. The audience enters 'behind the scenes' of the St Matthew's Passion model and 'onto the stage' of the interactive space. They then move around the dividing curtain/screen, to take their seat in the darkened 'house' before the proscenium view of the St Matthew's Passion. Here they can listen to a dramatized audio presentation of Craig's creative journey while watching the changing effects projected in the model and on the digital screen.

In the interactive display, wooden blocks and figures can be moved around on the table and placed in various scenic arrangements. These movements and placements of objects are traced by an infrared reader and then rendered as a three-dimensional visual and projected on a screen in front of the table. Sliding wooden 'dials' are also provided to control the projected lighting effects. Three different templates engraved in the interactive table show the Craigian arrangements for *Hamlet*, a production that represents Craig's creative peak. In 1912 Craig had been appointed as a stage director at Konstantin Stanislavski's Art Theatre and it was agreed that Craig should stage *Hamlet*. Stanislavski, as a proponent of psychological realism, initially found Craig's abstractions difficult to understand but soon acknowledged the powerful theatrical impact of the simple three-dimensional architectural forms. It was a European collaboration and a seminal moment in design. The original set model was exhibited at V&A at the International Theatre Design exhibition in 1923 and was very significant in the establishment of the Theatre Collection.

The visionary ideas and methodologies of both Craig and Stanislavski are also reflected in the design by Casson Mann for the Museolobby in Moscow, which was commissioned in 2008 by Horus Capital for their media centre in the 'Moscow Company of Gold Thread' factory complex which had originally belonged to Stanislavski's family and was the location of Stanislavski's theatre (Plate 2.2). The clients wanted the unique lobby space of the main building to be both a functional reception area and a museum dedicated to the life of Stanislavski

and reflecting the duality of his life as theatre director and businessman. In order to address the problem of how to convey the aspect of live performance, Casson Mann's proposal was to create an interactive stage with both physical and digital scenery. The museum would be separated from the reception spaces by a golden mesh scrim which was a visual reference both to the theatre and the gold thread produced by the factory. A timber 'stage floor' provides the focus and location for the flytower from which the scenic furniture, e.g. desks, doors, tables etc., could be flown in. The interactive table would be set out for an interactive meal with place settings for each of Stanislavski's heroes. Portraits and information about their work would appear projected on the walls, when the visitor touches the plates. There would also be projections of servants serving food to the illusory diners. In addition to the dining room scenes, there was also to be another projected layer; frames filled with live videos of contemporary directors commenting on Stanislavski's work. The installation itself would be in a constant state of flux. Like Altick's nineteenth-century Transformation scenes which involved the play of light upon painted scrims, each digital scene would dissolve into the next. Positioned among the descending and ascending scenery within the stage space, the spectators control the unfolding narrative through their interaction with the physical props.

In both the Museolobby and *Space and Light*, the representation lies somewhere between the three-dimensionality of the object and the flatness of an image – between presence and absence. As Aronson observed,

> The very idea that one image, the projection, is created by light, and the other, the stage set, is created by objects that are made visible by their ability to reflect light, creates two perceptual orders, two kinds of reality.[23]

The inclusion of the model in the Craig exhibition and the table in the Museolobby, provides the focus for a concentrated physical and optical engagement that facilitates an imaginative and embodied transit from the material object to the projection. It was Stanislavski who recognized the presence of the prop as something more than a theatrical object, by first suggesting that it gives the actor a means of obtaining 'a state of concentration'.[24] Similarly, visitors to an exhibition, if allowed to actively engage with the object, can transcend the distractions of competing stimuli to focus their attention and become immersed in the narrative.

Alain Badiou has suggested that the theatre of representation is now being succeeded by a theatre of operations and that this transition from a theatre of display to a theatre of construction (or process) requires 'a revision of the nature and place of instructions'.[25] Previously the director or curator has been the provider of the directions/instructions. Today through the influences of more embodied and devised performance practices, instructions and directions are often collaboratively or audience generated. They engage in dialogue and exchanges and orchestrate for themselves personal encounters with artefacts and ideas. It would appear from the popularity of these arrangements, that the contemporary theatricalized public knows what is expected – is willing and confident about taking on performative roles.

Atalanta, devised by the seven sisters group in 2010 as part of the Cultural Olympiad: Creative Campus Initiative, uses both artefacts and hand-held video technologies. The group under the artistic director, Susanne Thomas and associate director, Sophie Jump are recognized for their imaginative performance work in theatres, galleries, libraries and museums. For the Creative Campus Initiative CCI, they proposed an interactive performance walk based on the Greek myth of the runner Atalanta and the origins of the Olympic Games. Based in the

Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, it combined a downloadable podcast walk which could be linked to any of the CCI and universities' websites and blogs, with elements of live perform-ance. *Atalanta* takes the viewer on a journey through a part of the museum – guided by the audio track as well as video footage on the screen that matched the route. By synchronizing the image on the screen with the real environment, the viewer was able to follow the narra-tive. On specified occasions actual performers were involved (Figure 2.2). Their presence was integrated with the positions and movements of the characters on screen so that the specta-tor experienced both the live and recorded performances simultaneously. The viewer also became an actor 'performing' their walk before a second audience of other museum visitors. After the period of live performances, the piece continued to be available for download so visitors could still experience the walk.

Atalanta opened up both literal and metaphorical viewpoints and pathways within the museum's collections. The narrative journey took the viewer behind the digital screen to an 'elsewhere' made up of layers of illusion and the real, which would vary according to the direction of the spectator's gaze and position in space. The mimetic relationship between the virtual spaces of the screen and the physical spaces of the museum that are 'nevertheless susceptible to interpenetration and *mise en abyme*' is, as Egginton observed, made possible because of the existence of the frame which is 'an essential characteristic of theatricality'.[26] This condition, together with those aspects that Fried identified with the 'theatrical', i.e. site specificity, embodiment and visuality, are producing innovative strategies for exhibition and museum spaces. While contemporary technology often provides the means of delivery, it is the spatial, visual, aural and temporal constructs that structure a unified scenography. By stag-ing narratives for objects and spectators, theatricality is creating atmospheres of imagination. A combination of showmanship and scholarship informs these original presentations that exploit

FIGURE 2.2   *Atalanta*, 2010, Ashmolean Museum. © sevens sisters group and photographer Davy McGuire.

and celebrate the possibilities and processes of theatre. Through the techniques of staging, the museum is being reinvented as theatre and offering contemporary versions of Altick's 'shows', those exhibitions which

> ministered to . . . the desire to be amused and instructed, the indulgence of curiosity and the sheer sense of wonder . . . through them the vicarious became the immediate, the theoretical and general became the concrete and specific . . . the means by which the mind and the imagination could be exercised.[27]

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3

WRITING SPATIAL STORIES

Textual narratives in the museum

Laura Hourston Hanks

This chapter focuses the scope of narrative to the written, rather than the spoken, word, exploring manifold relationships between text and museum space. Part One, *The Written Word*, illuminates contrasts in the deployment and influence of text on a selection of recent case study museums. *Literal* and *abstracted* representations of text in museum space are revealed, as are *real* and *imaginary* influences. Lastly in this section, the oppositions of textual *presence* and *absence* are discussed, revealing potential opportunities and challenges for museum and exhibition designers. In Part Two, *Literary Devices*, the transposition of particular techniques of writing onto the making of museum space is explored. Here, with reference to the Imperial War Museum and the Imperial War Museum North, *structure* and *characterization* are shown to have relevance beyond literary confines for the production of rich and meaningful museum experiences.

The delivery of narrative can be subdivided into two basic forms; verbal and textual. Whilst the power of the spoken word is currently much exploited in the production of holistic museum environments through the use of audio commentaries, film installations and live performance, the written word's impact on the space of the contemporary museum, although more long-standing, is arguably less creative. The written word is often confined to collection catalogues, wall panels, visitor guides and artefact labelling. What happens, though, when writing moves beyond the medium of visitor information and collection interpretation, to become the very content, method, or meaning of museums? This chapter seeks to explore various correlations between the written word and the space of the museum in an attempt to reveal storytelling potentialities for contemporary museum design.

PART ONE: THE WRITTEN WORD

Literal and abstracted narratives

The building block of written language, the individual character, is a direct design influence on the Museum of Chinese Characters, which opened in An yang in central Henan Province in 2009. Here the holy character 'Yong', from ancient Chinese Oracle writing traditionally carved on tortoise shell and ox bones, is a key design generator. Meaning 'city', its simple

pictographic form of a central square – representing the city walls – surrounded by four gate-ways, is transposed directly onto the form of the museum by its architect, Professor Yang Hongxun. The container and the contained have undoubted coherence in their depiction of Chinese characters, but the simplistic determinism of this design solution is intrinsically limit-ing. In literary terms, the design language is literal rather than figurative, and thus passes up the opportunity to 'change[s] the literal meaning, to make a meaning fresh or clearer, to express complexity, to capture a physical or sensory effect, or to extend meaning'.[1]

The Museum of Modern Literature in Marbach am Neckar, Germany, 2002 to 2006, which was awarded the RIBA Stirling Prize in 2007,[2] makes a striking counterpoint to this Chinese case. Here, in the birthplace of the dramatist Friedrich Schiller, previously scattered texts were brought together following national reunification, and the architect, David Chipperfield, was challenged 'to draw people to look at books and manuscripts they cannot read more than a page or two of (except by arrangement) . . . a tough brief'.[3] The museum design team favoured the language of restrained neo-classicism, with its limited material palette and repetition of architec-tural motifs at various scales.[4] The result is an architecture of academic aesthetic and 'meticulous modesty'.[5] Repeating columns form rhythmic colonnades, podia are layered, and ceiling coffers produce orthogonally gridded patterns; such rigorous architectural order being reminiscent of the conventional order and scales of characters, lines and pages of text, and the collection of volumes into libraries. Although not explicitly declared by the architects, critics have posited this 'reading' of the building as a material *abstraction* of the rich German literary tradition.[6]

Real and imaginary narratives

The treatment and resonance of factual and fictional narratives within the museum are explored here through two museums that have first-person narrated texts at their core: the Anne Frank House and Orhan Pamuk's Museum of Innocence. The *Diary of Anne Frank*, one of the most widely read books in the world, is the record kept by Annelies Marie Frank of her family's period in hiding in German-occupied Amsterdam during the Second World War. The Frank family and others famously hid for two years in a secret annex off the office of Anne's father, Otto Frank, until in August 1944 the annex was stormed by German Security Police and the occupants were arrested and deported to concentration camps, where – with the exception of Otto Frank – they all died. Anne's diary and some papers were recovered and passed to her father after the end of the war, and the annex, canal-side office and adjacent renovated house at 265 Prinsengracht now together form the Anne Frank House museum. Although now empty of furniture, the rooms of the annex have been preserved in their original state as far as possible, and personal items belonging to the eight residents have been brought back into the spaces. The office rooms of the canal-side part of the house have been 'returned to the style and atmosphere of the hiding period',[7] and the remodelled neighbouring house has the original diaries and papers on permanent display. In terms of this exploration of text in the museum, what is striking here is the congruence of the narrative experience; of real events, their actual physical settings and their authentic chronicling in the form of the original diaries. This degree of coincidence allows a real connection between contemporary visitors and the house's wartime occupants, through an integrated and affective experience.

Orhan Pamuk's Museum of Innocence has a fictional text at its centre and raises intriguing issues with regards to imaginary narratives. *Museum of Innocence* refers to both Pamuk's 2008 novel and his Istanbul museum that was due to open in 2011, which together constitute a project in

which fiction and reality are surreally conflated. Novel and museum are simultaneously separate entities, yet intrinsically interlinked, with Orhan describing them as 'two representations of one single story perhaps'.[8] Parallels between the written word and museological space – or Orhan's writing and curating – are palpably strong. The novel is concerned with the period between the 1970s and 2000s of the main protagonist, Kernal's, personal infatuation with the character Füsun, during which he surreptitiously gathered items belonging to her. In the museum, the concern is the transformation of this time into a space in which these amassed personal artefacts can be displayed. Both narrative vehicles of text and physical archive have an object-based encyclopaedic intent. The novel 'becomes an exhaustive catalogue of Füsun's . . . belongings', whilst the museum as *Wunderkammer* is a repository of these self-same things, with the house itself a revealing object in the collection.[9] The act of collection links novel and museum, with the implicit desires for publicity and permanence being shared by both. Characters also drift between real and imaginary worlds, with the actual project architect, Íhsan Bilgin, being mentioned twice in the novel. Indeed, Pamuk completed the novel after a design discussion with Bilgin, and '[t]his is, perhaps, the first example of an architectural project shaping the end of a novel'.[10]

Commonalities exist, then, between the writing and curating of the *Museum of Innocence*, and the act of translation of the story into the two different media – the written word and spatial experience – is fascinating. Here Açalya Allmer believes Pamuk to be 'aware of the difficulties of translating a verbal narrative that unfolds in the imagination of the reader into an architectural space', and warns that the Museum of Innocence 'should not be considered as an architectural adaptation of the story'.[11] This distancing from literal spatial translation is clear in the architectural treatment, which favours the pragmatics of visitor circulation and the exploitation of found space as memory repository over exact replication of the novel's 'set'. Both the container (house) and contained (collection of personal artefacts derived from the novel) enable a material representation of the story, but how can the vivid world of the imagination, as provoked by the novel, be conjured up architecturally? Or how can *ekphrasis* – the expression of an image in words – be successfully reversed? How can intangible 'atmosphere', seemingly lost in architectural translation, enrich visitor experience and elevate curatorial space to narrative space? The Museum of Innocence raises all these questions, but crucially, unlike the Anne Frank House that provokes a real and powerful empathy in its visitors, the Museum of Innocence is always only *pseudo-real* and divorced from actuality. The distanciation of the constructed narrative and found space contrasts with the immediacy of the real story and actual place. As such, Pamuk's created and curated experience keeps the visitor at an emotional – or in literary terms, *aesthetic* – distance, limiting the degree of involvement in the 'work of art'.

Narrative presence and absence

Both the presence and absence of seminal texts create unique challenges for museum and exhibition designers, as evidenced at the Museum of Scotland and the National Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. In part to counter-balance the popular Romantic perception of Scottish history, the curators at the Museum of Scotland were keen to prioritize the depiction of the Scottish Enlightenment.[12] However, the communication of an intangible intellectual movement, by an institution defined by tangible remains, was immediately challenging: 'how does one present Hume's views on causation, Smith's economic theory, or even Black's work on latent heat?'[13] Importantly some core books from the period were available, but the question was how to make them *speak*.

The Spirit of the Age exhibition, located on Level 3 as part of the larger *Scotland Transformed* displays, reveals Scottish life in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Seminal texts such as William Buchan's *Domestic Medicine* of 1769 and a first edition of the *Encylopaedia Britannica* dating from 1771, are on permanent display, but are contextualized and communicated in two distinct ways. Personal contextualization takes the form of portraits, memorabilia, and other personal effects belonging to key figures within the movement; '[w]hat is on display is a coherent arrangement of objects that would have been used by the Enlightenment illuminati, seen by, worn by or read by them, conveying a sense of their discernment'.[14] These personal contextualising objects include a letter from David Hume, dated Bath, 20 May 1776, as well as a reconstruction of a room in Riddles Court on Edinburgh's High Street where he lived for a short time. The other method of transcription was the display of artefacts associated with the *application* of Enlightenment ideas, divided into themes of; improvement, politics, architecture and town planning, education and the spread of ideas, social life and sports, and the study and practice of medicine.[15] Here, then, the authentic tome, although present, plays a limited part in the overall display agenda.

At the National Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa in Wellington, opened in 1998, the ambitious brief was to 'powerfully express the total culture of New Zealand'.[16] In a predominantly bicultural country, this objective necessarily centred on the contentious Treaty of Waitangi. The origins of the modern New Zealand nation-state can be traced back to 1840 and the signing of this treaty, which in effect passed sovereignty of the islands of New Zealand to the British Queen. Controversially, however, before the concordat had been fully ratified by all the Maori chiefs, the British Governor had 'proclaimed British sovereignty over the whole country, the North Island on the ground of cession by the Maoris, the South Island by right of discovery'.[17] Despite the centrality of the treaty to the story of New Zealand, and hence the narrative intention of Te Papa, '[t]here were very few artefacts directly related to the treaty', and most crucially, 'the original documents were to remain at the National Archives'.[18]

In this politicized cultural context, the design teams were acutely aware that 'many visitors may potentially have a fair degree of antipathy towards any exhibition regarding the treaty'.[19] However, they did not shy away from its depiction, the pivotal space of the building, the 'wedge' between Maori and Pakeha wings, being used to house the Treaty display, with 'the selection of this space, reinforc[ing] the museum's attitude towards the importance of the treaty'.[20] Both architectural form and material detailing privilege the treaty in all its meanings.[21] The tension at the heart of the nation's history is manifest in the space at the heart of the museum.

In the absence of the authentic Treaty document,

> a huge, 7 × 5m suspended glass relief acknowledges, in two layers, the history of the document itself. The front layer contains all the signatures of the Waitangi document, while the rear layer represents, in moulded and coloured surfaces, the parchment as ravaged by ill treatment and hungry rats.[22]

To complete this space, two large-scale translations of the treaty in English and Maori are suspended on the respective walls of the 'wedge', creating a quietly but powerfully charged display. Here at Te Papa, where the seminal text is absent, architectural symbolism and curatorial reconstruction have filled the void. Despite its inauthenticity, the resultant exhibition environment is meaningful and iconic: 'The treaty is therefore seen in a variety of contexts – historical, monumental, awe-inspiring, troublesome, flawed, under constant reinterpretation as part of the ongoing debate, but above all, relevant'[23] (Figure 3.1).
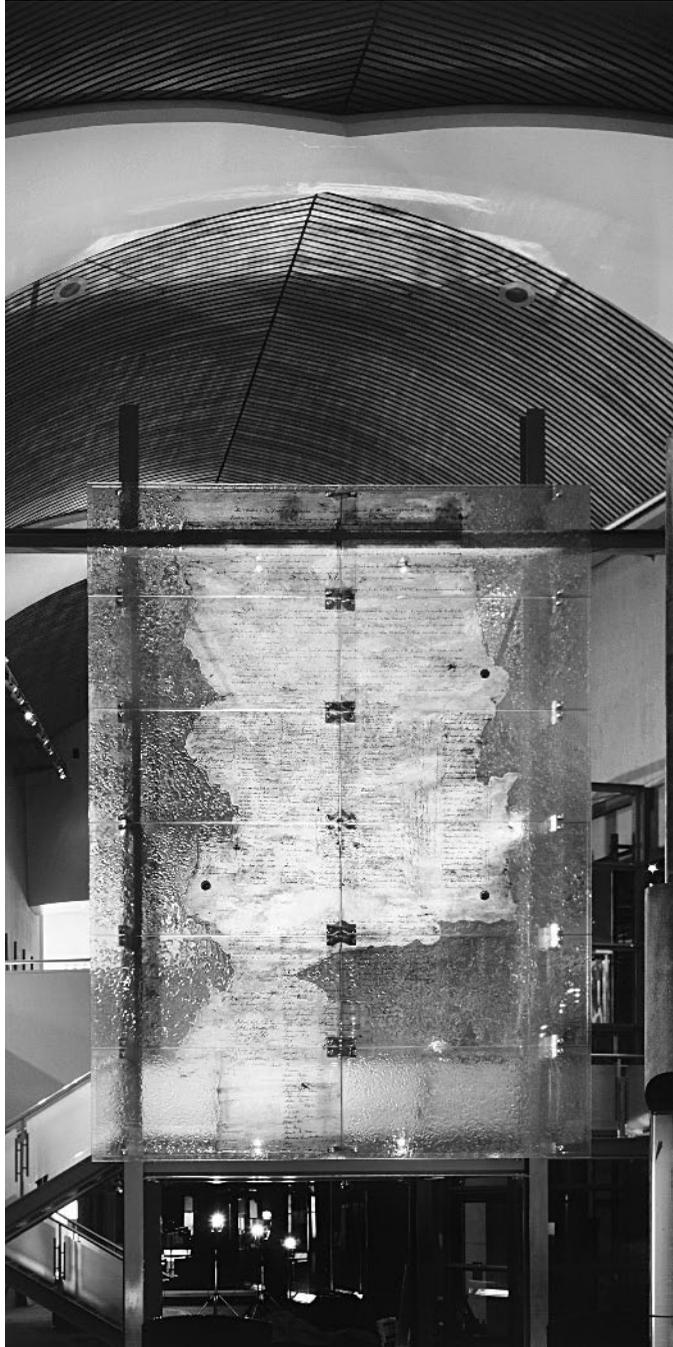
FIGURE 3.1 Large-scale glass relief replica of the damaged Treaty of Waitangi suspended in the *Signs of a Nation Nga Tohu Kotahitanga* display space at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa. The original document is stored at the National Archives. Supplied by the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.

PART TWO: LITERARY DEVICES

Moving on from this consideration of binary oppositions, we now turn to the transposition of literary devices or tools onto spatial exhibition design in two museum displays: the *Holocaust Exhibition* at the Imperial War Museum (IWM) in London,[24] and the Main Exhibition Space at the Imperial War Museum North (IWM North) in Manchester.[25] Grappling with the emotive themes of conflict and loss, the exhibitions are also linked by institution, the IWM, and designers, Stephen Greenberg and Bob Baxter. The discussion aims to reveal the narrative journeys through both exhibitions, symbolic design intentions, and experiential space making, and is framed around two principal concerns of the novelist; *structure* and *characterization*.

Narrative structure

Meta-narrative and metaphor

A story usually requires a meta-narrative, or overarching structure, that allows for complexity – in the form of sub-themes, minor plotlines, and multiple characterization – to occur within or beneath it. The two installations in focus have markedly similar meta-narratives: London's *Holocaust Exhibition* depicts the Nazi persecution of Jews and other minority groups in the years preceding and during the Second World War; whilst the IWM North's display agenda is to address conflicts that have defined the twentieth century and those which will continue to shape the twenty-first. Here the temporal boundaries are 1900 and the present, with attention being focused primarily on landmark events affecting the lives of British and Commonwealth citizens. However, despite this obvious coincidence in subject matter, the narrative interpretation required in each case is distinct. The bipolar nature of the Holocaust, of victim and perpetrator, encourages the presentation of a palpably strong account of history: clarity of meta-narrative is easily achieved.[26] The curatorial challenge at the IWM North was of a different nature; the subject matter is multifaceted, being drawn from multiple conflicts, and the overall script is therefore more complex. The challenge here was to create a comprehensible and integrated narrative, which connected and contextualized each event and series of events within the whole. Between the two exhibitions the curatorial demands vary, but the core content and message is similar, as is the design strategy chosen in each case to communicate these ideas. In the words of Paul Valery, which Libeskind used as inspiration, 'the world is permanently threatened by two dangers: order and disorder', and this understanding of the roots of conflict is central to the design approach in both cases.[27]

At the *Holocaust Exhibition* Greenberg and Baxter first imagined the limited available space being delineated by a three-dimensional grid, or 'Rubik's cube'. This grid pervades the display space, from the large-scale wall planes to the smaller-scale materiality of brown and grey German tiles, which form a recurring motif. This *literal* gridded structure employed by the designers equates to a recurring literary theme, or *leitmotif*, as well as a clear literary narrative structure, and just as with the written word, allows for greater complexity and diversity of ideas and themes within it. From within this imposed order, the designers started the process of dissolution by fracturing planes to create a metaphorical or symbolic disorder. This is most visible in the many inclining planes and diagonals of both floor and wall on the earlier, upper section, introduced to represent the fragmentation of life in Germany in the pre-war years.[28] As the visitor descends to the lower level, where the true horrors of the Holocaust are

revealed, the grid reasserts its authority. Here the structure is strictly geometric, in reference – akin to literary symbolism – to the rational and tightly structured order of the Nazi industrial killing machine.

At the IWM North, Libeskind's architectural design concept was simple and declared on a wall panel: 'I have imagined the globe broken into fragments and taken the pieces to form a building; three shards that together represent conflict on land, in the air and on water'. *Metaphor* is again central here, with the orderly Platonic globe being shattered in an analogy of violence and disorder. This is most apparent from across the ship canal, from where the exposed steelwork and aluminium cladding of the three fused fragments make a dynamic silhouette against the skyline.

Just as any author of fiction grapples with issues of narrative structure, here the designers have symbolized the meta-narrative of order versus disorder through the spatial and architectural design of both museums, allowing a course to be navigated between 'rigid totalities on one hand, and the chaos of events on the other'.[29] This imposition of a material and metaphorical structure – a grid in one case, and Platonic sphere in the other – has created the necessary boundaries for intelligent and evocative design, just as a clear literary meta-narrative enables complexity and creativity.

Plot and pace

In common with most literary creations, both exhibitions take the visitor on a chronological journey. In Salford, a timeline around the perimeter allows visitors to orientate themselves in exhibition time. The circumference of the space is its ordering and sequencing mechanism, although this route is only implied or suggested, and not physically prescribed. Thematic exploration is then provided by six 'silos', free-standing within the space, and two 'timestacks'.[30] In London, a chronological approach is also favoured, but here the temporal journey is reinforced by a one-way system through the exhibits. Choice is all but removed from the visitor, and other than by backtracking within the restricted space or taking one of the few shortcuts to the exit, the visitor is impelled to go in one direction, along with the crowd. Just as clipped sentence and paragraph structure, and emphasis on action rather than description, quickens the pace of a novel as the reader approaches the denouement, so interior spatial design is employed here to channel visitors through the space more hastily, and inexorably, possibly in an attempt to mirror the irreversibility of the Jews' final journeys to their deaths. Necessary physical and emotional 'escape routes' have been included, which inevitably break the relentlessness of the experience, and therefore the moments of profound empathy.

A beginning, a muddle, and an end[31]

Greenberg believes that any museum experience, from arrival to departure, should constitute a *performance sequence* and adhere to the classic shape of a three-part drama.[32] This characteristic tripartite structure is in evidence at the *Holocaust Exhibition*, where it is overlaid with symbolic significance. The initial oval-shaped space, the opening 'act' of the historical documentary, is home to artefacts revealing the normal lives of Jews in Germany before the rise of National Socialism, and 'is truncated at one end, as if registering an abrupt interruption'.[33] The symbolic journey continues into its second 'act' with a physical and metaphoric descent to the horrors of the extermination camps, as visitors are taken downstairs to the 'depths of despair'.

Meaning carries through to the third and final display space; a conscious echo of the oval form of the introductory space. This similarity between the opening and closing rooms of the exhibition provides a simple formal structure which signals completion to the visitor. The space, which is taken over by an audio-visual display, offers an important opportunity for reflective contemplation and 'depressurization', and adheres to Greenberg's notion of the exhibition as a drama of three parts. However, this device does run a particular danger; the notion of coming back to the starting point could be interpreted as symbolic denial, although the very different architectural nature, in terms of light and materiality, of these two spaces, plus the display of haunting video testimonies from survivors, completely rejects this take on the exhibition's meaning. Indeed, this closing of the circle could be viewed as a cautionary tale, implying the ease with which history could repeat itself without the action of Edmund Burke's 'good men': 'For evil to triumph it is only necessary for good men to do nothing.'[34]

The narrative journey through the IWM North's main exhibition space, like its London counterpart, is highly legible, but is not divided into beginning, middle and ending. The peripheral timeline interspersed with thematic silos and timestacks provides an accessible and mentally mappable framework to the whole experience. Here, at the main entrance to the display space, the starting point *is* the end point, but unlike the *Holocaust Exhibition*, there is no curatorial exploitation of this narrative loop.[35] The past does not inform the present here other than incidentally, and certainly not in a way that is supported or reinforced by the flagship architecture. The complex, multifaceted programme – the dramatic 'muddle' required by Larkin – doubtless hinders the potential impact of the narrative journey, as does the autonomous architectural shell. The powerful symbolism of the London exhibit is largely lacking at the IWM North, where space is simply fashioned from the existing hall to fulfil display purposes, rather than to choreograph experience, or evoke sensation. As Greenberg acknowledges:

> Libeskind's vision [at the IWM North] is personal and it eschews any closure or reorientation for the visitor, whereas in the *Holocaust Exhibition*, the closing and harmonious oval-shaped space provides a humane place of safety and contemplation. From here visitors can look back into the blackness of the exhibition they have experienced, while they test their emotions against testimony from survivors about trust, faith, memory and rebuilding their lives. For the visitors, many of whom are in bits by this point, this is not a redemptive experience, but it is transforming. The testimony answers questions in their minds and they are left in awe of other human beings and their courage. IWM North has yet to make the audiences' creative space in the same way.[36]

History and biography

Many of the greatest works of fiction – and one need look no further than Shakespeare here – operate on two principal levels simultaneously; charting the rise and fall of nations, monarchy and empires, whilst also chronicling the everyday, mundane lives of individual protagonists. Analogously there are two principal themes which underpin the *Holocaust Exhibition*; the *personal* and the *organizational*, and this duality is also true of the IWM North. There, the peripheral timeline narrates grand historical events, and within this wider macro, or *organizational* narrative, certain objects have been prioritized as having iconic status. Five such objects have been selected as major exhibits, and these include the artillery piece that

fired the first shell from the British side in the First World War. Beyond its imposing scale and physical authenticity, this object is endowed with a specific contextual import, having played a unique and significant role in history. The *organizational* was also a key theme and scale of display at the IWM's *Holocaust Exhibition*, but the depiction of this was handled very differently:

> In one space there is only one artefact – an ordinary Adler typewriter of the period, a basic tool of the bureaucracy. It sits in a space bounded by an organisation chart of the whole Nazi chain of command from Hitler down.[37]

Like the more iconic artillery piece, the typewriter represents the wider system, this time of National Socialism, and highlights the huge administrative power of the Nazis' destructive regime. However, in stark contrast to the scale and significance of the artillery gun, it is the everyday, mundane nature of this object which chillingly reminds us of the mass complicity instilled by the Nazis, and disquietingly recalls the words of Burke. Through the use of this everyday object, with its distance from but implicit involvement in the Holocaust, the visitor – like the reader of fiction – is allowed to place him or herself within the moral context and enquire, 'what if?'

Characterization

> The museum is the colossal mirror in which man finally contemplates himself in every aspect.[38]

Personae

Both displays have grand historical narratives, but beneath these overarching storylines, individual voices or *characters* emerge. In Manchester, overlaying the continuous timeline, the six silos each display a different aspect of war in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.[39] This thematic narrative is then deconstructed further into an array of personal stories revealed through a wide range of material, including photographs, uniforms, diaries, letters and medals, arranged in a series of retractable trays that form a timestack, and are themselves embedded in the walls of two of the silos. These trays allow visitors to reveal many diverse lives, all touched by modern conflict in different and often interweaving ways. Through the physical 'riffling' through drawers, a secret or voyeuristic relationship is set up between viewer and subject, allowing empathetic links that are harder to form in the larger *organizational* displays. A complex and multifaceted view of identity is portrayed by engaging in a 'bottom–up' exploration of individual stories, and the resultant immediacy of the timestacks is effective and stimulating. This corresponds to the immediacy of a first-person narrative in fiction, via which the reader has direct access to the intimate thoughts and feelings of the individual protagonist. Such direct communication promotes a close and empathic relationship between visitor/reader and subject/character (Plate 3.1).

The London exhibition also necessarily confronts the personal dimension of the Holocaust, incorporating many personal testimonies that span from the rise of National Socialism in the 1930s to the present day and run like threads through the whole exhibition. This continuity of voices throughout provides a narrative arc, again akin to the personal dialogue of the fictional narrator.

Identity

Artefacts are also used to depict the personal dimension of the Holocaust, and here the notion of character or *identity* is crucial. The *Holocaust Exhibition* deals with the loss of dignity and stripping of identity of its victims, which is powerfully depicted through the display of piles of their personal items. The resonance of these amassed objects is complex and twofold: the huge number of items belonging to the dead starkly conveys the sheer scale of the 'Final Solution'; and the display of hundreds of identical items together, the stripping of any individuality or sense of self from the victims. Conversely, the personal nature of the objects themselves, for example shoes and combs that were worn by their owners in their final days and hours, powerfully highlights the millions of personal tragedies that constituted the wider Holocaust. This juxtaposition between mass genocide and personal identity – via the medium of the everyday, mundane object – constitutes possibly the most resonant and moving part of the exhibition. The depiction of tragedy is, of course, not new, with Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, defining it as; 'the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself . . . with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions'.[40]

Self

The characters of both victims and perpetrators, protagonists and antagonists, are examined within the *Holocaust* display, and in order to differentiate between and codify these two groups, the exhibition designers decided to use a chromatic device in which the space of the victim is white and the space of the perpetrator is black.[41] So the stories of both oppressed and oppressors are told concurrently within the displays, but – as in the very process of reading and imagining – the final layer of meaning is formed through the addition of the visitors themselves.[42] The visitor affects the display directly, adding another layer of meaning to the chromatic codification of space in the *Holocaust Exhibition*, and in order to see this we return to the Adler typewriter and its adjacent 'chain of command' wall chart:

> This is printed in white out of black behind glass, so that visitors see their own reflection mirrored in the black perpetrator space, as they stand on a white floor, in victim space. . . . This single artefact has become a social actor engaging with the audience in a shared creative space[43] (Plate 3.2).

Faced with their own reflections in the glass, visitors are encouraged to grapple with the implications evoked through the exhibits, and project themselves into the situation on display. Put simply, they are challenged to address whether they would be a 'goodie' or a 'baddie'. Such empathy makes intellectual and emotional demands upon the viewer, and is fundamental to the purpose of the exhibition. This recalls Jauss' analysis of aesthetic experience, and falls somewhere between his 'associative identification', which involves an active participation of the spectator, and his 'sympathetic identification', in which 'the audience places itself in the position of the hero and thus expresses a kind of solidarity with a usually suffering figure'.[44]

Conclusion

Transposing devices of literature onto display-space making has rich creative potential, and both IWM installations explored employ strategies more familiar to literature than design. Just

as for novelists, the creation of a coherent grand narrative is important for exhibition designers, as from within this legible frame, visitors can situate themselves within the context on display and gain understanding. The traditional role of the curator as trustworthy and 'omniscient narrator' is still relevant and in evidence then,[45] but is now tempered or augmented by the addition of new voices telling their own stories. Characters traditionally excluded from the museum are now invited in, leading to the exciting and unexpected. Literary symbolism has also been seen to have its corollary in architectural metaphor and display symbolism, adding another layer of meaning to the spatial whole.

Conflation of distance appears to be vital; between the reader's reality and the story depicted in the case of fiction, and in the museum's displays, between the visitor's life and experience, and that of the subjects on display. This closeness or empathy is aided by integration, or the creation of a holistic, immersive experience, akin to the building of atmosphere in fiction. Where one element becomes too dominant, the whole suffers, as at the IWM North, where Greenberg believes that, 'Daniel Libeskind's object-making vision has overwhelmed the experience and has taken precedence over the story and the characters in that story'.[46] Integration is better achieved, and *synchronicity* between real time and space, and exhibition time and space, appears much stronger in the London display, where exhibition content and design are constructed with the same agenda, with the input of many of the same personnel, and are subsequently mutually sustaining; the entire experience is 'joined-up'.

Textual narratives abound in the space of the museum. The written word is both contained and explained within the museum; it can influence exhibition and architectural design, and it offers unique access to remote times, places and people. Reliance on text takes many forms, but interpretation is always critical: '[i]n post-structuralist terms, mediation is not only a valid part of the display, mediation is as valid as the artefact itself'.[47] Viewed on its own, the written word may be denotative, but the deeper meanings, values and emotions associated with it – its connotative potential – can be realized by the creative display-space-maker.

Notes

1 Literary Terms, Online. Available at: http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/lit_term. html. Accessed 6 July 2011.
2 Royal Institute of British Architects' *Building of the Year* award.
3 Museum of Modern Literature. Online. Available at: www.architecture.com/Awards/ RIBAEuropeanAwards/2007/MuseumOfModernLiterature/MuseumOfModernLiterature.aspx. Accessed 6 July 2011.
4 The material palette is largely confined to concrete, limestone, wood and glass.
5 Building of the Year: RIBA Stirling Prize 2007, Channel 4, 6 October 2007.
6 Ibid. More speculative correlations to the literature contained within the museum may also be advanced. The museum's dramatic setting atop a rocky plateau overlooking the valley of the Neckar River allows for shifting perspectives and panoramic views of the building itself and surrounding landscape, which remind one of the multiple viewpoints and imaginative reach of the literature contained within. The dramatic topographical setting of the steeply sloping site with its incised terraces allows for the creation of spaces and places of very different character, in a manner analogous to literary characterization, and the building also reveals itself by degrees, as a novel would reveal its plot in carefully crafted stages. A compelling literary narrative is set up, and the building has the transformative power of the literature it contains. See David Chipperfield Architects. Online. Available at: www.davidchipperfield.co.uk. Accessed 6 July 2011.
7 A Museum with a Story. Online. Available at: www.annefrank.org/en/Museum/Exhibitions/The-story-on-the-spot/ Accessed 6 July 2011.

8   O. Pamuk, 'Winning the Nobel Prize Made Everything Political', *Deutsche Welle Interview*, 7 September 2008, in A. Allmer, 'Orhan Pamuk's "Museum of Innocence": On Architecture, Narrative and the Art of Collecting', in *ARQ*, 2009, vol. 13, no. 2, p. 168.

9   O. Pamuk, *The Museum of Innocence*, trans. M. Freely, London: Faber & Faber, 2010.

10 Allmer, 'Orhan Pamuk's "Museum of Innocence"', p. 165.

11 Ibid., p. 168.

12 The Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh, opened in 1998, was designed by Benson and Forsyth.

13 R. Anderson, 'Scotland's History in the National Museum of Scotland', in T. Ambrose (ed.) *Presenting Scotland's Story*, pp. 71–2, quoted in McKean, C., *The Making of the Museum of Scotland*, Edinburgh: NMS Publishing Limited, 2000, p. 103.

14 McKean, *The Making of the Museum of Scotland*, p. 139.

15 J. Calder, *Museum of Scotland*, Edinburgh: NMS Publishing Ltd, 1998, p. 46.

16 P. Bossley, *Te Papa. An Architectural Adventure*, Wellington: Te Papa Press, 1998, p. 2; theme 'History'.

17 K. Sinclair, *A History of New Zealand*, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1985, 8th edition, p. 72.

18 P. Bossley, 'The Treaty', in 'The Designing of Te Papa', *Architecture New Zealand*, Special Issue, February 1997, p. 64.

19 Ibid., p. 64.

20 Ibid., p. 64. The exhibit occupies a total area of 650 square metres, and is housed on Level Four and the Level Five mezzanine.

21 'The vaulted ceiling is of triangulated fibrous plaster and macroscarpa slats, suggesting interwoven links between the pakeha and Maori sections across the space' (ibid., p. 64).

22 Ibid., p. 64.

23 Ibid., p. 67.

24 The IWM in London is housed in the Grade II listed former Bethlem Royal Hospital, designed by James Lewis and completed in 1815. In 1983 Arup Associates were commissioned to prepare a feasibility study for the museum's extensive redevelopment and a suite of gallery spaces on two upper floors, designed to house a permanent special exhibition on the Holocaust, formed a small part of this.

25 In 1996, following an open competition that attracted 75 teams of entrants, Stephen Greenberg (then of *DEGW*) and Bob Baxter (then of *Amalgam*) were selected to design a permanent gallery at London's IWM in collaboration with Suzanne Bardgett, the museum's own project director. The exhibition opened to the public in the summer of 2000. Meanwhile, a new northern outpost of the IWM was on the drawing board of Daniel Libeskind. The IWM North opened in 2002 on the quayside in Trafford Park, Manchester, housing a display on twentieth-century conflict master-planned by Stephen Greenberg and Bob Baxter, in collaboration with Libeskind.

26 The exhibition designers also felt a deep obligation to challenge the viewer, however, and warn of the ongoing dangers of evil, and more significantly, acquiescence with it.

27 P. Valery, in D. Libeskind, 'Berlin Alexanderplatz: Ideologies of Design and Planning and the Fate of Public Space', *The Journal of the International Institute*, 1995, vol. 3, no. 1, p. 1.

28 However, as the critic Andrew Mead points out, 'perhaps in the period since this design was chosen, we have been over-exposed to sloping walls and fractured forms; most obviously at Libeskind's Jewish Museum, Berlin. In conveying a sense that all is going awry, the nod here towards Deconstruction seems a little clichéd.' A. Mead, 'Horror of the Holocaust', *The Architects' Journal*, 28 Sept. 2000, p. 36.

29 Valery in Libeskind, 'Berlin Alexanderplatz', p. 1.

30 These are shelving installations containing small artefacts.

31 Philip Larkin on the classic formula for a novel.

32 S. Greenberg, 'The Vital Museum', in S. MacLeod (ed.) *Reshaping Museum Space: Architecture, Design, Exhibitions*, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, p. 230.

33 This symbolic device of the dead-end was famously used by Libeskind at the Jewish Museum, Berlin, and although quirky and thought-provoking, may now have become tired with overuse. See Mead, 'Horror of the Holocaust', p. 35.

34 This quotation by Edmund Burke (1729–97) appears on the wall in the final, contemplative space of the IWM *Holocaust Exhibition*.

35 'What has also happened in IWM North is that the architectural sequencing and the elements of the display are disconnected experiences, and they don't make a narrative arc – not surprising given the limited budgets and easily remedied in the years ahead' (Greenberg, 'The Vital Museum', p. 232).

36 Ibid., pp. 232–3.
37 Ibid., p. 230.
38 G. Bataille, 'Museum', in N. Leach (ed.) *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, London and New York: Routledge, 1997, p. 23.
39 For example, women's work in wartime, war reporting, and propaganda.
40 P. Murray and T. S. Dorsch, *Classical Literary Criticism*, London: Penguin Books, 2004.
41 This coding was implemented discreetly through a range of materials and lighting techniques, and provides atmospheric spaces.
42 This corresponds to Zellner's assertion that, 'through his creative participation . . . (the visitor's experience) . . . could transform into moments of interrogation, reflection, and moments of recognition' (Chapter 18, p. 203 in this volume).
43 Greenberg, 'The Vital Museum', p. 230.
44 R. Holub, 'Reception Theory: School of Constance', in R. Selden (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism Volume VIII From Formalism to Poststructuralism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 345.
45 The omniscient narrator is one of four perspectives from which literary narratives are traditionally told: the first person; the omniscient narrator; the limited omniscient narrator; and the objective point of view.
46 Greenberg, 'The Vital Museum', p. 232.
47 S. Greenberg, 'The Vital Museum', Paper for *Creative Space* Conference, University of Leicester, 2004, p. 1.

4

ATHENS, LONDON OR BILBAO?

Contested narratives of display in the Parthenon galleries of the British Museum

Christopher R. Marshall

Introduction: an old dispute meets a new museum

The June 2009 opening of the Acropolis Museum in Athens has added a new urgency to the now 200-year-old debate surrounding the Parthenon sculptures.[1] The British Museum's pre-emptive response to this was posted online in the months prior to the Acropolis Museum's opening. At that stage, the Trustees made their position clear, noting:

> the New Acropolis Museum . . . will allow the Parthenon sculptures that are in Athens to be appreciated against the backdrop of ancient Greek and Athenian history. The new museum, however, does not alter the Trustees' view that the sculptures are part of everyone's shared heritage and transcend cultural boundaries.[2]

This said, the tone of those opposed to the British Museum's retention of the Parthenon sculptures has certainly changed as a result of the new museum. The museum's architect, Bernard Tschumi, acknowledges this, for example, by emphasizing the commission's 'unstated mandate . . . to facilitate the reunification of the Parthenon Frieze, when half of it is still on display at the British Museum in London'.[3] His choice of words is significant in signalling a shift in rhetoric away from an earlier emphasis on restitution or cultural repatriation to what is now referred to as the sculptures' desired 'reunification' following the new museum's inauguration.[4]

It is perhaps surprising, then, given these ongoing debates, how little attention has been paid to the earlier deliberations surrounding the creation of the sculptures' current display within the British Museum. The vast gallery sequence created in the 1930s by the American architect John Russell Pope (1874–1937), in collaboration with his patron, the art dealer and philanthropist Joseph Duveen (1869–1939), has come to stand as a paradigmatic expression of the museum as temple[5] (Plate 4.1). Yet, as this chapter will demonstrate, beneath its apparent serenity lies a contentious design process that is fascinating to study for what it reveals about the many alternative visions projected for the Parthenon galleries in the past. It also highlights the unique challenges involved in displaying the sculptures: challenges that remain relevant today in relation to the parallel universe created for them in Athens.

Art or archaeology? Opening discussions regarding the sculptures' display

The impetus for the debates concerning how best to modernize the Parthenon displays was the offer made by Duveen in October 1928 to finance the construction of a new purpose-built gallery for them. His offer formed part of an extraordinarily ambitious programme of philanthropy that involved substantial gifts on his part for redevelopment projects undertaken simultaneously at the National Portrait Gallery (1928–33), the National Gallery (1928–30) and the Tate (1927–37).[6] This had been triggered, in turn, by the 1928 Royal Commission on National Museums and Galleries that had been chaired by Duveen's close friend and associate, Sir Edgar Vincent, first Viscount d'Abernon.[7] From the tenor of Duveen's letter of offer, it is clear that a new Parthenon display held a special place in his priorities:

> I offer, in addition, adequate funds to the British Museum to enable them to provide a dignified and artistic setting for the incomparable splendour of the Elgin marbles and the Nereid statues; I have long felt that our national honour and our artistic prestige in the world are concerned to show that we appreciate our good fortune in the possession of such masterpieces by freeing them from overcrowding and displaying them in suitable relief.[8]

Duveen's sentiments echoed a growing view in favour of a more aesthetic approach to exhibiting the sculptures.[9] One of its leading adherents was Sir John Davidson Beazley, Professor of Classical Archaeology and Art, at Oxford University, who together with Donald Robertson, Professor of Greek at Cambridge and Bernard Ashmole, Professor of Archaeology at London University, published a detailed articulation of this position in a privately printed pamphlet dated September 1929.[10] This report argued against the museum's emphasis on supplementing the marbles with casts and other didactic materials (Figure 4.1). It advocated the removal of

FIGURE 4.1   British Museum, Elgin Gallery, London, 1923. Photo: British Museum. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

'illustrative material, an unsightly litter of models, casts, photographs, drawings, picture-post-cards and guide-books, such as would not be tolerated, for instance, in the National Gallery'.[11] Equally influential within the museum itself, although less known today, are a further three unpublished assessments drawn up during the period. In late 1929, a report was prepared by John Forsdyke, then Assistant Keeper of Greek and Roman Antiquities, and soon to become Keeper (1932–36) and Director and Principal Librarian of the museum (1936–50).[12] In October 1929, another report was prepared by Theodore Fyfe, Professor of Architecture at Cambridge University.[13] This was followed by yet another report prepared by Arthur Hamilton Smith, former Keeper of Greek and Roman Antiquities, and author of one of the fundamental studies of the sculptures of the period.[14]

The reports highlight the authors' detailed awareness of the unique display challenges posed by the sculptures. All were in agreement firstly concerning the need to separate the frieze, metopes and pediments, which were crowded together in Smirke's galleries. Regarding the pediment sculptures, for example, the Beazley report noted: 'The Pediment statues have not a clear background, because the Frieze (again for want of space) runs behind them'. All stressed the particular challenges to display caused by the fragmentary nature of the pediments. Forsdyke commented:

> The West Pediment . . . is represented here by fragmentary remains of 7 [figures], only 2 of which have aesthetic significance (Illissos and the torso of Iris). Such mutilated remains will not bear distant display. In regard to their original setting and to their surviving qualities of design and style they must be given ample lateral space, and must not be cramped between close side walls. Positions against the longer walls of a large gallery are therefore indicated.

Forsdyke's point about what he terms lateral space became a recurrent theme of the discussions. This partly reflected the 100-year-old precedent of exhibiting the pediments along the middle of the Smirke Galleries, an emphasis that had certain advantages such as allowing the end sculptures to be appreciated more fully in the round than would otherwise have been the case. Fyfe went further, noting:

> The placing of the sculpture of the two pediments at each end of a room not very much exceeding them in width, though in conformity with the original positions of the pediments as end gables to a long building, is an arrangement which would be totally destructive of the effect of the statuary. In view of their original setting in the open air, it is all-important that there should be no obvious limitations to lateral spaciousness in a museum setting.

The metopes also posed challenges. Although hung relatively high so as to convey their original position on the external face of the Parthenon's epistyle they had nonetheless been placed, according to all the reports, too high and in too close proximity to the frieze – which was originally separate to them running along the outside of the temple cella and porches and viewed in the gap between the temple wall and the external columns. As the Beazley report pointed out: 'The Metopes are out of sight, being set (presumably for want of wall space) above the Frieze, where their design is distorted and their detail invisible.' Forsdyke agreed, noting that the metopes

were formerly set on the eye-level in the Elgin Room, and were doubtless relegated to their present height in order to make room for the reconstitution of the Frieze in plaster. Some of the Metopes now exhibited are casts, and where these are coloured to match the originals, it is not possible to see which is which . . . Their mixture of free sculpture and relief makes the Metopes peculiarly unsuitable for a position above the eye, since their design is distorted by foreshortening and the projecting parts mask the background. Their present impression is a line of horses' bellies.

The issue of the extent to which the sculptures should be supplemented by casts was, of course, a flashpoint for fundamental differences between the pre-existing policy of a contextualizing archaeological display versus the growing sentiment in favour of a more aesthetic emphasis. In his report, for example, Smith estimated that the then current display comprised only 60 per cent originals interspersed with casts.[15]

As regards the frieze, Fyfe agreed with the others in stressing the importance of its being separated from the other sculptures:

> [I]t is essential that the frieze should be exhibited by itself, continuously at eye level in one section or compartment of a long gallery, having no other exhibits in that section; and that the metopes and pediment groups (as the purely external sculpture of the Parthenon) should be associated together independently, and also at eye level, in the other section of the gallery.

This comment touches on the second major problem confronting any discussion surrounding the sculptures' redisplay. From a contextual perspective, the metopes and frieze should be positioned on the outside walls of a gallery as a band running along its external perimeter. The natural orientation of a gallery, however, runs counter to this, and so the inclination is, rather, to display the works in a reverse sense on a gallery's internal walls. Pope followed Smirke in adopting a conventional gallery arrangement and so never did address this central discrepancy between the sculptures' original setting and their subsequent museological presentation. One of the reports, though, did attempt to tackle this. Forsdyke proposed the ingenious solution of creating a room within a gallery room and then to run a cast version of the frieze along the outside walls of this inset internal room (Figure 4.2). This would have offered the best of both worlds, at least as regards this issue, since it would have enabled visitors to view the fragmentary originals of the frieze within the conventional parameters of the inset gallery, but then would have given them the opportunity to view a complete cast sequence of it running along the room's external walls.

Competitors for a new Acropolis: Forsdyke versus Allison versus Pope

The unadorned practicality of Forsdyke's scheme did nothing to address the central issue of the desire to produce a suitably elevated architectural setting. It was inevitable that Duveen, with his highly advanced sense of the importance of appearance, would ignore Forsdyke's recommendations and turn, instead, to more fully articulated architectural presentations. The first group of these was produced by Sir Richard Allison, who, from 1914, had been chief architect for the Office of Works. This was an influential position and from the early documentation it seems that Allison considered himself, at least initially, as the commission's favoured choice.
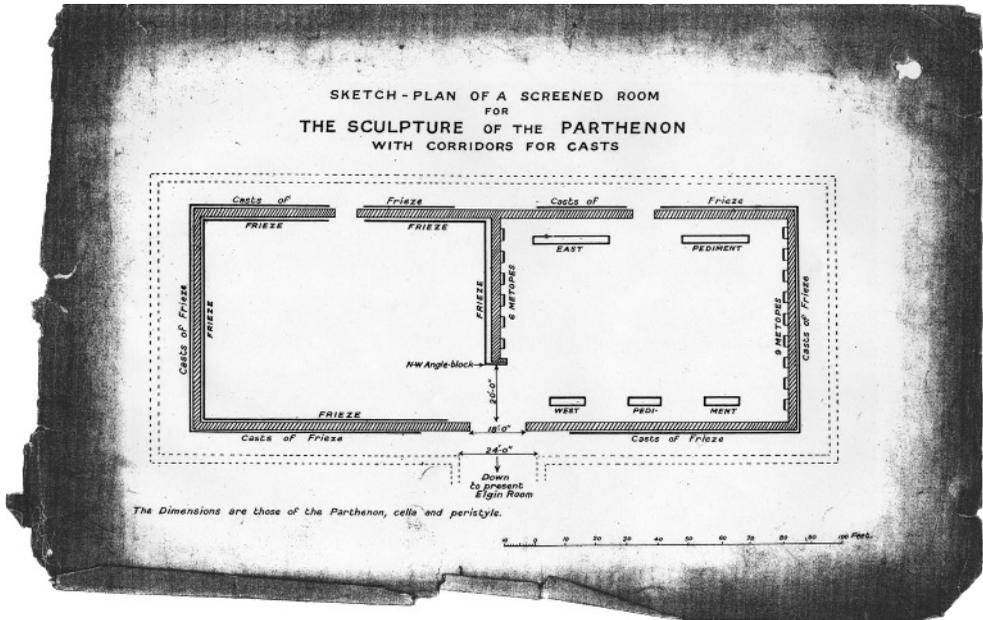
FIGURE 4.2 Edgar John Forsdyke, sketch–plan of a screened room for the sculpture of the Parthenon, late 1929. Photo: British Museum. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

He must have felt reasonably confident since, in addition to his close working relationship with many of the individuals involved in the project by virtue of his position at the Office, he had also completed a number of museum projects, including the Science Museum (1919–28), as well as being in communication with Duveen regarding his work on the Duveen Wing of the National Portrait Gallery.

Allison's schemes – which are dated May 1929 – project an impossibly grandiose sequence of galleries for the sculptures (Figure 4.3). They are so grandiloquent, in fact, that they are still often credited erroneously to Pope, who is commonly identified as the author of all the early schemes.[16] This cannot be, however, since the plans are clearly inscribed HMOW, are specifically referred to in Allison's correspondence, and by the fact that Pope did not become directly involved in the project until the year's end. Another telltale feature is the somewhat unresolved clash they present of fresh design solutions, combined with an emphasis on the British Museum's pre-existing display traditions. This is evident in such features as the designs' continued emphasis on adding casts and architectural elements to the works together with the desire to position the pediments laterally within the room rather than at the end as was ultimately adopted, and as Allison himself proposed in a variant to his scheme.

It was clear from the outset, though, that Duveen had his mind set on an external candidate who was just then completing work for prestigious American museums, where so many of Duveen's clients were based. When Pope eventually did produce his first presentation drawings for the project in early 1930, however, he was met with a barrage of criticism from the British Museum's Director and Trustees with whom he and Duveen would do battle endlessly over the next five years. Pope's initial proposal well demonstrates the complexities involved, mainly by virtue of the extent to which it ignores (or, more likely, remains unaware of) the
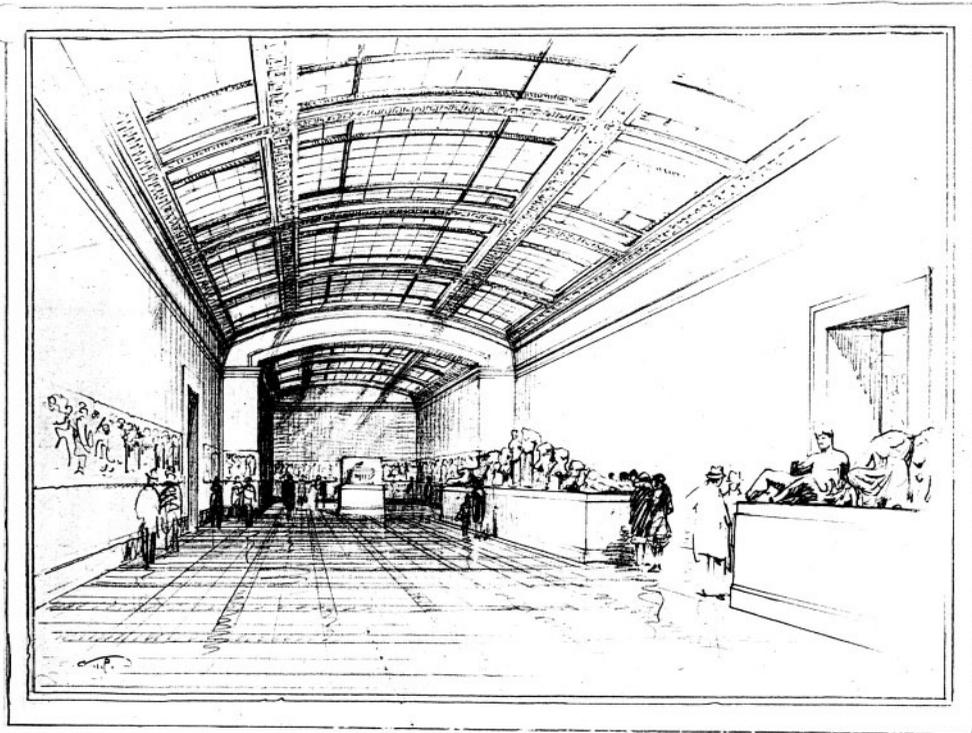
q May 1929

FIGURE 4.3   Richard Allison, proposal for new Parthenon Sculpture gallery, May 1929. Photo: British Museum. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

detailed recommendations contained in the earlier reports (Figure 4.4). His initial design, for example, positioned the frieze above eye level and thus too high in the opinion of all those involved. It also set the frieze into the wall in elaborate frames, an emphasis that went against the Trustees' desire to keep the frames and decoration as unobtrusive as possible. This approach also created the problem of how to incorporate the turning or corner reliefs that would otherwise have been obscured if set into frames. The metopes were also too high and had to be lowered in subsequent designs. The Trustees' greatest disapproval however, was reserved for Pope's initial treatment of the East pediment sculptures. This was judged singularly deficient in that it was considered too theatrical and perceived as creating the misleading impression of a complete and undamaged pediment, whereas in reality the East pediment preserves only the two angle pediments with a forty-foot gap of missing sculpture in between.

Another point of contention concerned Pope's desire to raise the pediment sculptures above eye level at the top of a flight of steps placed at either end of the gallery. Pope did this, of course, to convey the pediments' original position high on the temple. Writing in response to this project in March 1931, the recently appointed Director and Chief Librarian George F. Hill articulated a detailed series of objections to Pope's first stage of designs. His letter, with its barely restrained tone of hostility, captures well the consistently strained relations between
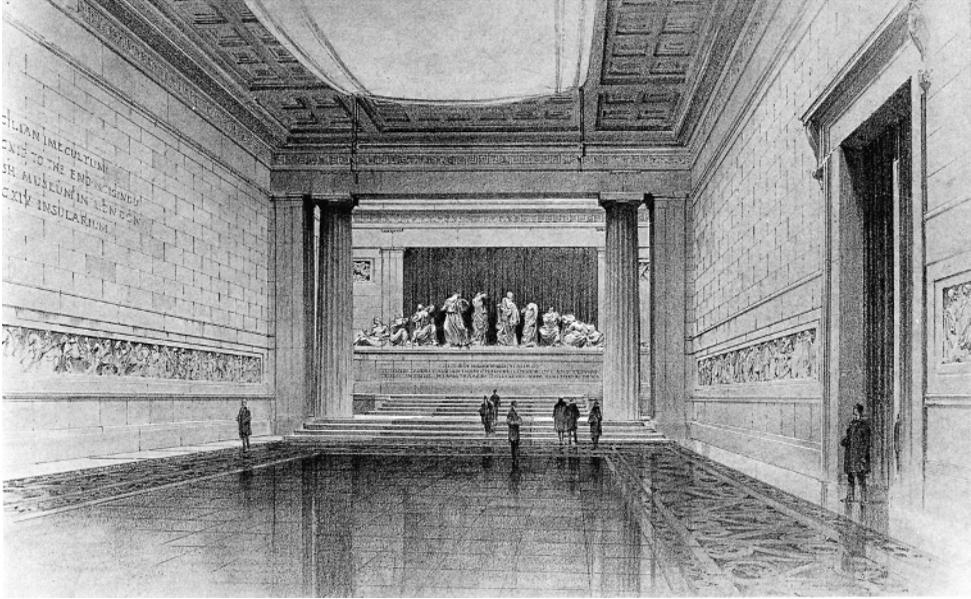
FIGURE 4.4 John Russell Pope, proposal for new Parthenon Sculpture gallery, early 1930s. Photo: British Museum. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

the relative outsiders of Duveen and Pope and the tightly knit donnish world of the British Museum's Trustees and their Oxbridge advisers. As far as Hill was concerned, the pedimental sculptures were no more than 'disjected fragments', and it would be misleading to present them as isolated and aestheticized elements:

> So far as the expert staff of the Museum is concerned (and the leading English archae-ologists are in agreement with them) you ought, I think, to know that it has never 'been found most essential to raise the pediments so that they can be seen from a distance'. In fact, to deal thus with the disjected fragments, which are all that remains of the pedi-mental sculptures, is to give a misleading presentation of the facts, which will meet with universal disapprobation among archaeologists in England and on the European conti-nent. If the pediments were complete, your point of view would perhaps be justified. I need hardly labour this point, since it has already been observed to you that the theatri-cal effect of your arrangement, with staple and curtain, would impair the dignity of the sculpture, and it has been represented how unfortunate was the proposal to combine the fragments from the angles of a pediment on a single plinth and stage them as if they represented the complete composition.[17]

Undaunted by these criticisms, Pope and Duveen revised their plans and responded point by point to the Trustees' objections. After a further year of negotiations Pope did eventually reach a state of revision that incorporated many of the criticisms, although the final agreed-upon form of the galleries still represented a major compromise as far as the Trustees were concerned.

London versus Athens: the new Acropolis Museum in light of the earlier debates

Before discussing the narratives evoked by Pope's galleries as built, it is worthwhile consider-ing how the new Acropolis Museum compares with the recommendations contained in the previously discussed reports.[18] A defining feature of the Acropolis Museum is its emphasis on spatially differentiating the pediments, metopes and frieze in a manner that reflects more accu-rately the Parthenon's original context (Figure 4.5). The decision to display them all together in the same space nonetheless creates additional problems that are arguably not fully resolved in the new arrangement. The metopes, for example, are too high (at least as far as the earlier reports are concerned) and are also not correctly positioned relative to the pediments – which should be above them, if one were seeking architectural accuracy, which the installation seems in other respects to want to convey. Forsdyke's complaint, for example, that the old British Museum installation of the metopes high on the walls reduced their visual impact to 'a line of horses' bellies' seems equally apposite to the new Acropolis Museum display.

Yet more problematic from the perspective of the early reports, is the treatment of the pediments. Looking at their current installation one is reminded of the fundamental impor-tance of the arguments raised in all the reports concerning the need to separate the pediments visually and spatially from the other sculptures and to provide them with a clear and unim-peded background against which to be viewed. At the new Acropolis Museum this does not occur since the pediments are interrupted on one side by the frieze and metopes and on the other by views from outside.

FIGURE 4.5 Acropolis Museum, Parthenon Sculpture Galleries, Athens. Photo: C. R. Marshall. © Acropolis Museum.

The frieze, on the other hand, is arguably the most successful element of the new display. Its presentation at Athens creates for the first time in 200 years a complete reconstruction that also accurately reflects the frieze's original positioning as an external band running along the outer wall of the temple. This installation is not, however, without its problems. In particular it creates the issue of its working against the viewer's ability (or we should perhaps rather say visual patience and attentiveness) to differentiate between originals and casts, thereby losing an awareness of the significance of key originals on display. This underscores the continued validity of Forsdyke's arguments regarding the need to separate casts from the originals and the desirability of preserving the complete sequencing of the frieze outside the galleries at the level of casts. If this were to be done in the manner of Forsdyke's report, it would entail removing the original components of the frieze remaining at Athens in order to isolate them in a more appropriately emphatic, dedicated display setting – perhaps even in the gallery space resting within the externally facing pavilion display areas that run along the outside of the third floor of the museum.

The design aesthetic of the new Acropolis Museum – with its emphasis on polished, chrome surfaces and a sleek, minimalist appearance – presents itself as a contemporary break with the earlier display narratives found in London. In point of fact, though, this masks an arguably more retrospective emphasis that returns the debate back to the more contextualising archaeological approach favoured by the British Museum prior to Pope's intervention. This approach may well carry certain advantages when applied in Athens. The Acropolis Museum is, after all, fundamentally concerned with the site-specific archaeology of ancient Athens and it rises over the site of the excavation of the Makriyianni settlement dating from the Archaic to the early Christian periods. We should not forget, moreover, the undeniable political message that is conveyed by combining the original sculptures still in Athens with casts indicating the location of other portions in London and elsewhere.

For all this, though, the point remains that the idea of being able to fully integrate the sculptures – or reunify them as those in favour of this position would put it – into a seamless whole represents something of an unattainable chimera. If not quite the 'disjected fragments' of Hill's evaluation, the sculptures are now incontrovertibly historically discontinuous. They have been appreciated as fragments for the past two centuries and they would remain as shattered pieces of a giant, eternally incomplete sculptural jigsaw even if it were possible to relocate all the remaining pieces back to Athens. The idea of turning back the clock to a notional time in a now distant past where the sculptures could be made complete once more is a powerful, yet no less utopian and ultimately illusory claim, than the British Museum's own contention that it is qualified to speak on behalf of the whole of humanity and retain the sculptures for the benefit of global citizens the world over.[19]

Temple versus pavilion: the competing ideologies of Pope's and Tschumi's museums

These critiques of the Acropolis Museum, valid though they may well be, nonetheless ignore a more fundamental point regarding the real strength of the Athens installations. The principal emphasis of Tschumi's design seems, rather, to lie in a different direction. Its aim is not so much to create an environment for appreciating individual sculptural elements in positions of relative autonomy. Rather, the most powerful and effective aspect of the new Acropolis display is to create a total integrated architectural environment for the sculpture that is then

set up in direct dialectical relation to the Parthenon on the Acropolis Hill. In this sense, it is important to note the degree to which Tschumi's Parthenon galleries differ from the framing of the collections on the other two levels of the museum. Unlike the sculptures elsewhere, the Acropolis galleries have been constructed transparently with a floating pavilion on the top floor that acts as a frame for the Parthenon that is always present in the narratives created by the displays not only implicitly but also visually, on the other side of the glass (Figure 4.6).

Of course, the ideological intention behind this is to set up the very powerful political argument that this transparent gallery, bathed in Attic light and in direct communication with the Acropolis' earlier remains in the galleries below and with the Parthenon above, is now able to stake a claim as the sculptures' natural repository in a way that the closed, introspective emphasis of the British Museum's displays could never achieve. As the Athenian architect and academic Yannis Aesopos has noted, the museum manifests in this sense a 'clearly political dimension': 'Decades-long diplomatic efforts having failed, contemporary architecture now seems to represent the last chance for a "reunification" of the Parthenon sculptures'.[20]

It is to this aspect of the rhetorical function of museum architecture as a means of framing objects so as to convey powerful ideological statements about the institution itself that I want to return now in the context of a brief comparison between the Acropolis Museum and Pope's own contribution to the rhetorical positioning of the Parthenon sculptures within the British Museum. Pope was, of course, highly aware of the rhetorical power of architecture and his concern to exploit this dimension led to some of his most intractable debates with

FIGURE 4.6   Acropolis Museum, Parthenon Sculpture Galleries, Athens. View of the Parthenon. Photo: C. R. Marshall. © Acropolis Museum.

the Trustees. One key design element, for example, on which he was not prepared to compromise, was his insistence on preceding the galleries with two smaller anterooms, or saloons. These were problematic from the Trustees' perspective because Pope's initial plans had them cutting into Smirke's old Parthenon galleries, which were now to be used for the Nereid and other displays, from which they also took away potential natural lighting.

Pope nevertheless insisted on retaining these antechambers even to the extent of revising his entire plan in May 1931 so that he could continue to incorporate them while answering the Trustees' criticisms about lighting. His solution was to narrow the dimensions of the central gallery in order to allow room for the incorporation of extra space for the anterooms on the right, or east side facing the existing British Museum galleries, thereby obviating the need to cut into Smirke's galleries. Since his new gallery design was substantially longer than the existing galleries, this then left him with extra space on each end of the galleries which he proposed opening out so as to create a wider room at either end that he could use to incorporate the full sweep of the pediments and metopes behind them. The notes from a meeting on 8 May 1931 drawn up by the Chairman of the Trustees' sub-committee in charge of overseeing the commission, Lord Crawford, clarify Pope's thinking:

1. Lobby – Pope says that an ante-room is desirable to increase the axial value of the new room, to make a preparation, to adjust the mind to the Elgin Room, and he considers it a fundamental of the scheme . . .

8. The Heighth [*sic*] of the Room in relation to the New Buildings. On this Pope practically announced a new scheme. He suggests though quite informally and without committing himself, that the Room should be shaped like a dumb-bell or steel rail – that is to say narrowing the central Frieze gallery, and broadening the two Terminal galleries. This he hopes will permit of two substantial changes,-

    (a) the Atrium shall be a long-shaped gallery to the west of the existing Elgin Room and therefore will not destroy the latter – it will give the visitor the pause to which Pope attaches so much importance:

    (b) reducing the breadth of the central new Elgin Room will permit the height to be reduced . . .[21]

The idea of carefully staging the visitor's response to the sculptures even before he or she actually reached them was, thus, of paramount importance to Pope. The transition from the small anterooms to the main galleries certainly achieves this by channelling the visitor firstly into the anterooms and then opening out the space significantly in a way that concomitantly raises the visitor's expectations of the importance of the giant room that he or she is entering. This impression is further heightened by virtue of the fact that the Parthenon galleries are significantly larger and more colossally proportioned than the other galleries of the museum.

This proved to be the final obstacle to the Trustees, accustomed as they were to the relative modesty of the original galleries by Robert and Sydney Smirke. The palatial scale of Pope's design was without precedent at the museum. It confronted the Trustees significantly, although they were finally forced to relent on this in the face of Duveen's and Pope's continued resolve to give ground on many of their detailed objections but not on the fundamental issue of scale and overall treatment. The tipping point to the debate was perceptively articulated by Gilbert Murray (Professor of Greek, Oxford University) noting in a letter to the

Director of 8 May 1931 his opinion that they should adopt a softer line with Pope and accept his designs, notwithstanding the problems they still experienced in coming to terms with them. Murray's argument was that they had already gone too far in accepting the essential terms of Duveen's offer at the outset to reject the fundamental design at this stage, a perception that finally held ground and led to the designs being accepted subject to further modification on matters of detail:

> I think the real point which we all feel, and which Peers [Sir Charles Reed Peers, Trustee since 1933] put so well and tactfully, is that the proposed room, though not in any way over-ornate or frivolous, is on a palatial scale and out of tone with the rest of the Museum. That is the real problem, and I almost think that we have already committed ourselves to something of the sort from the moment when we agreed to have a special room built for the Elgin Marbles. I think Duveen's idea, which we in principle accepted, was to treat the Marbles as something exceptional, and to build a sort of shrine for them, taking them completely out of the ordinary series of galleries, as they now are.[22]

Conclusion: London, Athens or Bilbao? The Parthenon galleries and contemporary museum architecture

So it was that the British Museum finally got the palatial shrine that its patron and architect had always intended but that the Trustees had not anticipated. Considering its style as completed, one is struck by the still powerfully imposing impression that it conveys of a totally integrated architectural/sculptural environment. In this sense it is not so different from Tschumi's design in that both seek to match the daunting precedent set by the sculptures' original setting by creating powerfully projective architectural contexts for them in a contemporary museological format. The difference between them, though, lies in the extent to which Tschumi's operates as a transparent pavilion, whereas Pope's scheme functions in an opposite sense as the inner sanctum of an imposing yet insular temple. The design is also noteworthy for manifesting Pope's unique blend of scrupulously academic neo-classicism combined with an equal emphasis on an incipient modernism that acts to simplify forms, reduce detailing and exaggerate the abstract purity of the colossally scaled galleries.

The originality of this approach is made clearer if we consider how it diverges from other recently installed sculpture gallery commissions that Pope and Duveen studied in their deliberations for the project. On the one hand, it is clear that Pope chose to eschew the more fussily detailed archaeological emphasis in the Metropolitan Museum's Greek and Roman antiquities galleries, designed by McKim, Mead and White from 1912 but not completed until 1939.[23] At the same time, Pope has also differentiated his work from the aggressively modernist – even proto white cube – New Objectivity style adopted by Ludwig Hoffmann in his 1930 redesign of the Pergamon Altar room in the Pergamon Museum, Berlin, which was another important high-profile project from the period.[24]

The result is the creation of a powerful signature style – assuredly traditional yet strikingly modern within its own frame of reference. Pope extended this style further across the developing global reach of the commissions that he undertook elsewhere during this period. Thus similar articulations are to be found in the Baltimore Museum of Art, through to the Tate Gallery (likewise designed for Duveen) and on to his last project of the National Gallery of Art, Washington.[25] In the final years prior to his death in 1938, then, Pope was operating very

much as the prototype for the high-profile global museum architects of today. Common to all these architects, and once again Pope seems to have foreshadowed the trend, is the decision to reject the supposed neutrality of the white cube gallery in favour of a more strongly assertive architectonic emphasis that welds the stylistic personality of the architect to the corporate identity of the museum.

In the case of Pope at the British Museum, his assertively declarative late neo-classical framing of the Parthenon sculptures created the obvious association that the new gallery was to be viewed as the inevitable inheritor of the tradition of the Western appreciation of Classical Greek culture as derived ultimately from the archetypal image of the Parthenon itself. In his other museum projects, Pope was only able to make this connection in a general sense. In the British Museum, however, he was given the unique opportunity of being able to graft his vision of the museum as temple directly onto the stones of the Parthenon itself. He did this, in particular, by inserting into the corners of the galleries a series of four precisely proportioned replicas of the Parthenon's Doric columns. The result is, as we have seen, one of the most definitive expressions of the museum as temple. Pope was only able to achieve this, though, because his vision built, in turn, on the classicizing aspirations underpinning the British Museum's history more generally since at least the time of Smirke's initial designs 100 years earlier. It is an attitude that is central, for example, to the sentiments of the 1928 Beazley report mentioned earlier that notes by way of conclusion:

> The Elgin room is not an ordinary room in an ordinary museum . . . it is one of the central places of earth . . . We are given an opportunity of proving that we are worthy of our trust: that we are conscious of our duty to the works themselves, and to the noble civilization, mother of our own, that produced them . . .

In establishing this architectural link Pope created a powerful argument in support of the British Museum's case for retaining the Parthenon sculptures on the basis of its long-standing classical inheritance. As we have seen, Tschumi drew on the same tradition to create a counter claim that is almost the reverse of Pope's – an externally projecting 'daughter' of the Parthenon framed in polemical opposition to the now aged and inward-looking son residing in the inner sanctum of Pope's Parthenon analogy. It will be fascinating, then, to follow the course of these two competing narratives of architecture, space and ownership in the years to come.

Notes

1 See J. H. Merryman, *Thinking about the Elgin Marbles: critical essays on cultural property, art, and law*, The Hague: Kluwer Law International, 2000; C. Hitchens, *The Parthenon Marbles: the case for reunification*, London: Verso, 2008.
2 British Museum, 'The Parthenon Sculptures: the position of the Trustees of the British Museum'. Online. Available at: www.britishmuseum.org/the_museum/news_and_press_releases/statements/the_parthenon_sculptures/parthenon_-_trustees_statement.aspx. Accessed 24 August 2010.
3 B. Tschumi, 'Conceptualizing Context', in Bernard Tschumi Architects (ed.) *The New Acropolis Museum*, New York: Skira Rizzoli, 2009, p. 82.
4 See the postings of The International Association for the Reunification of the Parthenon Sculptures. Online. Available at: www.parthenoninternational.org. Accessed 24 August 2010.
5 For previous analyses see I. Jenkins, *Archaeologists and Aesthetes in the Sculpture Galleries of the British Museum 1800–1939*, London: British Museum Press, 1992, pp. 225–29; S. McLeod Bedford, *John Russell Pope: architect of empire*, New York: Rizzoli, 1998, pp. 179–85; M. Caygill and C. Date, *Building the British Museum*, London: British Museum Press, 1999, pp. 64–65; D. M. Wilson, *The*

British Museum: a history, London: British Museum Press, 2002, pp. 240–42; E. Kehoe, 'Working Hard at Giving it Away: Lord Duveen, the British Museum and the Elgin Marbles', *Historical Research*, 77/198, 2004: 503–19.

6 For the Tate Gallery see C. R. Marshall, '"The Finest Sculpture Gallery in the World!": the rise and fall – and rise again – of the Duveen Sculpture Galleries at Tate Britain', in C. R. Marshall (ed.) *Sculpture and the Museum*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011, pp. 177–95.

7 D'Abernon subsequently played a key role as a go-between negotiating with Duveen and the British Museum Trustees.

8 Joseph Duveen to Lord d'Abernon cit. *The Times*, 11 October 1928, p. 10.

9 Jenkins, *Archaeologists and Aesthetes*, pp. 221–29.

10 For background to the report see Kehoe, 'Working Hard at Giving it Away', pp. 504–06.

11 J. Davidson Beazley, D. Robertson and B. Ashmole, *Suggestions for the new exhibition of the sculptures of the Parthenon*, privately printed, London, September 1929, no pagination, which is the source for all subsequent references to Beazley cited in this chapter.

12 British Museum, Central Archives (hereafter B.M., C.A.), CE103 (MD 25 vol. IA), Edgar John Forsdyke, 'Notes on Exhibition of the Sculptures of the Parthenon', undated, but datable by internal evidence to late 1929, prior to October 1929, subsequently supplemented by a further report, 'Notes on Rearrangement of Sculpture Galleries Involved by the New Parthenon Room', dated 10 June 1931.

13 B.M., C.A., CE103 (MD 25 vol. IA), Theodore Fyfe, 'The New Elgin Room', dated October 1929.

14 A. Hamilton Smith, *Memorandum on the Proposed New Elgin Room*, privately printed and dated 24 October 1930. For discussion see Jenkins, *Archaeologists and Aesthetes*, p. 226.

15 Ibid.

16 E.g. see Wilson, *The British Museum*, plate 26 and p. 241.

17 B.M., C.A., CE103 (MD 25 vol. IB), George F. Hill to John Russell Pope, letter dated March 1931.

18 For the museum's planning and design see Tschumi, *The New Acropolis Museum*.

19 For this position, see N. MacGregor, 'Global Collections for Global Cities', in J. Anderson (ed.) *Crossing Cultures: conflict, migration and convergence*, *The Proceedings of the 32nd International Congress in the History of Art*, Melbourne: Miegunyah Press, 2009, pp. 65–70.

20 Y. Aesopos, 'The New Acropolis Museum: re-making the collective', in Tschumi, *The New Acropolis Museum*, p. 56.

21 B.M., C.A., CE103 (MD 25 vol. 1B), Lord Crawford (in Chair), 'Elgin Room: Conversation at British Museum, 5 May, 1931', unpaginated.

22 B.M., C.A., CE103 (MD 25 vol. IB), Letter from Gilbert Murray to George F. Hill, 6 May 1931.

23 C. A. Picon, 'A History of the Department of Greek and Roman Art', in C. A. Picon *et al.*, *Art of the Classical World in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York and New Haven: The Metropolitan Museum in association with Yale University Press, 2007, pp. 9–13.

24 N. Bernau, *Museum Island Berlin*, Berlin: Stadtwandel Verlag, 2006, pp. 50–53.

25 For Pope's other museum commissions see Bedford, *John Russell Pope*, pp. 170–203.

5

THIS MAGICAL PLACE

The making of Yorkshire Sculpture Park and the politics of landscape, art and narrative

Suzanne MacLeod

Yorkshire Sculpture Park, or YSP, the first permanent open-air gallery of sculpture in the UK, sits in the beautiful historic landscape of the Bretton Estate in West Yorkshire. Often described as 'magical' or 'other worldly', the park has a reputation for an unfettered, relaxed and sensory approach to the display and experience of art which attracts large numbers of school groups, SEN (special educational needs) groups, students and teachers as well as a broader public.[1] The park has an important position in the UK as a major visitor attraction and also in Yorkshire as part of a growing critical mass of sculpture galleries and centres for the study of sculpture.[2] The park now employs more than 100 people and has added considerably to the cultural and economic life of Yorkshire, a region often described as 'the cradle of modern sculpture' for its famous sons and daughters who have gone on to develop successful careers as sculptors, most notably Barbara Hepworth and Henry Moore.[3] The impact of the park is also much wider than the Yorkshire region; it attracts 300,000 visitors from across the UK annually and the recent Memory Project illustrates its impact on the lives of individuals.[4] The memories of visitors collected through the project are highly emotive and charged with stories of human relationships and dependencies; woven into these very personal narratives are references to the experience of art, sometimes specific and sometimes more open and reflective. Staff at the park advise on the display and installation of sculpture to galleries around the world and can talk eloquently about their process; the art as well as the pragmatics of placing sculpture outdoors. For artists, an exhibition at YSP marks a certain level of achievement and will often be the largest and most important exhibition in their career. Despite all of this activity – the world-class artists, the memorable installations, the visitor figures and the feedback – YSP has occupied a position at the periphery in the networks of established institutions for the display, study and experience of sculpture, often producing ambivalent or even negative responses from art professionals for its focus on an enjoyable, relaxed and accessible open-air experience. As the Head of Programme at YSP states of its position in the world of contemporary art curation, 'We are both there and not there'.[5]

With all this in mind, this chapter traces the physical evolution of YSP over its 35-year history with a particular emphasis on its mission-driven development and vision of visitor experience. Partly held up as an example of incredible resolve in a world of career and

icon making, the history is intended to enable an exploration of a specific example of museum making as a route to developing a broader understanding of the relations between the politics of museum space, the narratives embedded in designed forms and, importantly, perception and use. The chapter is informed by a body of work which recognizes built forms as autobiographical, the physical evidence of social relations embedded with stories of their makers' values and beliefs.[6] If, as this volume suggests, we are essentially narrative beings reaching out into the world and constructing stories about ourselves through our experiences in space, so we shape our physical environment as a route to making manifest our vision of the world and our own place within it. What Pallasmaa refers to as 'the continuum between our inner and outer landscapes' suggests the ways in which we are entwined in the physical world and enables a recognition of use – the occupation of 'synthetic landscapes' – as active in the production of space. This occupation is itself shaped to a great extent by our perception of the 'affordances' or potential for social use and experience inscribed into built forms.[7] It is these productive relations between the politics of making museums, built forms, our perception of them and the uses to which they are put – so often missing from discussions of museum architecture and design – which this chapter sets out to explore.

In Yorkshire, the particular story of museum making that emerges through this analysis is one that can be characterized as a delicate negotiation of both a politics of landscape and a politics of art and its experience. The chapter explores these various politics to reveal a story of making based on a series of negotiations; of the boundaries of land and its ownership, of the boundaries of sculpture's display and experience and, more recently, of the tension between commerce and mission. Drawing on archival research, exhibition and site analysis as well as a series of interviews with key individuals actively involved in the making of YSP since 1977, the chapter explores the socialist origins of the sculpture park before going on to explore two key battles: the first for the right to exist at Bretton; and the second for recognition in the arts establishment. It is argued that these two sets of negotiations have had a significant impact on the shaping of YSP and the stories embedded in its built forms, a process of change which now necessitates a delicate balancing act if the park is to continue to encourage a physical and emotional as well as intellectual encounter with sculpture. Finally, some of the recent changes of use at Bretton are discussed in order to expose the ongoing nature of this making. The chapter ends with a consideration of the future of YSP as a luxury property developer moves into the eighteenth-century Palladian Hall at the literal and historical heart of the Bretton landscape.

The making of a landscape and a philosophy

Yorkshire Sculpture Park is sited in the grounds of what was Bretton Estate, a private estate with a history dating back at least to the thirteenth century but developed as we see it today by Sir William Wentworth and his descendants over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[8] By the middle decades of the twentieth century, the family began to sell off land and in 1948 the estate was broken up. The landscape at Bretton today is a rich and multi-layered environment riddled with the physical remnants of its past uses and suggestive of the stories of those who have inhabited and shaped the site over the last 300 years. The Palladian mansion built in 1720, the 'Capability Brown-style' parkland and lakes designed by Richard Woods around 60 years later as well as the rugged Country Park and distant farmland, are the most visible features of the site, but the landscape is scattered with bridges, grottos, the remnants of a menagerie, a boat house, a chapel and a series of buildings added from 1948

onwards, including the new visitor centre and underground gallery added by YSP in 2002 and 2005, respectively (Figures 5.1–5.3, Plates 5.1 and 5.2). The larger estate has now been reunified by YSP through a complex story of ownership and management.

In 1948, the new owner of the hall and the immediate parkland was West Riding County Council who purchased it as the home of a new teacher training college in arts education. The West Riding was at this time investing in teacher training under its influential Head of

FIGURE 5.1 Map of Yorkshire Sculpture Park. The map shows the park today with its main entrance via Archway Lodge, visitor centre, underground gallery and various gardens, stretches of parkland, Country Park, lakes and areas reaching over to Longside. To the top left of the map can be seen Park Lane, the original entrance to Bretton Hall College and YSP. Bretton Hall can be seen towards the middle of the parkland above the lakes. Reproduced with kind permission of YSP.

FIGURE 5.2   View of Bretton Hall from across the lakes. The formal gardens and parkland were built around a series of vistas with the landscape designed to be surveyed from inside the mansion. Outside, this 'synthetic landscape' offered up beautiful views of the house and land to its owners and visitors as well as providing more intimate spaces of contemplation. Reproduced with kind permission of YSP. Photo: Jonty Wilde.

the Education Authority, Alec Clegg. From 1945 to 1974 when the West Riding disappeared in a local government reorganization, Clegg led the region to a reputation for excellence in schools provision premised on a re-evaluation of education which placed the whole child and his or her development at its core. Part of a post-war idealism and very real sense of the need for urgent social change, Clegg believed in socially integrated schools which allowed children to learn from their peers and the experiences of others. He was critical of the established education system with its sole emphasis on intelligence levels – reading, writing, arithmetic and examination – a system that he recognized as failing many children who, for a whole range of reasons, might not be motivated to reach their potential. Decades of work and writing attest to Clegg's deep belief in the role of the arts in education and creative expression as a route to the spiritual and emotional development of the child. His emphasis was not on a factual knowledge of art or particular competence in a specific art, it was not about the history of art, the lives of artists or art appreciation, but about relevant and appropriate 'exposure to beautiful things' with a focus on doing.[9] At its most basic, Clegg believed that involving children in making and seeing art would have social impacts; unless teachers were trained to nurture 'that part of the child that cannot be labelled intelligence and which undoubtedly accounts for his everyday actions and behavior and reactions to his fellow men' he argued, 'our civilization may end in disaster'.[10]

Covering a population of 1.75 million and incorporating some 1,200 schools and 330,000 children by the 1970s, the West Riding was vast and covered the social and economic gamut from areas of relative wealth and prosperity to large areas of social deprivation. By the 1970s

its education service was regarded as pioneering, providing particularly primary-aged child-ren with an engaging and rounded school experience. If the immediate post-war ideals of social democracy and the need for urgent social change dissolved away in many spheres as the twentieth century advanced – Arthur Marwick's 'incredible shrinking social revolution' – in the West Riding, Clegg and his colleagues stayed true to their beliefs.[11] At Bretton, the environment was recognized as conducive to the creative arts and with 60 students and six staff in 1948, what had previously been a site of wealth and privilege was remade through its occupation by a creative community of learners.

In 1968 Clegg appointed Alyn Davies as Principal. Davies immediately embraced the ethos of Bretton, building on the investment in its students and continuing to encourage a vibrant learning community; art, music, drama, English and fashion and textiles students lived and worked side by side, assessment of student work focused on performances and creative peda-gogies necessitated cross-disciplinary collaboration. The campus was a hive of activity with gardeners, carpenters (for the building of stage sets, for example), teachers and students, many of whom were living on site or in nearby Bretton village, contributing to the culture of the place.[12]

It was out of this philosophical and practical educational context that YSP emerged, ena-bled by Davies but driven, as it has been since, by its Director, Peter Murray. In 1977 Murray, a lecturer at Bretton, raised the possibility of establishing a permanent sculpture park. His sug-gestion hit a chord with Davies who had a longer-term ambition of opening the landscape up to a broader public. As Murray would later write,

> Within days of our initial discussion he was working on strategies to persuade the aca-demic board, his Governors and Wakefield Metropolitan District Council [WMDC] to allow the College grounds to be opened to the public and to establish YSP as an independent trust.[13]

In WMDC Davies found numerous supporters, many of them ex-colliers drawn to the demo-cratic ideals behind making the landscape accessible and harnessing its capital for learning.[14]

If the project was timely in the context of progressive arts education, it was also timely in art terms and followed a period of concerted effort by a small group of individuals and organiza-tions from the middle decades of the twentieth century 'to promote sculpture as a social art'.[15] As Richard Calvocoressi has noted, one of the ways in which sculpture was introduced to a wider public was through open-air exhibitions and in the post-war period the phenomenon was international. In the UK, 1948 saw the first open-air exhibition of sculpture at Battersea Park funded by London County Council and the Arts Council and in the years that followed a number of open-air exhibitions took place around the country.[16] Particularly influential on Bretton were two established sculpture parks – Kroller-Muller in the Netherlands and Louisi-ana in Denmark established in 1961 and 1964, respectively. 1977 saw the largest of the open-air exhibitions at Battersea Park to mark the Queen's Silver Jubilee as well as the opening of Grizedale Forest, though already sculptural practice had advanced beyond the post-war con-cerns of artists such as Moore and Hepworth and a younger generation of artists whose art was, as Lewis Biggs described it, 'materialist, urban and abstract rather than spiritual, withdrawn and abstract', were turning their backs on open-air settings.[17] On 24 September 1977 the first YSP exhibition opened and the basic principles of the park were established; YSP would provide artists with support and a place to exhibit and it would provide a broad audience with access to

modern and contemporary sculpture. From the very start, emphasis was placed on a physical encounter with sculpture as opposed to a more detached, intellectual engagement.[18]

Mission and the battle for territory

YSP opened as a result of the energy of a small number of enterprising individuals who, with an initial grant of £1,000, managed to encourage artists to get involved and show their work.[19] The college was central to this endeavour from the start, though the park was established with its own management committee which included college staff as well as politicians, sculptors and colleagues from local and national arts institutions. Over the first few years, YSP effectively camped in the college grounds and existed as a result of college support and infrastructure; it relied heavily on the college gardeners and transport as well as its technical staff. Displays were limited to the parkland immediately below the Camellia House (Figure 5.1) and various rooms were occupied in the college buildings for administration and occasionally for exhibitions. Murray remained on the college staff, fitting the organization of the park in around his other duties; a staff specifically dedicated to the park would be slow to develop, though in 1979 an Education Officer was appointed and in 1983 YSP's involvement in the International Sculpture Symposium, would enable the appointment of an Administrator. In terms of the physical occupation of the site, the first ten years of the park's development can be understood in this way; a creative and highly successful, though hand to mouth, development reliant on the goodwill and generosity of the college and a number of key individuals. This was no amateur undertaking, however. From as early as 1979 Henry Moore was Patron of the park and the first Board of Trustees included Alan Bowness, soon to be Director of Tate. Following the first exhibition of sculptors with Yorkshire connections in 1977, other high-quality exhibitions followed.

By the mid-1980s plans to build a permanent home for the park and to provide facilities for the growing number of visitors – now estimated at 100,000 annually – solidified and YSP entered into discussions with architects BDP, a northern practice with a reputation for environmentally sensitive architecture, about a new building development and the addition of a new access road through Archway Lodge. The route to this development would be bumpy and political. Residents of West Bretton, organized through the Parish Council, raised objections to the plans with the view that the development would be detrimental to the landscape as well as village life; the café for example might 'attract the wrong type of visitor'.[20] YSP set about consulting with local residents, sharing their plans and explaining their sensitive approach to the development of the site as well as their desire to reduce, rather than increase the impact on the village – the new access road, for example, would re-route traffic away from the village. As the majority of villagers were increasingly convinced by the plans, the Countryside Commission began to object to the idea of a new access road and its potential impact on the Country Park. Added to this were the voices of individual landowners whose land would need to be crossed by the access road. The site was complex and any plans for development were increasingly complicated by the range of views and strength of feeling about the site and its use.

As access to the site continued to divide opinion, the support of WMDC for the project became more and more vital. By 1986, the Council was essentially undecided over the access issue and was recommending that planning permission be sought for a building but not for the new road. Recognizing the need to resolve the access issue and help WMDC visualize

their plans, Murray invited two key councillors, John Pearman and Christopher Heinitz, to visit Louisiana and Kroller-Muller. At the end of the visit WMDC would publicly state their backing of the project, though ongoing pressure and lobbying would be required as divided loyalties would continue to complicate the decision-making process; the leader of the District Council was also Chair of the Bretton Country Park Management Committee and as a result would continue to waver over the access road issue.[21]

This slow but real progress would be halted entirely in 1987 when Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government released a White Paper entitled 'Higher Education: Meeting the Challenge'.[22] The paper set out government plans to enable colleges to opt out of Local Authority control and re-establish themselves as independent Higher Education Corporations. Part of the process involved a transfer of property whereby colleges would take ownership of their assets, including land, and would be encouraged to run as businesses. The politics behind the Higher Education Act were relatively simple; rather than being funded and administered by Local Authorities, budgets would be allocated direct from central government and colleges would be given the freedom to use their assets to generate income. The Act was a direct challenge to the power of Local Authorities but also to any ethos-driven approach to education and at Bretton, YSP now faced a future of existing alongside and becoming tenant to what would ostensibly be a commercial venture with the right to charge a commercial rent. The future of YSP was threatened as the college opted for independence and argued its legal right to the land.

What followed was a period of intense political negotiation and a legal exchange which would drain YSP of its few financial assets and its ability to proceed with its capital development plans.[23] The final outcome, mediated by the Polytechnics and Colleges Assets Board, was that the college would take ownership of the hall and the immediate campus, the sculpture park would take ownership of the Bothy and formal gardens, the first piece of land over which it would have control, and the rest of the parkland would remain with Wakefield.[24] In addition to this, YSP secured peppercorn rents on a 99-year lease protecting its right to use the wider Bretton landscape. The experience clearly impacted on Murray who has, since then, set about reuniting the Bretton Estate and securing it for YSP, its visitors and, as a result, ensuring its future.

In 1989 a small café was opened in the Bothy garden and in 1991 the Pavilion Gallery was added, a temporary, tent-like structure which offered indoor gallery space for many years. These developments were extended when in 1993 conversion work was undertaken to create a small indoor gallery space and meeting rooms behind the Bothy wall. As these developments offered some sense of growth, WMDC agreed to the placing of a changing selection of large Henry Moore sculptures in the Country Park, a rugged section of the estate originally referred to as the Deer Park and owned by WMDC since 1978. Regardless of the physical growth of YSP at this time, the Bothy development and the Pavilion Gallery were compromises, pragmatic solutions far from the vision of a dedicated visitor and exhibition centre.

Grass is a great defeater: mission and the placing of sculpture in the landscape

From the very start and despite some local objections that sculpture would 'pollute' the Bretton landscape, artists and visitors flocked to YSP enticed by the scale of the landscape and

nature of the open–air experience. Negotiating a place for the park in the network of organizations, funding bodies and individuals that comprised the UK art establishment, however, would be less straightforward. By the late 1970s and 1980s, the very urgent sense of social mission evident in many arts organizations immediately following the war was long forgotten and a new breed of art professional populated the country's art galleries. Often educated at Oxford or Cambridge and initiated into the art establishment through a Masters degree in Art History from the Courtauld, this essentially London-based network dominated the arts and prioritized an increasingly professionalized and intellectual approach to art. YSP, the product of a very specific time and place, already existed outside of this network. In a lecture delivered to students at Bretton in 1986, Murray described his curatorial staff: 'They didn't go to the Courtauld, they tend to do things like go on courses to learn to drive fork–lift trucks.'[25] Indeed, from the very start, the validity of YSP would be questioned by key establishment figures, a criticism and marginalization that would come to a head in the early 1980s and continues to impact curatorial strategies at the park today.

In 1983, in a move consciously designed to anchor the park into the international sculpture community, YSP hosted the International Sculpture Symposium. The symposium was a well-established annual event which attracted artists, curators and scholars from around the world. In 1983, a keynote speaker was British sculptor Anthony Caro. In his talk, Caro responded to more than three decades of placing modern sculpture in the open air, stating that sculpture in the open air often left him dissatisfied.[26] Caro suggested that landscape often killed or overwhelmed sculpture and described grass as 'a great defeater'.[27] Implying that YSP was nothing more than a 'soft and nostalgic container', he questioned what he saw as the presentation of sculpture as phenomenon, 'plopped down' in its setting and experienced as part of a larger entity.[28] Rather, Caro argued for a hard and contained frame for sculpture, a placing that would 'separate' the work and 'focus' it. 'If an artwork is to be *seen* as an artwork', he argued, 'then it must be isolated from *external* relationships which could be seen as part of the artistic play'.[29] Caro's point was that Moore made his sculpture *in relation* to landscape and that for him, the setting was entirely appropriate. Denying the impact of the physical environment on the work, Caro continued, 'It's not a sculpture park, it's simply sculpture to be viewed in the open air. You pass from one to the next assessing only *its* quality while keeping each one in the mind's eye'.[30] In the sculpture park, sculpture couldn't be seen in the way it could in the gallery because the viewer was 'beaten by the first glance'; the conditions were not conducive to looking.[31]

Caro wasn't alone and other commentators at the heart of the art establishment also raised questions about the idea of a sculpture park. Writing some years later, the then Director of the Henry Moore Institute Penelope Curtis suggested that 'sculpture parks have been perpetuating a kind of art made for sculpture parks which is quite different from what is happening elsewhere in contemporary art'.[32] Describing sculpture parks as 'a kind of buffer zone which sets the viewer at their ease', Curtis' message was clear; these were not serious contemporary art spaces where cutting–edge sculptural practice was taking place:

> Sculpture parks have a time and place. Or they had a time and place. In Europe they emerge[ed] out of a specifically left-wing initiative to rebeautify London after the Blitz. [. . .] That 52 years later Holland Park should see the restaging of one of these post-war events was perplexing. Had anything changed? People still gathered to 'be amused'. Parents still encouraged their children to laugh, to be photographed, and then to walk

on by. Sculpture is still oddly ready to be the willing hostage to a merely occasional audience, more willing, one might suggest, than almost any other art form, or perhaps any other discipline.[33]

At stake in the placing of sculpture was the very definition of sculpture itself and, in 1983, Caro's comments cut right to the heart of the difficulty for many inside the art establishment of placing art outdoors; the kind of elevated, intense focus required for its staging and viewing demanded a simple, modern frame.

What has followed since at YSP is a process of creating a new field of curatorial expertise specifically for the open air – an entirely conscious attempt to respond to the politics of sculpture's display and negotiate a position inside the establishment. A key element in this practice relates to the relationship between the site and the scale and form of the work. Curators mentored into the 'YSP-way' have been reined in by Murray, avoiding the over-filling of the landscape and giving each work space to breathe. Great care is taken to ensure the placing of one work doesn't interfere with the appreciation of another and that the formal qualities of the work, whatever they might be, are considered in the choice of location; a process which often involves hours spent walking the landscape with artists. In art historical terms, Murray is very clear about what is happening during this process of placing; sometimes the landscape is a backdrop, sometimes it is something to fight and at others artists are responding to it as a large piece of land art. However, other, arguably more democratic opportunities for experience, less bound by disciplinary convention and which move beyond the intensive looking valued by Caro and Curtis, are also opened up through the park's curatorial strategies and it is these strategies, particularly prioritized by the curatorial team at YSP, to which I now want to turn.

The exhibitions around which YSP is focused are developed with a clear interpretive framework. Some baseline information about the artist and their practice can usually be located in one of the free leaflets available at the visitor centre. However, the interpretive frame – which might just as easily relate to geology, ecology or philosophy as it might to art history – is intentionally broadened out and severed from the experience of the works themselves through a series of important curatorial strategies. In part this relates to the placement of the works and the need to move across sometimes quite large areas of varying terrain to experience them; the exigencies of the site dictate that the sculpture is disconnected from any textual or didactic interpretive frame. Any sense of an overarching narrative is also negated by the continual questioning of the finished object and, by implication, any kind of objectified experience of art. The presence of artists working on site, their accessibility and desire to talk to visitors; the general principle that unless stated otherwise, sculptures can be explored physically through touch; and the very public installation and removal of sculpture revealing the human effort and artifice involved in constructing the park, work to challenge any suggestion of stasis or permanence. Rather, all of these strategies open out the experience of sculpture beyond the work itself.

But what transforms the YSP experience from one of detached looking to one of physical encounter is use of the light, shade and drama of the landscape as a highly emotive, narrative-laden environment. The choreographed approaches towards and views through and around works sited at YSP preclude an experience based solely on looking and open the door to myriad meanings and references beyond the frame of the work itself, blurring the boundaries between curatorial vision and visitor experience and between the quixotic nature

of the everyday and the often limited experience of art. Combined with an open-air, physical, sensory and bodily experience of art and what Susan Herrington has described as the mnemonic and imaginative qualities of landscape, these very specific curatorial strategies – which use, for example, the massive and the miniature, anticipation and surprise – engender a level of ownership over and involvement in the site.[34] The openness and reflective nature of the physical interpretive frame – the landscape – is harnessed then, as a route to engaging, first and foremost, the emotional and spiritual side of visitors. Here, personal narratives, the stories developed through a sequential experience, may be about sculpture, about Yorkshire, about nature or the past of the place. Equally, and invariably it seems to be the case, they may be about personal memories and intimate relationships. At YSP the tradition of art's display is refracted, slowed down and opened out to myriad emotions, thoughts, memories and feelings through its very specific staging in this particular, highly interpretive landscape.

In 2001, 18 years after the International Sculpture Symposium, Murray asked Caro, who has had a long and productive association with the park, whether he now had fewer reservations about sculpture in the landscape. Caro's answer was ambiguous and was still concerned with the distractions of the site:

> You have developed very good curatorial skills: I have never seen the Henry Moores look better and Promenade looks great beside the lake. Yorkshire Sculpture Park is a difficult space because it is big and demanding. But all landscape is difficult, hills and trees and grass are so powerful, and romantic too . . . Unrelenting cityscape is often a better foil for sculpture, it provides the frame. Sculpture without containment, without anything to hold it, gets blown away.[35]

The process of carving out a new field of curatorial expertise which merged Cleggian ideals of human experience and learning with a context-specific interpretation of the framing of sculpture would be one effective route towards professional recognition of YSP. However, it would be the process of building and providing a more easily recognizable and mainstream vision of an art gallery that would lead in the last decade to some consistent level of official approval and the consequent, though still painfully insufficient, arts funding.

Consolidation: development and embedded narratives

When the National Lottery began to offer major funding to museums and galleries in 1995, YSP worked with architects Feilden, Clegg, Bradley (FCB) to develop a masterplan for consolidation.[36] Indeed, the Lottery seemed to offer the solution to YSP's long-term problem of capital development. The major elements of the plan had been in the air at YSP for many years; a new roundabout on the A637 would lead to a new entrance to the park via Archway Lodge and a new access road and car park would sit along the ridge at the top of the Country Park. A purpose-built visitor centre would nestle in the trees at the meeting point of the Country Park with the formal gardens and parkland and an underground gallery would sit below the Bothy garden. Added to this, Longside, a tract of land which formed the southern line of the original parkland, now came up for sale and it was proposed that YSP purchase the land and convert the buildings for use as a gallery, studio space and workshops (Figure 5.1). By the end of 1998, the proposals had been rejected twice and YSP was left holding an offer of a relatively small grant of £1.5 million for the purchase of Longside. As new and untested

projects in the region were given significant Lottery funding, YSP – now attracting some 250,000 visitors annually – failed to secure a major grant. As one interviewee commented, 'Its face just didn't fit'.

Under the direction of a new Director of Development, Fiona Spiers, YSP now set about using this initial piece of funding to begin a staged development and lever additional funds. The development of offices for creative industries at Longside was used to lever funds from ERDF, who then became the unlikely major funder of YSP's capital plans.[37] With a loan and some other additional pockets of funding from Yorkshire Forward, Biffa, and a number of charitable donations, Spiers and Murray managed to raise the funds for what would eventually be a £13 million development and which, in the context of Lottery funding, offered amazing value for money. The full development plan, as described above, was finally completed in 2005 (Figure 5.3, Plate 5.2).

The YSP that we experience today, post-capital development, is the direct result of the relations between the politics of landscape, the politics of art and the politics of narrative – YSP's ongoing desire to prioritize a direct, physical and personal encounter with sculpture. The capital project was designed to impact as little as possible on the site. Described by Murray as 'pencil lines in the landscape', FCB's clever design solution was to orientate the visitor centre at a point of intersection and disguise it in a belt of trees; conceived as a meeting point and a hub of social interaction, the visitor centre acts as a concourse, linking the entrance and car park to the gardens and underground gallery beyond. The geometry of the building is entirely led by the historic division of the landscape – the point where

FIGURE 5.3   The new visitor centre behind Henry Moore's, *Reclining Figure: Bunched*, cast 1985. The visitor centre was designed by Peter Clegg (FCB). Reproduced by permission of The Henry Moore Foundation. Photo: Jonty Wilde.

the concourse crosses one of the historic 'ha-has' is marked by the staircase – and the use of vast areas of glass give the impression of being in the woodland glade and walking over the sunken boundary. Additions such as Brian Fell's Ha-Ha bridge (2006) confirm and reiterate this thoughtful intersection of relatively low-cost, low-energy contemporary architecture with the historic landscape. The building itself is a clever mix of natural materials; a gently minimal design which makes sense to a contemporary art audience though still with enough warmth and recognizable detailing to have mass appeal. Leading into the visitor centre from the car park is a walk of donors, a path of names cut into steel. The work by Gordon Young records the names of supporters of the park – individuals, schools, companies – who gifted £65 to YSP's development; a people's version of the museum tradition of giving and naming space. In the underground gallery YSP now has a starkly minimal gallery space – a direct 'application of disciplinary knowledge'[38] – albeit one literally dug into the ground. The developments have had a significant impact on the story of YSP and the way it is, quite literally, recognized within the art establishment; YSP is now an Arts Council Regularly Funded Organization (RFO), a direct comment on perceptions of its importance in the UK arts infrastructure, and in 2009 it was awarded an Arts Council Sustain grant intended to support excellence during the economic downturn.[39]

If the new developments can be understood as the result of a series of negotiations, they also bring a new tension into focus – that between mission and commerce. The addition of a shop with its luxury goods and the rather expensive restaurant complete the standard facilities of a twenty-first-century gallery experience and sit comfortably alongside the thoughtfully placed sculpture in an increasingly well-tended landscape. The additions are necessary of course; the park must raise around 50 per cent of its revenue costs annually. However, these spaces of commerce have introduced a hierarchy into the park, a segregation of the space based on ability to pay. Interestingly though, steps have been taken to drench the spaces where commerce and the machinery of art history are most evident, in landscape; to close the gaps opened up in the site through these contradictory images. One senses at YSP an instinctive sensitivity to the need to infuse these new aspects of the visitor experience with a purposeful statement about the history and ethos of the place. Here, the physical evidence – inanimate and human – of middle-class leisure and consumption is questioned and continually complicated through the other, more dominant physical elements and uses; YSP is still produced by the very visible lines of school children snaking through the landscape and the use of the park by groups of children and adults with additional educational needs who are, unsurprisingly, attracted to Bretton. It is this noise and movement – the complex of uses and variety of experiences so distracting for some – through which the physical place is completed.

The need to reiterate the educational and experiential aims of YSP became particularly urgent on the closure of Bretton Hall College in 2007 and the subsequent loss of a highly visible educational use of the site. Once again the dynamics of Bretton shifted through a major change of use and, in the process, specific embedded narratives seem to have taken on more or less significance. In the landscape just below the visitor centre a tree seat has been added which bears an inscription recording the influence of Alec Clegg. The seat was a gift from the Clegg family; a personal tribute. However, in the wider context of the making of YSP, the seat plays an important role as a reminder of the social function of the site. The seat provides just one example of the embedded narratives or mental images which run throughout YSP, continuously charting a path between the wants and needs of the discipline of sculpture and

its boundaries of display, the politics of building in a heritage landscape and the YSP-driven desire to generate an encounter with sculpture.

Conclusion

Juhani Pallasmaa has argued for architects to recognize that our inner and outer worlds, mental and physical, are fused 'into a singular existential reality'.[40] Drawing on the work of cultural geographer P. F. Lewis, Pallasmaa reminds us that our human landscape is 'unwitting autobiography' and that 'the cultural record we have written in the landscape is liable to be more truthful than most autobiographies, because we are less self-conscious about how we describe ourselves'.[41] The stories that YSP tells in its physical landscape are a direct result of the politics of its making; the ongoing process of negotiation over the landscape and access to it have, since 1977, shaped the physical site and the stories of self that the park prioritizes. Of course, autobiography is also an art form; a telling of the self that makes sense of life and projects a preferred version of events. At YSP, the history of its making has also necessarily focused around carving out a location inside the art establishment. This has involved generating a space for sculpture in the landscape which manifests some of the same physical characteristics as more mainstream galleries. This conscious strategy has had direct results; YSP now holds an important though still peripheral position in the UK arts infrastructure.

There continues, however, another and, in terms of perception and experience, far more important narrative thread within its spatial autobiography. The heritage of YSP is the heritage of Henry Moore and Sir Alec Clegg, of sculpture as a social art and of an arts education which purposefully sets out to touch the spiritual and emotional side of the individual. It was this quality of the inherited landscape that Murray recognized – its physical forms were designed over decades to transport its occupants to another world and the post-war harnessing of the power and capital of that site for learning was a moment of clarity in the wake of an appalling human disaster. Consciously or unconsciously YSP continues to embed this story of its making in the physical stuff of the park by design as well as, crucially, through use. The challenges of this making – where the development is never complete and the politics of land and of art will continue to impact the programming and uses encouraged at the park – are ongoing. On the closure of Bretton Hall College in 2007 and the regrettable loss of a very direct and visible educational use of the site, the hall was purchased once again by Wakefield Council. In 2007 Rushbond plc, a property development company, were given a long lease on the hall for their plans to develop a luxury hotel and spa. As one would expect, the negotiations have been complex with the Council seeking to both ensure the future of the hall and find a suitable partner to share space with YSP. The specifics of this new occupant of the site and the inevitable story of luxury and commerce that they will bring to Bretton is yet to be written. What is clear, though, is that 'this magical place' was not made by chance and is as much a product of its mixed educational uses as it is connected to the particular qualities of the Bretton landscape. Maintaining the essential elements of that making whilst embracing change and development will continue to demand a delicate hand.

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Notes

 1 There were 519 recorded school visits between 1 April 2010 and 31 March 2011, excluding universities, colleges and adult learning groups. There are no figures for the SEN groups who are using the park. Email correspondence with Helen Pheby, 20 July 2011.
 2 Henry Moore Institute opened in Leeds in 1993. Staff from the Institute also curate the sculpture galleries at Leeds City Art Gallery. The Hepworth opened in Wakefield in May 2011.
 3 M. Hodgson, 'Around Town meets . . . Peter Murray of the Yorkshire Sculpture Park', *Around Town*, June/July 2011, p. 5. Some of the reasons for this are explored in R. Calvocoressi, 'Public Sculpture in the 1950s', in S. Nairne and N. Serota (eds) *British Sculpture in the Twentieth Century*, London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1981, pp. 135–53.
 4 Visitor figures are calculated through a combination of car parking and gallery visits. The latest visitor survey October 2010–June 2011 suggests that UK residents make up around 99 per cent of visitors with only 1 per cent coming from overseas, although earlier surveys suggest the number of overseas visitors is much higher. The Memory Project captured 111 visitor responses. Online. Available at: www.ysp.co.uk/memoryproject/memoryproject-memorybank1-1.shtml. Accessed 21 November 2011.
 5 Interview with Clare Lilley, 26 May 2011.
 6 See, for example, J. Pallasmaa, 'New Architectural Horizons', *Architectural Design*, vol. 77, issue 2, 2007, pp. 16–23.
 7 Ibid. p. 21. Pallasmaa takes the notion of 'synthetic landscapes' from Alvar Aalto. The idea of 'affordances' is taken from J. Gibson's 'ecological psychology' which acknowledges the co-evolution of animals and their environments. J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1986. See also Jonathan Hale's chapter in this volume.
 8 For a full history of the estate see YSP's Landscape Project reports. Online. Available at: www.ysp.co.uk/page/landscape-project/es. Accessed 14 August 2011.
 9 N. J. George, *Sir Alec Clegg Practical Idealist 1909–1986*, Barnsley: Wharncliffe Books, 2000, p. 76. I am grateful to Peter Clegg and Alyn Davies for their descriptions of Alec Clegg's work.
10 Ibid., p. 48.
11 This point is made in P. Darvill, *Sir Alec Clegg, A Biographical Study*, Knebworth: Able, 2000, p. 17.
12 These memories were described by Alyn Davies in an interview on 17 June 2011. Other descriptions of the learning community at Bretton corroborate these descriptions.
13 P. Murray, 'Introduction', in L. Greene, *Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Landscape for Art*, Hoylandswaine: YSP, 2008, p. 7. WMDC had taken over ownership of Bretton following the demise of West Riding County Council in 1974.
14 Interview with Alyn Davies.
15 Calvocoressi, 'Public Sculpture in the 1950s', p. 137.
16 For this history see also L. Biggs, 'Open-Air Sculpture in Britain: Twentieth Century Developments', in P. Davies and T. Knipe (eds) *A Sense of Place: Sculpture in the Landscape*, London: Ceolfrith Press, 1984, pp. 13–39.
17 Ibid., p. 32.
18 Interview with Peter Murray, 29 July 2011.
19 P. Murray, '30 Years of the Yorkshire Sculpture Park', *Public Art Review*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2007, pp. 52–3.
20 YSP Archive: Folder: *1986 YSP Reports*: 'Minutes of YSP Building Development Meeting with Bretton Parish Council, Monday 18 August 1986'.
21 YSP Archive: Folder: *1986 YSP Reports*: 'Background notes', p. 1.
22 Government White Paper, *Higher Education, Meeting the Challenge*, London: HMSO, 1987.
23 A block of funding had been allocated to YSP by the outgoing West Yorkshire Metropolitan County Council following its abolition in 1985. These funds were intended for a capital project but would be lost to legal fees.
24 Interview with Peter Murray.

25 YSP Archive: Folder: *Peter Murray, Articles and Essays 1979–1986:* 'Slide lecture given by Peter Murray, YSP Director, to students at Bretton Hall College, 1986'.
26 The talk was written up as: A. Caro, 'How Sculpture Gets Looked At', in P. Davies and T. Knipe (eds) *A Sense of Place*, pp. 40–3.
27 Ibid., p. 41.
28 Ibid., p. 40.
29 Ibid., p. 41.
30 Ibid., p. 41.
31 Ibid., p. 42.
32 P. Curtis, 'Not Seeing the Wood for the Trees', unpublished paper, undated though written circa 2001, p. 1.
33 Ibid., p. 2.
34 S. Herrington, *On Landscapes*, New York and London: Routledge, 2009.
35 *Peter Murray Interviewing Anthony Caro (June 2001)*. Online. Available at: www.anthonycaro.org/ysp2-with-peter-murray.htm. Accessed 21 March 2011.
36 There is a natural symmetry in the YSP story in that Peter Clegg of FCB is the son of Sir Alec Clegg.
37 The European Regional Development Fund supports regional economic growth, job creation and competitiveness. Interview with Fiona Spiers, 29 July 2011.
38 Pallasmaa, 'New Architectural Horizons', p. 18.
39 The story here is complex. From April 2012 YSP will become a National Portfolio Organization. This Arts Council scheme replaces the Regularly Funded Organizations Scheme. YSP's funding from Arts Council since 1995 has increased steadily with some significant increases since 2001/2 and around 2005. That said, the cuts currently being experienced seem at face value to suggest that YSP has been hit harder than some arts organizations.
40 Pallasmaa, 'New Architectural Horizons', p. 17.
41 Ibid., p. 17.

6

NARRATIVE SPACE

Three post-apartheid museums reconsidered

Nic Coetzer

The 17 years since the advent of democracy in South Africa have seen pioneering changes to the deep spatial and economic divisions that have been entrenched in the country over the past 300 years. Nelson Mandela himself instituted the Legacy Project in 1997 aimed at transforming the representational and symbolic imbalances in South Africa's cities[1] and museums.[2] There has been an active re-dressing of the under-representation of apartheid's 'others' through a series of *grands projets* that seek, at least symbolically, to bring balance to a society of such extreme disproportion; for example, Freedom Park in Pretoria and the Walter Sisulu Square of Dedication in Soweto, start to 'talk back' – literally – to the plethora of colonial monuments and museums that, by default, continue to valorize the settler and 'his' civilizing project. Within this context of intentional transformation, three post-apartheid museums are of particular interest because they define three different approaches to the relationship between architectural design and the idea of 'narrative space'. The Apartheid Museum, at the Soweto–Johannesburg interface, is exemplary of architectural design that choreographs a range of phenomenological experiences for the visitor, scripting and directing experience through design. It is a singular narrative space. By contrast, the Red Location Museum of Struggle in Port Elizabeth maintains an intentionally more 'democratic' disposition in its spatial arrangement, determinedly allowing the visitor greater choice in their experience of the museum and its content. It offers a random narrative space. Finally, the District Six Museum in Cape Town arguably contains no architectural directives; its content is entirely present and apparent at all times offering up multivalent narrative spaces.

There is, however, another narrative space that this chapter will consider, that being the narrative of the design process itself; in other words, the role that the act of design plays in the construction of a meta-narrative for the project. Much like the work of Enlightenment architects Ledoux and Boullée, a current strategy used to rationalize and legitimize the expressive potential of a project is to base the design on the programme or brief rather than simply on the function or building type; it is the particular of 'apartheid' or 'Red Location' not the generic of 'museum' that drives the design. This use of programme-as-concept ultimately becomes the museum's real 'narrative space' through which the design is developed, gains a strong identity for both the architects and the client and, ultimately, wins the architectural competition.

Through this approach, architectural design works to predetermine and predefine all variable aspects of a museum's 'narrative space' into a singularity or a strong formal/spatial 'concept' that is needed to drive the project to completion. In post-apartheid South Africa, this potentially runs the risk of the symbolic or meta-narrative of the museum overwriting the small and multiple narratives of the continuingly under-represented. The structural condition of this approach to museum design – of overwriting the individual narrative space of each visitor *and* the raw material of historical time through the singularity of a meta-narrative space – needs to be engaged with if architects are to help establish more inclusive 'narrative space*s*' rather than the default design mode of a singular 'narrative space'.

Three museums: background and context

The District Six Museum is, perhaps, the clearest example of a community-based museum in South Africa. It was established in 1994 specifically to act as a proxy house for the former residents of District Six who were forcibly removed from the area by the apartheid government in the 1960s and 1970s. For the 60,000 people who were re-housed in the windswept wasteland of the Cape Flats more than 15 kilometres away, the museum acts not only as a depository for memories of life in District Six, but also as a community centre, galvanizing the restitution of the still largely vacant land and the redevelopment of the area. As we shall see, this museum is useful as a point of reference, not because it is the perfect museum, and notwithstanding its particular limitations as a small-scale community-based museum representing a delimited group of people, but rather because its exhibit and spatial qualities are in strong contrast to the other two museums.

The Red Location Museum of Struggle won its designers, Noero Wolff Architects, the Royal Institute of British Architects 2006 Lubetkin Prize for the best building outside of the European Union.[3] The project originated through an open competition in 1998 set by the Port Elizabeth municipality in the hope of bringing about social-spatial transformation in previously disadvantaged areas. The museum, and a small housing component also by Noero Wolff Architects, was the first of a series of planned civic and commercial interventions in this economically impoverished area. Red Location is, nevertheless, rich in history. Its name originates in the rusted Boer War concentration camp barracks reused by the colonial government to house black residents in Port Elizabeth. Furthermore, many of the African National Congress's top leaders lived here and initiated the Defiance Campaign and the ANC's armed resistance campaign from the area.[4]

Unlike the Red Location Museum, the Apartheid Museum is not a state-sanctioned or state-supported project. It is, however, the result of a government-legislated pay off – a 'social development' project required to balance the 'social ill' of a neighbouring casino development in the Gold Reef City theme park. This prize-winning museum, also through an open competition won by a consortium led by Mashabane Rose Architects, was completed in 2001. It has not been without controversy; the bidding consortium for the casino was backed by the Krok brothers whose capital accrual comes in part from selling toxic 'skin lightening' products to black people during the apartheid era.[5]

The District Six Museum

District Six Museum has always been more of a community centre and a place to share memories than a museum collecting precious artefacts – even if its prize exhibit piece is a totem of the original street signs rescued from the demolition (Figure 6.1). In some ways the museum

FIGURE 6.1 The converted District Six Museum and its main double-volume space showing the street-sign totem on axis and the giant map on the floor. Photo: Nic Coetzer.

works as a therapy centre for the trauma suffered due to the forced removal – a place of the talking cure – although more recently the museum has shifted to being the locus of land restitution claims and overseas tourists.[6]

What is most compelling about the museum from an architectural point of view, however, is its lack of an overwriting meta-narrative of design. The building began its life as a warehouse, was converted to a Methodist church used by many of the former District Six residents and finally became the museum with very little alteration.[7] The result is that there is no strong spatial scripting of the exhibited work; although there are moments of clear spatial-thematic cohesion, for the most the curated content is mixed and loose, a jumble of the past reflecting the jumble of memories and the heterogeneous nature of the community itself. Furthermore, the space of personal narrative is continually present, interrupting thematic boundaries with its idiosyncrasies while parts are frequently revised as new items are found or made.[8] As such, the museum reads more like a stuffed-full scrapbook than the sequential narrative of a novel. Visitors stop and contemplate stories of particular characters or events as they catch the eye, rather than being led through a controlled lesson in the history of the area. This personal and personable approach is an exact counterpoint to the depersonalizing and dehumanizing strategies of apartheid itself.

The museum's only strong spatial strategy – the location of a giant map of the original District Six on the floor in the middle of the double volume of the museum – reinforces its recording of personal narrative. At its inception, the museum used this map of the area as a mnemonic device for the former residents who were invited to record their lives and stories directly onto its surface. As such, it enacts a rebuilding and reclaiming of the territory that was lost and over-written by apartheid spatiality. Moreover, the space becomes a literal speaking of direct experience by former residents, their spoken words reverberating off and enlivening the many photos and stories covering the walls in the single space.

The District Six Museum's disregard for the curator's taxonomic table writ large in space and its lack of a symbolic meta-narrative allows it to approximate the experience of life and history as a messy and contradictory thing, with overlapping spheres, inconsistencies and anomalies. As such it points to architecture's tension with its 'posts' – postmodern, post-apartheid, postcolonial – which possibly contradict the essential task of the architect: ordering space and form through a coherent singular narrative. The ordering impulses of modernism or apartheid or colonialism – the taxonomic table of categorical difference – is the underlying project of the architect.[9] Architecture articulates difference, it brings forth boundaries, defines edges, creates zones. What is interesting about the District Six Museum is that it generally does none of these things. In fact, it is largely without an architectural idea which is, perhaps, its real strength. In some ways, however, the museum enacts the original spatiality of District Six itself; the area's jumbled alleyways and apparent lack of spatial order had been a strong component used to legitimize its clearance as a 'slum'.[10] In this sense, the lack of a clear and ordered formal/spatial design concept seems appropriate to the multiplicity of characters and enigmatic character of District Six itself.

The Apartheid Museum

The Apartheid Museum works in a very different way, scripting and choreographing, through its spatiality, a singular narrative that moves from a bucolic pre-colonial world, through the dark troubles of apartheid and into the light of democracy. Simple architectural devices embody (rather than symbolize) the troubled route from apartheid to democracy. Visitors are randomly issued an 'identity card' which assigns them to an apartheid-era 'race', thereby

FIGURE 6.2 The Apartheid Museum's pre-colonial open-air niches (left) and the 'mirror-people' ramp showing the pillars of the constitution. Photo: Nic Coetzer.

segregating their entrance to the museum. This is not unlike the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC (along with other obvious parallels between the two museums not explored in this chapter).[11] The visitor is then directed outside and up a ramp populated by full-scale 'people-mirrors' (who we meet later in diorama-type exhibits) (Figure 6.2). These figures represent the 'everyman', although they are quite well-known personalities in contemporary South Africa. Niches along the way chart the pre-colonial history of South Africa, deliberately out in the air, in a 'natural' setting. The visitor is then taken to a roof-top view looking back to Johannesburg – a primer for the story that really underlines the policy of apartheid, namely, the discovery of gold and the migrant labour-force that built the city on its toiling backs. A swooping staircase leads back down to the beginning of the exhibit proper, past the diorama exhibits and then through a sequence of dark and fairly claustrophobic exhibition spaces charting the rise of apartheid, resistance to it, and its eventual demise as legislation. This dark sequence passes through spaces deliberately prison-like in character – such as a haunting room of 133 hanging nooses, recording the execution of political prisoners by the apartheid regime – and concludes in complete darkness save for a set of TV screens depicting the troubled times between 1992 and the election of 1994. From this uncomfortable space the visitor is released into a brightened and naturally lit set of exhibitions illustrating the first democratic elections. The climax of this sequence is an exit vestibule or porch – adjacent to the segregated entrance – that is constructed by seven pillars embodying the main tenets of the post-apartheid constitution.

The Apartheid Museum does well to capture the horror of apartheid in its exhibitions but also through its architecture. Simple architectural devices such as harsh materials and raw finishes, along with dramatic light and space, are harnessed to heighten the emotional content of the exhibits. It is a singular 'narrative space', choreographing and directing experience to the concluding last act. As a design meta-narrative, the museum's content is the force that drives the museum's concept; it literally enacts the 'singular' narrative of the journey from apartheid to democracy in its spatial and formal articulation. It erases its form, burying the horrible story of apartheid underground and behind walls such that the only iconic element for the design is the pillars of the constitution. It is quite clear, however, that the Apartheid Museum's singular spatial narrative does not accommodate the multiplicities of interpretation and thematically oriented content that museums in South Africa are, perhaps, aiming for.[12]

Red Location Museum of Struggle

The Red Location Museum is largely defined through what the architects call 'memory boxes'[13] (Figure 6.3).These 12 'boxes' are 6 m × 6 m × 12 m-high exhibition rooms within an overarching factory-like sawtooth roof. They represent the 'memory boxes' that migrant workers used to take to the mines in Johannesburg, containing precious mementos and items to see them through their months away from home. The 12 purposefully rusted boxes are arranged on a grid, deliberately avoiding the scripting and hierarchical narrative of a sequential route through the museum as exemplified by the Apartheid Museum. Rather than see the grid as a restrictive technocratic device directing regularity and restricting difference, architects have also understood the grid as being a great democratic equalizer, its self-sameness supposedly allowing a non-hierarchical spatial disposition.[14] Notwithstanding this, the content of the memory boxes seems somewhat random, the relationship between them deliberately unmotivated, the taxonomy held by the grid unfathomable. The boxes contain variously: 'the

FIGURE 6.3   Outside and inside the 'memory boxes' in the Red Location Museum of Struggle. Photo: Nic Coetzer.

struggle and the memorialization of music'; 'an archive of memory'; 'Vuyisile Mini' (a local activist murdered in detention in Pretoria); 'the struggle underground'; 'environmental education'; 'sport and the struggle'; and a box dedicated to 'Workers and Trade Unions'.

Unlike the District Six Museum, the Red Location Museum seems strangely empty, without much curated content. This is not only due to a difference in museum administration and levels of community participation; like Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin, the Red Location Museum acts more as a memorial than a depository for artefacts and the active recording of memories. The architects are clear that it is the spaces between the boxes – the absences – that are intended as spaces of contemplation and are thus as important as the contents of the boxes themselves.[15] In fact, the memory boxes make up roughly 30 per cent of the total volume of the exhibition area that contains them (roughly 18,000 cubic metres versus 5,184 cubic metres of memory boxes), which suggests that the blank surfaces of these purposefully rusted boxes themselves are more important than archival material in the museum. The amount of usable volume drops to 5 per cent when the 12 m–high memory boxes are brought down to a more manageable 2 m height limit for display. The memory boxes are the real artefacts of the museum itself – staged by lighting they are 'democratically' exactly the same, their difference only attended to in the internal selves, the inner life of the individual.

Rereading the narratives

Through its strong spatial directing, the Apartheid Museum arguably enacts the controlling, categorical and depersonalizing logic of apartheid in its very spatiality. In the totalizing

coherence of the design's narrative is the overwriting of the multivalent, the personal and the counter-narrative. Rather than dealing with the complexities and contradictions of the past, the design's meta-narrative – its concept of the journey to democracy embodied as form and space – arguably produces a symbolic and literal manifestation counter to the spirit of the democracy it is trying to encapsulate. By symbolically burying apartheid, the museum perhaps manifests the continuing structural conditions of control and lack of freedom that remain deeply embedded in the country's spatiality.

Furthermore, the museum's dislocation from the city centre puts it at a safe distance from urban engagement, making it more of a tourist destination than an instrument of social change, exchange and dialogue (notwithstanding many visits from school children). Space and distance have always been controlling and disenfranchising devices in South Africa, and here they work again, shutting the museum off to those who remain the inheritors of apartheid's horrible legacy. Moreover, any interpretation of the Apartheid Museum – or visit to the museum – cannot escape its troubled development history, and its theme park and casino neighbours. Arrival at the Apartheid Museum's parking lot is likely to be met with the sound of terrified screams as an 'anaconda' ride snakes its way across the sky, its happy consumer-consumed humans enjoying their terror. Because of its dramatic lighting and intense subterranean spatial experience, the Apartheid Museum makes perfect sense, then, as a 'house of horrors' theme-park ride. The Apartheid Museum is horror writ large, but it is horror verging on entertainment. Its casino-world and theme-park logic reflects the current government's neo-liberal economic agenda which encourages commodification and tourism as trickle-down instruments of social change.

Whereas the Apartheid Museum enacts a singular narrative through its spatial sequence, the Red Location Museum purposefully avoids this with the aim of being inclusive and more truthful to the contradictory and fragmented reality of history. It deliberately allows freedom of movement and choice in its spatial disposition – albeit random on account of the visitor not knowing the content of each memory box prior to entering it. However, the strategy of the memory boxes ironically enacts a kind of segregation that can be interpreted as a re-enactment of modernism's zoning that was so effectively used by apartheid planners to segregate ethnic groups. Each box becomes cauterized from its community, isolated and 'zoned' differently from the next, with the empty spaces between the boxes resembling the no-man's-land buffer-zones between apartheid's residential areas. Moreover, the boundary between curated content is emphatic and singular in its spatiality, without any overlap or 'contamination'. The building's overall form solidifies an internalized order, the inner workings of the museum becoming cut off from the outside world by blank walls (Figure 6.4). These blank walls also bring the random route through the memory boxes to an abrupt ending, a sense that the journey is not complete, frustrated. In this way, the museum embodies, in my mind, the frustrations of a democracy that cannot shift the legacy of apartheid quickly enough, that does not know how to tie and relate all its players – each separate but equal – into a whole and integrated community. Instead, it gives them each their own space to 'do their own thing'. Ironically, 'separate development' was a key tenet of apartheid.

Conclusion

The two architect-designed museums presented here are clearly products of two powerful design prompts: first the role of the programme or brief as conceptual generator, and second,

FIGURE 6.4 The entrance porch of the Red Location Museum of Struggle (left) with a view down the side of the museum (right) showing unused market stalls opposite new housing by Noero Wolff Architects and the township of Red Location in the distance. Photo: Nic Coetzer.

the need to establish an architectural object of great formal and spatial power that can adequately 'talk back' to the power of apartheid. Much like Libeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin or The Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC, the Red Location Museum and the Apartheid Museum enact a spatiality that is strong in its narrative content *as memorial*. Moreover, the generation of these designs through architectural competitions insists on clarity in conceptual spatial manifestation; the narrative of design *must* have a singular power – a slogan, if you will – that is easily read by jurors and the public in the process of the project gaining traction. One can see how the idea of the 'journey to democracy' implied in the Apartheid Museum and the 'memory boxes' in the Red Location Museum become strong tropes through which the project gains confidence and support. Yet, at the same time, these strong conceptual devices overwrite the telling of the multiplicity and multivalence of people's lived experience under apartheid. They fail – understandably – to embody the desired transformation agenda and can be read as symptomatic of the difficult task of transformation remaining in the country. As such, they express an official discourse that speaks more of desire than fulfilment, and speaks more of symbolic 'talking back' to apartheid rather than substantial change. In some ways the projects are premature, trying to proclaim the end of an uncomfortable condition that continues to keep the citizens of the country separate and unequal.

On the other hand, the District Six Museum's lack of an overwriting design narrative presents it – in my mind – as the most generous post-apartheid museum, focused as it is on the intersection between grand narrative and the everyday life-world. Its lack of a symbolic design meta-narrative, ironically enough, allows it to embody the qualities a post-apartheid society is supposed to entail – non-hierarchical, inclusive, multiple, collaborative, everyday, overlapping, non-totalizing. Its lack of an over-determining architectural coherence or order, I would argue, allows the museum a multiplicity of narrative spaces. This, then, is the challenge to post-apartheid museum design: to retain the expressive power and design richness developed through the conceptual particularity of the programme, whilst maintaining a multitude of overlapping spaces for the small and disjointed narratives to speak.

Notes

1 C. Rassool, 'District Six Museum', in N. Murray, N. Shepherd and M. Hall (eds) *Desire Lines: Space, Memory and Identity in the Post-apartheid City*, London: Routledge, 2007, p. 117.
2 As cited in S. Dubin, *Transforming Museums. Mounting Queen Victoria in a Democratic South Africa*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, p. 3.
3 For an overview of the building see C. Slessor, 'Memory and Struggle', *Architectural Review*, vol. 219, issue 1311, May 2006, 40–7.
4 As noted by L. Findley, *Building Change: Architecture, Politics and Cultural Agency*, London: Routledge, 2005.
5 As noted by L. Bremner, 'Memory, Nation Building and the Post-apartheid City: The Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg', in N. Murray, N. Shepherd and M. Hall (eds) *Desire Lines*, p. 99.
6 Dubin, *Transforming Museums*, p. 138.
7 Rassool, 'District Six Museum', p. 119.
8 B. Bennett *et al.* (eds) *City. Site. Museum. Reviewing Memory Practices at the District Six Museum*, Cape Town: District Six Museum, 2008.
9 Also tangentially developed by D. Hollier, *Against Architecture, The Writings of Georges Bataille*, London: MIT Press, 1993.
10 N. Coetzer, 'The Production of the City as a White Space. Representing and Restructuring Identity and Architecture, Cape Town, 1892–1936', unpublished PhD, University of London, 2004.
11 J. Branham, 'Sacrality and Aura in the Museum: Mute Objects and Articulate Space', *The Journal of the Walters Gallery*, vol. 52/53, 1994/1995, p. 44.

12 Dubin, *Transforming Museums*, pp. 255–6. The museum was, however, as of November 2009, building a recording room for visitors to tell their own stories.
13 J. Sorrell (ed.) *Jo Noero. The Everyday and the Extraordinary*, Cape Town: ADA Publishing, 2009, p. 93.
14 For ideas on this see R. Koolhaas, *Delirious New York*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1978; M. Gandelsonas, *X-urbanism: Architecture and the American City*, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999.
15 Sorrell, *Jo Noero*, p. 93.

7

THE MUSEUM AS NARRATIVE WITNESS

Heritage performance and the production of narrative space

Jenny Kidd

Across the cultural sector, there has been a wholesale re-appraisal of the role and status of 'users', and an increase in practices deemed participatory. This is the case for museums also, where the rhetoric of co-production and consultation is now common. This chapter examines ways in which this rhetoric is being actualized in the space of heritage performance – increasingly participatory, and requiring of 'audiences' a willingness to give of themselves to the narrative in ways previously unimagined.

Research at the University of Manchester has examined the ways in which people respond to the performance of heritage, often termed live interpretation or museum theatre. With a focus on 'learning', the Performance, Learning and Heritage project team spoke with hundreds of audience members about their experiences of performance, including participation *in* performance. This chapter draws upon this research utilizing the words of visitors to explore some of the implications of visitors contributing their individual memories and narratives during participatory moments. We will see that there are issues around the authority, veridicality and authenticity of the larger museum project which are opened to scrutiny within and through such practices.

Practices of heritage and history have been re-conceptualized in recent years to more usefully and adequately account for our roles as publics within their construction.[1] According to Gibbons 'It is now well established that history exists in many versions and forms, and that all these are relative to the context in which the history is produced'.[2] Likewise, understandings of 'performance' have also become more nuanced, not least in articulating how everyday activity (such as visiting a museum) can itself be analysed as performative.[3] There is not space to carry out an in-depth appraisal of these changes here,[4] only to account for the growth of performance within museum spaces as one direct result; a means of widening representation (to reflect multiple voices, viewpoints, and, not least, the 'ordinary' person's role in history making), filling gaps within collections, and even problematizing museum practice. In this sense, the performance becomes a site or space which, in itself, can facilitate or enable new understandings and narratives about the museum.

In 2007, museums and heritage sites around Britain encouraged members of the public to take part in any number of performances, debates, and enquiries about slavery and the slave

trade, in commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act in the UK. The rhetoric spoke of uncovering hidden histories and taking part in 'conversations' about the legacy of slavery. Such events encouraged a mass of articulations by members of the public of their stories, genealogy, heritage and experiences of this continued legacy (including of racism); different forms of individual, yet very public, remembering. One such example, and the focus of this chapter, was Manchester Museum's Revealing Histories initiative, and the performance of *This Accursed Thing* that was commissioned as a part of it. This chapter looks at the ways in which autobiographical memories and narratives were encouraged through the play. It considers how these responses were facilitated, witnessed and legitimized within the architecture and authority of the museum, and questions the way in which we ascribe such contributions 'value'. It thus situates audience participation and narrative production within the physical context and larger narratives that are constructed and actualized by the institution.

Autobiographical narratives

This chapter seeks to explore the role of visitors' autobiographical narratives within our twenty-first-century understanding of 'the museum' as a construct and as a physical space. Practices of autobiographical memory more broadly have been well theorized,[5] with Conway's oft-cited and influential 1990 conceptualization of autobiographical practices foregrounding a number of characteristics including: personal interpretation, (and thus variable veridicality), long memory duration, and imagery. Such memories are often tied to other memories, intensely and repetitively recalled, and often represent unresolved conflicts or even trauma.[6] This becomes important in the discussion of the slave trade that follows.

Autobiographical memories, although inextricably connected to processes of 'self-hood' and actualization, also have a number of social functions, namely, developing intimacy, teaching and informing others, and, crucially for this study, eliciting and showing empathy.[7] In moments of articulating memory we render those memories narrative and this in itself inevitably impacts upon the memory's solidity and coherence. This process of emplotment[8] or even 'retro-fitting' can render such memories open to accusations of nostalgia at best, and fictionalizing at worst. I have argued elsewhere that this process is akin to performance in and of itself,[9] but this chapter questions how and whether this process complements and fits into the larger project of 'the museum' as a social space, and as an institutional narrative. As Kavanagh acknowledges, memory work is a natural part of the museum visit:

> Remembering is facilitated by environments or circumstances, in particular, those where narrative and reflection are safe or perhaps unavoidable. The multi-sensory experience of museums, together with the social nature of the visit, puts many visitors in a situation where recall is natural, even spontaneous.[10]

Kavanagh goes on to sound a cautionary note, however; the nature of such remembrances is inherently unpredictable and perhaps in eliciting them, the museum bears a grave responsibility. Making such memories social through narration can help the rememberer to alleviate some 'memory burden', but of course can also provoke conflict within or between individuals, or even contradict the larger narratives the institution wishes to construct.

In the exploration of *This Accursed Thing* that follows, we will see how autobiographical narratives were prompted in and through one participatory performance. *This Accursed Thing*

makes for a powerful infusion of pasts both generationally distant,[11] and as they are sensually and emotionally experienced in the everyday present. Participatory performance, as we will see, is one site in which an institution's authoritative narration of a 'past' meets, and can be usefully problematized by, the individual and collective memory practices of communities of visitors. In such moments, I contend, the museum, structurally and institutionally, becomes a witness to those rememberings, even a legitimizer of them.

Bluck proposes that researchers should investigate the specific 'situations, or triggers, in the environment that prompt an individual (whether consciously or not) to call memory, instead of or as well as other resources, to their aid'.[12] This, I argue, is something we should encourage museums to more readily and regularly contemplate, with a view to more honestly articulating the ways in which they (inevitably and intentionally) provoke individual memory practices in the physical museum, and increasingly also encourage their articulation in and through participatory forums.[13]

This Accursed Thing

This Accursed Thing was a promenade performance. The framework for the piece was Manchester Museum's involvement in the Revealing Histories initiative, a consortium of museums and galleries in the region undertaking research and investigation into their institutional heritages, including (previously undisclosed) links to the slave trade. The performance brief included exploring a number of themes emerging from the first case studies, including participation and dialogue, framing and induction into performance (the transition from 'visitor' to 'audience'), multiple voices and links between dramatic narrative and the site itself.

Members of the research team investigated audience responses to the performance in a number of ways: through filming and photography (tracking how audience members traversed the space of performance), questionnaires, focus groups and interviews (with independent visitors and school groups).[14] Materials from these discussions are reproduced in the following sections in order to explore the tensions identified. Although detailed overviews of the performance have been provided elsewhere, there are a number of elements worth noting here to foreground the discussion that follows. The script was researched and written by Andrew Ashmore and Associates, with input from museum staff. The performance was previewed and commented upon by the museum's Community Advisory Panel; a mix of local community interest groups and individuals. This level of 'collaboration' is rare in scripting performances of this kind and might account for its relative success.

The play consisted of two actors, each playing three characters. After a brief induction to the performance outlining that there would be a promenade element and that participation was encouraged, the audience met, in order: a curator, Thomas Clarkson (an abolitionist), an African slave trader, a British slave trader, James Watkins (a freed slave who came to the UK to campaign for abolition) and a millworker from Manchester. The performance ended with a de-brief session, where issues arising from the narrative could be debated, or, as was often the case, individuals could volunteer their own responses, including stories of their ancestry and the legacy of slavery. The audience found themselves, in turn, 'transported' to 1807 and official abolition, to Africa where they encounter trading as it continued, and to Manchester in the 1860s as the American Civil War led to a mass shortage of cotton for mills in the UK. There are thus a number of complex issues and instances of potential friction between characters themselves, but also between the audience and the different characters. The most

significant prompted instance of participation was one that followed the enactment of a slave trade, where the British slave trader turned to the audience, and, in a moment of direct address, challenged them to tell him what was wrong with what he was doing. Another brief yet powerful moment occurred when James Watkins, who was born on a plantation and thus named after that plantation, spoke of the pride he felt in the name he had chosen in later freedom. He encouraged audience members to reflect on the meaning of this simple empowerment, to 'taste your name', and then to shout it at the tops of their voices in the usually silent Natural History Gallery. There were a number of instances within the performance, then, that actively encouraged audience members to construct arguments, reflect, and verbally or otherwise engage. It encouraged personal recollection and exploration of 'selfness' even as a complex and collective narrative was being enacted. But what does it mean to construct a collaborative 'narrative space' through performance?

Narrative space in *This Accursed Thing*

The following discussions are drawn from audience members' responses, many of whom volunteered information about how participation had called to mind personal memories and experiences.[15] They reveal how moments of participation in the performance, and discussion of them in research interviews afterwards, gave rise to a more considered and collaborative narrative space than is usually possible in heritage work. There is no desire to assert that the responses that follow were in any way 'typical', however they do represent a significant number of conversations held with research respondents.

Many forms of autobiographical practice and narrative construction can result in intensely emotional responses, and *This Accursed Thing* attests to this. Sensory-emotional recollections were common, and tended to increase participants' empathy with the characters that they met. The fact that these rememberings happen in the social context of the group (or research interview) can have benefit in and of itself: 'social remembering can provide emotional benefits by allowing individuals to re-experience their past in a more emotionally positive and less emotionally negative way'.[16]

Emotions mentioned by our respondents included anger (frequently), fear, shock, shame, sadness and pain. As Pasupathi proposes, the experience of these feelings was ultimately a beneficial one in the frame of the performance, as one respondent eloquently asserts:

> I think that was my personal, individual avoidance. Avoidance because of the pain; avoidance because of . . . It actually took me on the journey that I didn't want to connect with, because it was a connection of thinking, this is what my ancestors went through. It was obviously a holocaust that I feel and believe should never be forgotten . . . at some point, it got more emphasized and it got more . . . It was harder not to get involved on the journey. So, basically, yeah: I went with it because trying to avoid it – it wasn't happening any more for me. You could not help but be there with them.

Such engagement happened in some instances before participants even arrived at the performance, an expectant remembering: 'I've spent a long time in prison myself and so somebody who is in that situation would be looking out for resonances from a similar kind of experience.'

In many ways, as in the quote above, individuals took ownership of the themes being explored, relating them to their own heritages, circumstances or grievances. This is 'our'

history, 'my' heritage: 'And I think I was very upset, but it's mostly a matter of mixed feelings . . . they were able to get what they wanted, *our* kings and chiefs selling their people to them'; '[In the past] There was no respect for us.'

Similarly, for those who were unable to marry the narrative being portrayed to their own ancestry, there was a sense of taking ownership of the heritage in new and quite profound ways. In ways that had perhaps not been expected, the history and legacy of slavery became a part of their stories also:

> There was definitely a lot of hurt . . . I'm from England; I'm proud of England and England's my country, and seeing it in that light. It disgusts me in a way. To see that so many years, well, not so many years ago, that that's the way that English people were. To quite happily discuss people's lives and just sell them for treats, effectively. I just couldn't believe. It just makes me feel like I don't belong here. That's not something that I believe in and therefore it's not something that I wish to be involved in.

This taking ownership of 'ignorance' was a common thread for a number of respondents: 'It made me aware of all my ignorance, really.' Additionally, in the quote above, we see that the performance has impacted upon the respondent's understanding of the passage of time since slavery was abolished. This is not only a heritage of which he finds he is part, but it is one that can no longer be distanced and understood purely as a 'past'. The passage of time can here be recognized as subjective; the history becoming closer to his own understanding of 'self' in any number of ways. Thus, we see that personal memory work was often a direct result of participation in the performance, these memories often spoken aloud in the moment of performance or in research interviews afterwards.

There were very real (and not un-troubling) moments in the performance where people began to lose themselves in the narrative being created, its urgency for some individuals mani-festing itself in an almost total immersion in 'their' story. Such intensity can of course be an aid to understanding and meaning making, and the emotional response can often be useful (as we have seen), but it is of course difficult for actors and museum staff (and researchers also) to anticipate and measure any ongoing sense of unease that might be fostered: 'obviously people were upset. It took them to a point where they didn't expect themselves to get so emotionally involved, but they did. Which was good.'

> as I say this gentleman sort of hijacked that as well, he had something that he wanted to get over and have answered. It wasn't necessarily the time or the place, but the staff and the actors handled it well, because, at the end of the day, it's more real for that person than it is for me.

As in the latter quote, on occasion this revealed an alienation of sorts. Similarly, in the fol-lowing quote, alongside the challenge of the mix of ethnicities in the group, the respondent perceived (rightly or wrongly) a necessary and inevitable closeness to the heritage in others that made his feelings and responses difficult for him to articulate (even stomach):

> I am a church member, and then for you to think that the church in particular acted in that way, was shameful, I think. I think being in a mixed group of people with Afro-Caribbean origins is quite challenging really, because of their more direct

experience of what happened, and therefore of our corresponding responsibility for that. Those sort of emotions really.

There are more explicit examples of people using the performance as a means of self-narration (including life story construction):

This was so personal to me, this one. Whereas I'd say always before that I'm looking at the children and seeing it through their eyes. I found this very personal to me and I don't know . . . I think it's the whole sort of humanitarian aspect of it: what went on and how black people have been treated in the past and how our relationships are nowadays. It was much, much more personal to me, this particular subject, at this stage of my life, I suppose.

In this conversation, which took place in the weeks following the performance, the respondent professed to be engaged in a process of self-actualization that directly related to the issues highlighted in the performance, and which went beyond the walls of the museum. This she was only able to conceive of as an activity in the present, which included thinking about current race relations, something which, again and again, our respondents felt an urgent need to talk about (and often felt the performance could have done more to address). There is something of a memory burden that many of our respondents demonstrate when it comes to thinking about the legacy of (actual and metaphorical) slavery, a burden that seems especially problematic within the space of 'the institution', and the larger narrative it constructs: 'This is a matter of mistrust, you know? . . . But the white man, on the whole, did enslave the black man badly. And they're still doing it!'; 'It lives today; the legacy still lives on, doesn't it? I don't understand that'; 'In a way some of the feeling I feel now is, like, there are still the bigots in this world and the racists in this world isn't there? To a degree, there are still a lot of people who need to be educated, I'm afraid'; 'I think slavery is like having an elephant in the room, you know, everybody has seen it but no one wants to talk about it'.

That we might all have 'seen' slavery puts it very firmly in the present, including within museum contexts and their accompanying narratives. Consequently, we all have a responsibility to remember (collectively and individually).

For some respondents, autobiographical narrations related not solely to issues around legacy but also to very clear and 'real' connections to ancestors and the journeys they had made; and a continuing need to work through the issues that arise from the very fact of the journey in the first instance:[17] 'My father's Jamaican, so I'm bound to have a more of an interest than folk, do you understand me? I mean: It's relative to me, do you know what I mean? My ancestors were taken from Africa to Jamaica'; '. . . it is really an exploration of my fore-parents, it is not just a general look at history but is looking at something that relates to me'.

Often this connection was enabled or amplified through the use of artefacts in the play. These artefacts linked to people's personal stories in quite profound ways, having 'born witness' to the heritage:

It's not just an artefact, it tells a history of whoever made it and whoever owned it and whoever took it from the rightful owner. So it's quite complicated, quite complex and I just think this story should be told, and I think that was a very good element of the play, when we were made aware of these connections.

And again:

> You actually got something that has, from that historical period that has that resonance in a way and it kinds of *speaks a story* more than what you see if you were just sitting there, if you know what I mean.

One encounter which was cited repeatedly in interviews was holding the manilla ring. These brass rings were used as a trading currency for slaves, and many audience members reflected on feeling the 'weight' of the ring (in any number of ways). Literally holding a man's life in your hands, this cold, ugly metal had a particularly powerful and long-lasting impact:

> We thought it was going to go round the neck, and that was the worth of a whole human being, you know? It was just so horrific. There were one or two moments, like that, where I wanted to weep at the fact that human beings could do that.

O'Keeffe has written about the role of artefacts as witnesses to history, giving the example of briefcases from the World Trade Centre; 'they were asked, in the very title of the Smithsonian Institute exhibition in which they found a home, to "bear witness to history"'.[18] Their materiality, as in the response above, manifests and attests to the horrors of the heritage, silently and with a terrible augustness, 'speaking the story'. Artefacts became a crucial part of the narrative space being created; a material reminder also of the role of the institution in the historical record. The physicality of the museum thus played a pivotal role in contextualizing the performance, and the various rememberings that it elicited. The architecture is both a comforting reminder of the fixity of history and heritage (as we have come to understand it), and a guilty party in the narrative being portrayed. There is a peculiar aptness to its frame. In the best and worst senses, it appears as one respondent commented, 'you are surrounded by history in a museum'. Being immersed in such a space, for all of these reasons, enables the autobiographical narratives that we have seen above to emerge: 'One of the most memorable parts is when we were in the big hall; it was rather a bit like being on board the ship if you like'; 'It's like you're walking on to a set'.

Such comments on the museum as a 'set' for the performance indicate a simultaneous sense of 'place' and a desire for 'dis-placement' from the reality of the museum (its familiarity and sets of expectations) or perhaps the intensity of the subject matter; a temporary removal from a world where the legacy of slavery and racism is so apparent (as our respondents tell us). There is a mix of the familiar and the unfamiliar in the use of the space, the heritage on offer and the particular sites within which it is performed. This potent mix allows for the authority of the institution and individuals' own truths to coexist, with the performance constructing, through the suspension of disbelief, a (perhaps momentary) narrative space somewhere between the two. However, that this is interpreted and understood as a 'safe' space should never be taken for granted. Our respondents showed themselves to be in a constant negotiation of the physical museum, the stories being presented, and their own personal responses to those stories that remind us how fragile and uneasy that narrative space might be. Thinking sensitively about how actors and/or the museum recognize the gravity of the issues that are opened up, respond sensitively to their articulation, and 'close' such an encounter (without shutting down debates) are crucial to well-conceived participatory work more generally, but even more so perhaps when people give of themselves in the ways that have been articulated here.

The museum as narrative witness

The responses to *This Accursed Thing* demonstrate how complex and varied practices of individual meaning making and narrative construction can be. Consequently, it can never be assumed that such narratives will accord with those being projected and actualized by the institution. How museums acknowledge and work with that potential discord remains intensely problematic; not least when it comes to ascribing 'value'. That is, how an institution uses, acknowledges, incorporates, or even challenges an individual's contribution after the participatory 'event' has finished. There is nothing more disempowering than being assured your story bears telling (no matter how painful the process) only to find that it is institutionalized on terms that you disagree with, or is flatly ignored. In participatory practices, the museum becomes a witness to the heritage as understood by the individual, and a potential legitimizer of their narrative. Kacandes recognizes the role of the witness in the process of articulating autobiographical memories, and potentially even making them useful; 'Narrative witnessing' by a listener/audience is crucial in rendering the memory authentic.[19] To reveal our memories within museum environments in ways that are prompted, but unexpected and unscripted, represents a challenge for institutions in terms of the responsibility that bearing witness to those memories brings.

The museum – physically, architecturally and institutionally – has a story to tell. Only recently has there been an acknowledgement of multiple viewpoints, understandings and 'truths' in the ways such narratives unfold on site, and an interest in working with the subjectivity inherent in visitor response. Projects which seek to work at the knotty interstices of this problematic represent a great challenge for institutions. Kavanagh conceptualizes one form of engagement with the museum as the 'dream space'; one situated in our inner life and sub-rational consciousness, and over which the museum can have little control.[20] It is in this dream space that the most enjoyable, yet subversive parts of the visit lie, and in which, I argue, the above examples of engagement are situated. Museum professionals must be careful not to view such engagements as inevitable and desirable in and of themselves, but to think carefully about how they support and understand that 'dream space' within the frame of the museum, which may mean giving away a little of their control over the narrative being portrayed. Only then might the museum be an enabling rather than legitimizing witness or (at worst) an appropriator.

There are complex ways in which some of our research participants rejected the idea of a collective memory or grand narrative of slavery as simplistic and homogenizing; as itself a fiction. However, a narrative that recognizes and encourages individual remembering and is able to shift in response to it was more appealing. We have seen that participatory work which acknowledges and works *with* its fictionality, can provide an interface between a visitor's subjective 'dream space' and the gravity, weight and illusion of 'the institution'; a collaborative, fluid, responsive narrative space within which new ideas about self-ness, the museum, legitimacy, authority and 'truth' can be safely explored and valued.

Notes

1 See J. Bradburne, 'The Poverty of Nations: Should Museums Create Identity?', in J. M. Fladmark (ed.) *Heritage and Museums: Shaping National Identity*, Shaftesbury: Donhead, 2000, pp. 379–91; B. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums and Heritage*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998; R. Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997; P. Vergo (ed.) *The New Museology*, London: Reaktion Books, 1989.

2 J. Gibbons, *Contemporary Art and Memory: Images of Recollection and Remembrance*, London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2007, p. 52.

3 See R. Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, London: Routledge, 2002; G. Bagnall, 'Performance and Performativity at Heritage Sites', *Museum and Society*, 1(2), 2003, 87–103; L. Smith, *The Uses of Heritage*, London: Routledge, 2006.

4 See A. Jackson and J. Kidd, *Performing Heritage*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010.

5 B. M. Ross, *Remembering the Personal Past: Descriptions of Autobiographical Memory*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991; M. A. Conway, *Autobiographical Memory: An Introduction*, Milton Keynes and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1990; D. R. Beike, J. M. Lampinen and D. A. Behrend (eds) *The Self and Memory*, New York: Psychology Press, 2004.

6 J. A. Singer and P. Blagor, 'The Integrative Function of Narrative Processing: autobiographical memory, self-defining memories, and the life story of identity', in Beike *et al.*, *The Self and Memory*, pp. 117–38.

7 N. Alea and S. Bluck, 'Why are you telling me that? A conceptual model of the social function of autobiographical memory', in S. Bluck (ed.) *Memory*, vol. 11, no. 2, March 2003, p. 167.

8 E. Zerubavel, *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

9 J. Kidd, 'Digital Storytelling and the Performance of Memory', in J. Garde-Hansen, A. Hoskins and A. Reading (eds) *Save as . . . Media and Memory*, Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

10 G. Kavanagh, *Dream Spaces: Memory and the Museum*, London and New York: Leicester University Press, 2000, p. 4.

11 Although in memory studies, the notion of subjective time means that these pasts might not be as distant as chronological time would have us believe. See A. Wilson and M. Ross, 'The Identity Function of Autobiographical Memory: time is on our side', in S. Bluck (ed.) *Memory*, vol. 11, no. 2, March 2003, pp. 137–49.

12 S. Bluck, 'Autobiographical Memory: exploring its function in everyday life', in S. Bluck (ed.) *Memory*, vol. 11, no. 2, March 2003, p. 122.

13 Including, more latterly, remembrance initiatives.

14 See A. Jackson and J. Kidd, 'Performance, Learning and Heritage' project report, 2008. Online. Available at: www.manchester.ac.uk/plh. Accessed 23 March 2011.

15 Not least for some of the (untypically high) number of visitors from Black and Minority Ethnic groups who came to the performance.

16 M. Pasupathi, 'Emotion Regulation During Social Remembering: differences between emotions elicited during an event and emotions elicited when talking about it', in S. Bluck (ed.) *Memory*, vol. 11, no. 2, March 2003, p. 161.

17 This relates to theories of post-memory. See Gibbons, *Contemporary Art and Memory*.

18 T. O'Keeffe, 'Landscape and Memory: historiography, theory, methodology', in N. Moore and Y. Whelan (eds) *Heritage, Memory and the Politics of Identity: New Perspectives on the Cultural Landscape*, Ashgate: Hampshire, 2007, p. 7.

19 I. Kacandes, 'Narrative Witnessing as Memory Work: reading Gertrud Kolmar's *A Jewish Mother*', in M. Bal, J. Crewe and L. Spitzer (eds) *Acts of Memory: cultural recall in the present*, Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1999, p. 55.

20 Kavanagh, *Dream Spaces*, p. 2.

8

BEYOND NARRATIVE

Designing epiphanies

Lee H. Skolnick

The aim of this chapter is to move through a treatment of the role of narrative in the creation of architectural and cultural experiences, while at the same time exploring the limitations of narrative as it has been understood and used in recent practices.[1] I will draw upon a variety of sources and examples to outline definitions of narrative in relation to architecture, philosophy, psychology, science, music, and other fields, and then go on to introduce the notion of epiphany as a goal that can take us beyond narrative to meaning making in the design of both exhibitions and buildings.

I will attempt to demonstrate how specific built experiences utilize narrative to embody meaning. In particular, I will cite churches, concert halls, and other purpose/concept/polemic-driven structures that have been exemplars of embodiment. However, I will try to amplify the goal of meaning making by expanding on the idea of epiphany as a particular, revelatory moment that is the cumulative result of already received information. In so doing, I will explore the possibility that a spatial experience can grow organically from content and intent, and propose that the achievement of epiphany is only possible if the creator has an understanding of how the participant might respond.

Had enough of narrative?

A word or an idea can be so overused that it starts to lose all its meaning or begins to mean its opposite. I still remember when bad meant bad, before it started meaning good. I used to enjoy being an architect, before I had to read about someone being the 'architect of the economic meltdown', or the 'architect of the attacks on the World Trade Center' or the 'architect of the Iraq war'. And, years ago, when I stumbled upon narrative as an idea to describe and codify a critical organizational and conceptual aspect of the kind of communication and experience we seek to engender through design, I thought I had uncovered the Holy Grail. And perhaps I had. I have spent many years preaching about the virtues of narrative as a critical and extremely useful – and user-friendly – tool in conceiving and designing built experiences – that is, buildings, exhibitions, public places, environmental graphics, even media and print communication. It became a mainstay in my efforts to promote a larger agenda – that

of understanding that all design is interpretation. That what we really seek through design is to impart information: themes and concepts, facts and evidence, and to incite cognition and emotion that will result in understanding and meaning making; to forge a firm and lasting connection between content and people in order to enrich their lives. And that the link we create to achieve this is the embodiment of that content in the forms that we craft – the environments, the exhibitions, the buildings and the other communicative mediums that can make meaning manifest. And that narrative, as a hard-wired human instinct, is a sure strategy for reaching your intended audience through a means that is completely intuitive.

But you know how by the time you hear your favourite cutting-edge music playing in the supermarket (or The Who playing a medley of their greatest hits during the halftime show at last year's Super Bowl) you know it's time to move on? Well, I have heard the word and idea of narrative applied to everything but breakfast cereal and toilet paper. And I'm wondering if it has been so co-opted, distorted and misused that it has lost its speculative edge, and thereby, its operational usefulness.

It has been used as a smokescreen, in this *New York Times* piece:

> voice-mail boxes inside Goldman Sachs lit up on January 21st with an unusual message from the bank's Chief Executive – a bit of Wall Street speak that sounded like the makings of a Book on Zen and the art of money-making.
>
> 'In a year that proved to have no shortage of story lines, I believe very strongly that performance is the ultimate narrative,' the Chief, Lloyd C. Blankfein, said in the companywide message. He then celebrated the bank's record profits in 2009 and discussed its plans to pay bonuses to its employees.[2]

This narrative had a happy ending – for Mr Blankfein. The *Times of London* reported that his bonus might reach $100 million![3]

It has been used as an apologia for the decline in the popularity of a sport in another *Times* article, 'Running Without a Narrative'.

> Some have blamed performance enhancing drugs for the loss of American dominance on the roads; others have criticized United States training methods; still others see a shifting of interest to other sports, like lacrosse and soccer. But the real reason for the decline is a failure of narrative.[4]

Of course, we've also observed many more serious efforts to reposition disciplines and reshape people's understandings of them by sending them through a filter of narrative and having them emerge less arcane, abstract or esoteric. Sometimes. As a means of shaping the teaching of science and making it more effective, the psychologist Jerome Bruner has proclaimed that the 'process of science making is narrative. It consists of spinning hypotheses about nature, testing them, correcting the hypotheses, and getting one's head straight'.[5]

The same subject has been treated by the philosopher Jean-François Lyotard, who analyses science through the lens of narratives and meta-narratives, and argues that the postmodern incredulity toward meta-narratives demands that we resolve the conflict that has always existed between scientific knowledge and narrative knowledge if science is to answer to the ultimate criterion of performativity.[6] And witness the emergence and growth of conferences and programmes on narrativity, which further dissect the subject into diverse aspects of the

overarching theme. A recent conference held by the State University of New York, Stony Brook, was entitled 'Narrativity' and included sessions on the 'Implications of the Temporal and Spatial Nature of Hypertext Narrative' and 'Metaphor and Memory: Nietzsche's Narrative of Self-Overcoming'.[7]

In the 1970s, the profession of medicine decided that its strictly scientific approach to problem-solving needed to begin taking into account the specific psychological and personal history of patients. Thus was born the narrative medicine movement, which demands an understanding of the highly complex narrative situations among doctors, patients, colleagues and the public, and concerns itself with the phenomenal form in which patients experience ill health and, ultimately, allows for the construction of meaning. It aims not only to validate the experience of the patient, but also to encourage creativity and self-reflection in the physician.

Perhaps less surprisingly, the field of music has embraced the use of narrative. From the programme music of Saint-Saens, Ravel and Debussy, to opera, to movie scores, to the recognition by Professor Fred Maus in his essay 'Narratology' that in the late twentieth century, music theory and criticism began to explore the possibility of narrativity in non-texted, non-programmatic music.[8] He observed that these studies lie not just at the intersection of music theory and criticism, but also of semiotics and the philosophical study of expression and representation, and that one of the most compelling aspects of the relationships among these fields stems from their shared purpose of communication.

In 'The Narrative Construction of Reality', Bruner regales us with a list of others who have been working in what he calls 'the vineyards of narratology', including anthropologists, psychologists, linguists and literary theorists.[9] I could go on and on. As I said before, it is difficult to find an area of study or life which has not been enveloped by, or filtered through the seemingly limitless fabric of narrative.

I guess it's time to set the record straight. I didn't actually set out here to trash narrative. Unlike Antony's treatment of Caesar, I'll probably do more praising than burying. As I mentioned earlier, narrative has been of great help to me in formulating and understanding an approach to making spatial experiences. But let's be clear about one thing. Narrative can never be an end in itself. Our job as designers is to interpret.

Narrative as interpretation

So, if we are to fully appreciate the operative use and potential of narrative as a tool in the work of museum making, we must understand it as a means of interpretation. We interpret when we explain or conceptualize; when we translate or explain the meaning or significance of something; when we reveal or disclose. And it is well known that for human beings this revelation is often best achieved through storytelling. A story is an 'incident, experience or subject that furnishes, or would be interesting material for, a narrative'.[10] What Bruner and others have illuminated is the potential for narrative as a form not only to represent reality, but to constitute reality.

The coalescing of this notion had been brewing in me for a long time. But it began to really crystallize several years ago, when I travelled to the University of Leicester to participate in the 'Creative Space' conference. It was billed as an international conference exploring museum and gallery space as a creative medium and was a wide ranging look at the interaction between design and museology. I gave a paper at the time called 'Towards a New Museum Architecture:

narrative and representation', which was subsequently included in Suzanne MacLeod's book *Reshaping Museum Space*.[11] I put forth in that paper that, no less than exhibits, museum architecture is an interpretive medium – one which can communicate ideas and content both general and specific. I suggested that architects must mine each situation to unearth the stories that could form a narrative, and that moving from the more superficial model of representing that narrative to the deeper challenge of embodying it was the surest way of designing an experience that conveyed meaning.

The foundation for accepting narrative as a means to our communications goals is easy to construct. Bruner has extensively explored the meaning of narrative and its foundational role in creating and interpreting human culture. In *Acts of Meaning*, he discusses characteristics of storytelling which relate directly to museums and to design.[12] He focuses on how people learn. Human beings are natural storytellers; they make sense of the world and themselves through narrative, a form shared both by storytelling and history. From the time they are very young, children learn that the way to integrate their own desires with their family's norms and rules is to construct a story about their actions; this push to construct narrative, Bruner maintains, shapes how children acquire language, and the habit persists into adulthood as a primary instrument for making meaning. These storytelling skills ensure our place within human society and probably mean that information that is not structured narratively is more likely to be forgotten. Museum designers, take note!

What becomes clear from this hermeneutic cycle is that if our goal is interpretation, and the most natural mode of communicating is storytelling, then narrative is the architecture that both structures and conveys the intended meaning. In narrative, as in interpretation, we construct by selecting, gathering and reassembling information and evidence within the framework of our own ideas. As interpreters, we may receive content in any range of modes, but we attempt to translate and send the synthesized messages out in a coherent, comprehensible language. Where narrative comes in is in providing the choreographic structure that follows a storyline – a series of events that form a meaningful pattern. And, as in architecture, the ultimate synthetic manifestation of the intended communication is the constructed experience, which both conveys and embodies meaning.

Given the fact that one can easily substantiate the fundamental role that narrative plays in communication, and if we accept that like every art, architecture communicates wittingly or unwittingly, I have been continually surprised that museums – institutions dedicated to the interpretation of cultural content – have so often been so devoid of appropriate messaging in the design of their buildings. Certainly, we can partially ascribe this condition to the multiple aims to which museum buildings are put: as isolated artistic expression; as civic monument; as source of community pride; as fundable entity; as destination; and as postcard. And yet, because of, or in spite of, these myriad demands, there have been attempts by some architects to represent or even embody specific themes in museum buildings: the ethereal mysteries of the cosmos (Plate 8.1); the chaos and anxiety of the Holocaust; the joy of creativity; and the authentic materiality of the natural sciences.

Beyond narrative

Still, I find myself plagued by the excruciating possibility that buildings can reach further beyond symbolic representation and fulfil their potential to embody content and meaning. That by employing narrative in a much deeper way, we can reach beyond it. Fortunately, I

am not alone. In *The Architecture of Happiness* Alain de Botton reminds us that 'John Ruskin proposed that we seek two things in our buildings. We want them to shelter us. And we want them to speak to us – to speak to us of whatever we find important and need to be reminded of'.[13] That sounds like narrative to me. But de Botton goes on to say that 'beautiful objects . . . embody good qualities rather than simply remind us of them'.[14] That 'to call a work of architecture or design beautiful is to recognize it as a rendition of values critical to our flourishing, a transubstantiation of our individual ideas in a material medium'.[15] How much closer to our definitions of interpretation can one get?

In 'The Fiction of Function', Stanford Anderson declares that 'architecture is . . . a bearer of meaning'.[16] He discusses how fragments of stories are carried in details, how features of buildings reveal function, that building elements have metaphoric qualities: portals loaded with the significance of arrival, windows as the eyes through which a controlled view of the world is afforded. He concludes this treatment by saying that only when an architect has a larger vision do these individual, sometimes unavoidably metaphorical details attain a higher level of organization that we might call a story. So how can a space grow organically from its content and intent? Is it possible to achieve what the painter Francis Bacon spoke of when he posited 'a complete interlocking of image and paint, so that the image is the paint and vice versa'?[17] Can we, as designers, tap into the power of narrative and interpretation as innate human tools used for understanding, as design-generators, and as methods for embodying the conceptual and thematic within the experiential, spatial and material?

For the answer, I had to move away from the museum. I looked to the architecture of religion and music, because in my own experience, those have come the closest to transcending narrative through a synthesis of the cognitive and sensual to embody and communicate meaning. Churches attempt a pure expression of spirituality. They embody faith, the particular beliefs of a religion, their rituals and their icons, and they are simultaneously viscerally and emotionally inspirational.

In *Theology in Stone*, Kieckhefer suggested that 'entering a church is a metaphor for entering into the presence of the holy' and that the intended experience of a medieval Christian church was multi-sensual: 'to the eyes, in its dazzling artwork and in the ritual acts performed; to the ears, through both word and music; to the nose, in "divine fragrance" of incense and flowers'.[18] Or as a monk once said of his church: 'It prays for itself.' De Botton wrote that 'it is the world's great religions that have perhaps given most thought to the role played by the environment in determining identity'; 'that the very principle of religious architecture has its origins in the notion that where we are critically determines what we are able to believe in'; 'that we require places where the values outside of us encourage and enforce the aspirations within us'.[19] He relates an experience he had in London, venturing from a crowded, noisy McDonald's into Westminster Cathedral (Plate 8.2):

> Drawn by rain and curiosity, I entered a cavernous hall, sunk in tarry darkness, against which a thousand votive candles stood out, their golden shadows flickering over mosaics and carved representations of the Stations of the Cross. There were smells of incense and sounds of murmured prayer. Hanging from the ceiling at the centre of the nave was a ten-metre-high crucifix, with Jesus on one side and his mother on the other. Around the high altar, a mosaic showed Christ enthroned in the heavens, encircled by angels, his feet resting on a globe, his hands clasping a chalice overflowing with his own blood.

The facile din of the outer world had given way to awe and silence. Children stood close to their parents and looked around with an air of puzzled reverence. Visitors instinctively whispered, as if deep in some collective dream from which they did not wish to emerge. The anonymity of the street had here been subsumed by a peculiar kind of intimacy. Everything serious in human nature seemed to be called to the surface: thoughts about limits and infinity, about powerlessness and sublimity. The stonework threw into relief all that was compromised and dull, and kindled a yearning for one to live up to its perfections.

After ten minutes in the cathedral, a range of ideas that would have been inconceivable outside began to assume an air of reasonableness. Under the influence of the marble, the mosaics, the darkness and the incense, it seemed entirely probable that Jesus was the Son of God and had walked across the Sea of Galilee. . . .

Concepts that would have sounded demented forty metres away, in the company of a party of (rowdy) teenagers and vats of frying oil, had succeeded – through a work of architecture – in acquiring supreme significance and majesty.[20]

In his *Ten Books on Architecture*, Leon Battista Alberti cast his exploratory net wide enough to seek a narrative of a superior cosmic harmony in both design and music.[21] By studying the correspondence between architectural proportions and harmonic musical ratios, he found that the very same numbers that cause sounds to have 'concinnitas' (to be pleasing to the ear), also fill the eyes and mind with wondrous delight. He, too, sought to interpret through the relationship between symbol, meaning and the real, the purest expression of semantic reference.

As we all know, Goethe proclaimed that architecture is frozen music.[22] Certainly, both are abstractions of meaning that manifest themselves in real experience. Both can be powerful, both effectively and affectively. Architecture for music, particularly the best concert halls, like the best churches, embody their themes while enhancing appreciation and understanding through experience. While functional issues such as acoustics and harmonic proportion vie with expression for prominence in their design, buildings for music can aspire to be purely musical, even as they impact and are impacted by the music of their time and place.

In *Buildings for Music*, Michael Forsyth develops this theme and places it in historical context by demonstrating the powerful effect of musical taste and style on architecture and the reciprocal influence that buildings and their acoustics have had on musical performance and composition.[23] In his essay, 'Their Master's Voice', the architectural scholar, critic and curator Kurt Forster submits that 'the design of concert halls is among the greatest challenges in architecture'.[24] He says, 'in a word, it is the task of the architect to bring the listeners assembled in a hall to the threshold of an experience beyond architecture by means of the architecture around them'.[25] He goes on to cite Hans Scharoun's drawings of his Berlin Philharmonie with their 'billowing vaults and vertiginous skywalks', as 'amalgamating with the propulsive power of music'.[26] He ends by inextricably dissolving the musical into the architectural when he observes that, in this project, as in Frank Gehry's Disney Concert Hall (Figure 8.1):

across decades of divergent evolutions, Scharoun's and Gehry's concert halls share in this spirit of improvisation in a manner deeply akin to the practice of musical improvisation, which knowingly loosens control in order to create the occasion when the grace of coincidence matches mastery beyond rules.[27]

FIGURE 8.1 The Walt Disney Concert Hall, Los Angeles, California. Photo: Carol M. Highsmith, Wikimedia.

And he concludes by saying: 'I would not hesitate to embrace the Disney Hall with the words by which Theodor W. Adorno did justice to Scharoun's achievement, characterizing the hall as 'beautiful, because, in order to create ideal conditions for orchestral music, it becomes similar to music without borrowing from it'.[28]

While poring over Anderson's work on fiction and function, I was reminded that there is another obvious project type worth examining in this regard; one much closer to home – the home. Anderson analyses the Villa Savoye (Figure 8.2) of Le Corbusier in relation to its 'interpretation of the quality of life that was coming about through, or was potential in, the conditions of modern times'.[29] He writes:

> the same vision informs Le Corbusier's still lifes, the spatial and formal ingenuity of the Villa Savoye, or yet again the select perception of the kitchen of that same villa. Le Corbusier offered a vision of certain eternal goods; the loaf of bread, the can of milk, the bottle of wine, light and air, access to the earth and sky, physical health, all made available more fully and to greater numbers thanks to new potentials that were both spiritual and technical. There is hardly a detail of the Villa Savoye that does not contribute to the story.[30]

FIGURE 8.2 The Villa Savoye, Poissy, France. © 2006 Mary Ann Sullivan, Bluffon University.

Designing epiphanies

In this research on building types and their communicative potential and power, you will notice that I have sought something that goes beyond symbolic or even literal representation; something that achieves, or at least approaches, the Holy Grail of embodiment. Why? It's not just my natural, annoying tendency to want to provoke the reader by offering a chapter declaring narrative dead and useless. Well, it's not only that. It's that I, myself, have had experiences in places – museums, other types of buildings, landscapes – where all of a sudden, or even gradually, understanding washes over me like a warm pleasurable wave. And my heart beats faster. And my nerve endings are all firing. And the world seems brighter. And life seems a bit clearer. And for that moment things are a little less confusing. And I go forward with that understanding, which can never be fully extinguished. Assuming I haven't recently ingested illicit substances, been born again, or eaten something bad, what's going on?

In his 1967 neon wall sign, the artist Bruce Nauman said that 'the true artist helps the world by revealing mystic truths'. I want to do that. I want to know how to do that. So I look beyond narrative: beyond the assembling and amalgamating; beyond the bits of information and the ordering of experience. To what? To a synthesis wherein the individual elements are dissolved, where the sequence gives way. Where revelation produces epiphany.

An epiphany is 'a sudden, intuitive perception or insight into the reality or essential meaning of something'.[31] It is a point where past experiences come together. It is a particular moment that is the cumulative result of already received information. And so I focus on embodiment because narrative implies moving through conceptual and physical space in time but epiphanies are the product of all of our temporal experiences. I think that successful embodiment produces epiphanies because content, messages and themes are unified. In *Architecture and Narrative*, Sophia Psarra distinguishes 'between the conceptual and the perceptual characteristics of space, between patterns we can hold in our mind at once and those we grasp gradually through movement'.[32] I have come to believe that these can actually be one and the

same thing. That in the mind conceiving of an experience and in the senses living the experience itself, there can be a simultaneity. And that this is when epiphanies occur. Achieving epiphanies is necessarily hard work. Is it worth it? It is if we believe how it is defined.

Derived from the Greek, the word epiphany means 'a sudden manifestation of deity'.[33] In Christian theology, it also means 'the manifestation of a hidden message for the benefit of others, a message for their salvation'.[34] And if we look at history, we see that artists have always sought to produce epiphanies. James Joyce gave the name epiphany to certain short sketches he wrote. He even suggested that there was a certain resemblance between the mystery of transubstantiation in the Catholic Mass and what he was trying to do as an artist, changing the bread of everyday life into something with permanent artistic life. On a more individual level, in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, his character Stephen Dedalus says that epiphanies are a sudden and momentary showing forth or disclosure of one's authentic inner self.[35] I am proposing that, through design, situations can be made to show forth their authentic inner meaning.

For creators of experience, inducing those personal epiphanies is a cherished goal. To connect people to ideas is our version of the divine. Ancient artists seemed to have an intuitive, hard-wired grasp of this. Their art was all about beliefs held true by the greater proportion of their cultures. But even in our complex society, despite a much expanded cultural diversity, we can still strive, at least in our artistic expression, to communicate both values and concepts.

Architecture, the mother of all arts, allows for the deployment of the widest range of resources to pursue this mission. And museums, the stewards of our cultures, must play a key role in attempting to bring it forth to the public. We understand how people respond to space, light, material, movement, proportion, colour, iconography, detail and even media. But we know that epiphanies are produced only when the synthesis of these elements transcends their individual messaging. The ability to process input in this way is a remarkable human faculty, and we must recognize it as the key to our potential success in a quest to make meaning manifest.

The wonderful challenge, then, is to fill people's senses and minds with content-laden stimuli; to imbue every ingredient of an experience with informative suggestions and to trigger vivid yet specific associations. To use our knowledge of how people take in and process information to inform an 'intuitive' narrative. There will always be a place for explicit, even didactic, exposition. Those of us who design exhibitions are on a lifelong hunt for ever more engaging techniques for delivering content. Artefacts; graphics; hands-on mechanical interactives; role play and performance; electronic displays; audio-visual media and web-based delivery systems; handheld devices and gestural interfaces – all these and other means of presenting and sharing will continue to be refined, enhanced, updated and added-to.

And linear narratives will not, and should not, go away. Many stories lend themselves to a beginning, a middle and an end. Chronologies; systematic sequences; cause and effect; series of themes, concepts, sub-concepts and examples – these well-known narrative structures have their place in certain situations, particularly in the appropriate crafting of specific exhibitions. However, what architecture and other art forms can teach us is that narratives can be multi-layered, atemporal, asynchronous, sensorially immersive, and diffuse. As Alain de Botton pointed out in his moving account of his experience at Westminster Cathedral, the cumulative effect of space, scale, light, materiality, ornamentation, sound and scent produced in him a profound epiphany involving mind, body and emotion. The overwhelming and intoxicating

experience of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony is comprised of a narrative structure upon which is hung a staggering range of theme and variation, melody and harmony, polyphony, density and volume, poignancy and majesty, tension, chaos, longing and resolution. One emerges from this carefully crafted, masterful structure of sound completely transformed.

Similarly, great literature often plays with time, jumping around and arranging connotative allusions in an artful mélange. Poetry goes even further, stripping language and structure to the points of distillation and abstraction, seeking the evocation of essences. And the best plays and films fool us into entering unreal worlds by offering the comfort of familiar images, characters and situations, while allowing every other characteristic of reality to become a variable to be manipulated.

What all these art forms have in common is that they are experienced over time. Whether quick, or drawn out over great durations, the artist must grapple with the fact that the receipt of information will occur in a sequence. But the nature of the information itself does not have to parallel that order. A great teacher of mine said that the best teaching is done by osmosis. There is no suggestion of linearity or even the various natures of what is absorbed. It can enter continuously, gradually, and from all around. That is what we, as architects and designers, need to understand. Every aspect of a designed and built experience holds narrative potential. The rigid structure of linearity can be an impediment and a crutch. Limiting the range of interpretive mediums through which content is filtered will most assuredly reduce the effectiveness of communication.

That same teacher maintained that the true medium of architecture is air. Air in and air out. He claimed that great architecture had sounds that you didn't know you were hearing and smells you didn't really sense. I think he was identifying epiphany – the transcendence of narrative into embodiment. And that's what the great artists and architects are telling us. Narrative, yes. But use it as an open-ended means to connect with people. As a strategy, not as a solution or end in itself. Shuffle it, layer it, scatter it, and embed it in every part of the structure or space, so it will be fully absorbed and made an integral part of the participant's experience.

The musician and artist, David Byrne, was asked: After finishing a song, are you always able to completely grasp the meaning? He responded by saying: 'Some I'm not sure what they're about. But they have a kind of resonance. They say something to me, or they touch something, but I'm not sure exactly what it is.' The interviewer continued: 'You are the person who introduced the idea of "stop making sense", which is a liberating thought for songwriters, that we can be freed from linear, logical thought in songs.' Byrne replied:

> There was a lot of stuff I heard when I was growing up that was like that: Beatles songs, Rolling Stones songs, Bob Dylan songs. Even a lot of R&B and James Brown songs. If you took the lyrics at their face value, it was just a series of non-sequiturs. But in context, in sound and in the way they were said, whatever the gut reaction was to those particular words, it made sense on a non-logical level. It skirted your logical or rational facilities and struck a different level. A level which you can say 'that's reality'. The rational way of thinking is only a gloss that you put on reality, and if through whatever means necessary you get at what's under that, you're touching something more basic.[36]

It is interesting to me that what we seek is always that – something so basic. Clarity. Understanding. Perhaps it's what makes epiphany so alluring. Narratives can be so complex. They may still be among the better devices we have for communication. But for me, in my own

evolution of exploring how we communicate through design, narrative has become the past which is prologue. As narrative dissolves, epiphany emerges.

My next mountain is epiphany. And it's a steep one. But I take comfort in this little anecdote: Ludwig Wittgenstein, having abandoned academia for three years in order to construct a house for his sister Gretl in Vienna, understood the magnitude of the challenge. 'You think philosophy is difficult', observed the author of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 'but I tell you, it is nothing compared to the difficulty of being a good architect'.[37]

But, lest we forget, (and who have we found to be more likely than architects to forget this?) epiphanies are not about the creators, they are about those who experience them. Interpretation, design, architecture – they are all ways of communicating. And communication necessitates both speaking and listening in order to form a connection. The poet and songwriter Leonard Cohen summed up the relationship among the artist, his creation, the listener, and the world when he said: 'That's what dignifies the song. Songs don't dignify human activity. Human activity dignifies the song.'[38]

Notes

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9

PLACE, TIME AND MEMORY

Stephen Greenberg

At *Creative Space*, a conference on museum design at the University of Leicester in 2004, I presented a paper entitled *The Vital Museum*.[1] This was about how exhibit making could shift away from the static conventions of 2-D and 3-D design, graphics and showcases, towards theatre, storytelling and mediated environments. Here the audience effectively become actors within a drama set in an architectonic or scenographic space. Since then, my colleagues in Metaphor and I have experimented where we can with this kind of dramatized and mediated storytelling in exhibitions, whole museums and palaces. This chapter speculates whether the same concept can be expanded onto a larger canvas, exploring narratives of place on an urban scale.

The shift from the conventions of 2-D and 3-D design is also a shift in thinking from users to audiences and from formed spaces to found spaces. *The Vital Museum* was influenced very much by the writings of the theatre director Peter Brook, how he thinks about audiences and also about the nature of the performance space itself.[2] Overlaid on this is our approach to narratives in space that is effectively one of sampling, mixing and layering just as in contemporary music. The work of our studio, Metaphor, is primarily a collage of a range of media: architectonic and scenographic, audio-visual, graphic, installation art; it is atmospheric and, above all, narrative. Whether this sampling approach can extend out of the exhibition narrative environment into the wider cityscape and landscape is an interesting question.

We have found audience evaluation an exciting way both to validate this process and elicit participation, and to respond to personal and collective memory in our narrative place making. Audience evaluation of our exhibition *The First Emperor: China's Terracotta Army* at the British Museum revealed that many visitors felt they had had a spiritual experience that stayed with them.[3] What was going on here? *The First Emperor* exhibition was a scenographic experience set within found space; theatrical, atmospheric, narrative and multimedia (Plate 9.1). It had the added ingredient that the audience came face to face with remarkable objects, and were transported on a journey into another world. This landscape of sampling and collaging is full of different signs and symbols that act as visual and aural triggers to personal recollection. Our route to get here was to use content shaped into a story and simulacra – representations of the real – together, to make narrative environments. In this we differ fundamentally from

architects who are also at work in the urban landscape but whose preferred mode is form and concrete materials. Our visual and aural triggers work in the narrative environment both cerebrally and also in the visceral way that the triggers of 'taste and smell' do for personal recollection and memory, as Proust describes it.[4]

One cannot explore this without looking at the role of architecture in the twentieth century. The making of the physical world that surrounds us has always been the province of form makers and the biggest challenge in scaling this narrative approach up into an urban landscape is that these environments are controlled by architects and developers. When I trained as an architect, there was no doubt about the rightness of modernism. The first book on our reading list was Le Corbusier's *Vers une Architecture*: the manifesto of architecture.[5] One cannot underestimate the long shadow that this propagandist text had over at least four generations, educated in the certainty of their action. It lent a confidence – an arrogance – to the gait of architects that even the postmodern generation haven't sloughed off. David Kynaston, writing about the 1950s describes how architects were part of the 'top-down' 'Reithian' establishment, thinking that they knew what was best for people.[6] Social research indicated that people didn't want to live in flats or streets in the air, but their wishes were ignored.

Some argue that these wishes are still ignored. The debate concerning the Duchy of Cornwall's development at Poundbury might prove a strong indication of this. Prince Charles and the architect Leon Krier argue that, in essence, the town is evoking a story, atmosphere, beliefs, and also an idea about rational beauty expounded by the philosopher Roger Scruton.[7] Surveys show that Poundbury, a facsimile town, is very popular and has an 85 per cent satisfaction rating. In opposition, supporters of modernism such as Stephen Bayley say his interference is undemocratic, and deride The Prince's Foundation for the Built Environment, which fosters traditional architecture and design.[8] However, although these critics have ideological reasons for supporting modernism over classicism, they are unable to provide a compelling narrative. Rarely, if ever, does any correspondent or critic ever suggest that the Prince might be right.

Modernism has always presented itself as a visual simulacrum of utopian modernity. From the outset form never really followed function. Users rarely featured except in a mechanistic way, focusing on only their physical needs. But when you look at what we have produced, often you have to ask, what does it mean, and more specifically what and where's the story?

In his 1925 Voisin Plan for Paris, sponsored by an automobile manufacturer, Le Corbusier proposed to bulldoze most of central Paris north of the Seine, and replace it with his sixty-storey cruciform towers placed in an orthogonal street grid and park-like green space. His scheme was met with criticism and scorn from French politicians and industrialists, although they were favourable to the ideas of Taylorism and Fordism underlying Le Corbusier's designs. Many of these ideas were eventually borrowed by the ultimate car city, Detroit, in the 1950s and by communist cities alike. The Voisin Plan would have resulted in the obliteration not just of 'voisins' – neighbours – but also of complex layers of history and memory. From our postmodern vantage point we find it hard to conjure up that emotional will to erase, presented as super-rational and an immutable mass improvement. The Voisin Plan,[9] along with Le Corbusier's later publication *Ville Radieuse*,[10] still has a profound impact on cities around the world.

Le Corbusier, never one to employ ambiguity, advocated for architectural relics to be enshrined like carefully tended relics, 'for in this way the past becomes no longer dangerous to life'.[11] Throughout the twentieth century the world remained dominated by Le Corbusier's vision. The imagery of his simple cartoon-like line drawings was compelling. Cities have

embraced it with verve – it is, after all, a green light for property developers and politicians to create untold wealth in the process. All kinds of buildings have been erased and with them large tracts of history and memory, devaluing the intangible in the process and creating the most indefensible and alienating places. Modern urbanism has been a powerful tool for fundamentalist regimes for this very reason. The united forces of politics and development have made a huge impact; correcting, erasing, censoring and rewriting history as they go.

When a building is demolished, the memories it contained are irredeemably lost. Not surprising then that in the 1970s Le Corbusier and the Heritage Industry collided with each other. It was the first reaction to the loss of rich urban habitat, inspired by writers such as Jane Jacobs and the dynamiting of the failed Pruitt Igoe Housing Project in St Louis. A younger generation of architects and artists began squatting in, taking over and finding new uses for old buildings, saving and reviving inner city areas that would otherwise have disappeared. However, whilst the buildings had been saved and imaginatively renovated, their previous existence was often erased. And yet, this connection with our past is one we forget at our peril. As the novelist Hilary Mantel has observed, when we touch history we touch something deeper in ourselves.[12]

Deep down the moderns want to confine history. We see it in the zoning of cities, rather than in the rich overlap and natural grouping of trades that you still see in emerging cities such as Cairo. In mega cities such as this, the poor have no alternative but to live in this informal organic way – much as they always have, but now also piled up vertically. The rich in a city like Cairo move to gated communities where they live in villas with faux Islamic styling. As early as Abercrombie's Plan for London in 1944, urban areas around the world began to be compartmentalized and the foundations of dystopia laid.

Yet, for centuries cities were made without Voisin plans. We lived in amongst the layers of history, acknowledging that the world was old. We lived with memory and with ancestors. The Renaissance was overlaid on the Medieval. Historic fragments embody stories. And it is a universal truth that everyone has a story or is seeking one.

How then do you make memory and stories part of the making of the urban landscape? What if stories are not only central to creating successful interpretive spaces, such as galleries and museums, but also city-scale civic spaces and places? One could say that the historic fragments have simply got larger and some of the stories more epic in scale, grounded as they are in collective and personal memory. In our work we have discovered that memory and public space are deeply intertwined, and yet in terms of urban design discourse they might as well not exist as it is all too easy to sweep away a story in the name of progress. This is unsurprising considering that such an approach overturns large tracts of architectural and urban design pedagogy where the vision is controlled by a mixture of the architecture and the developers' financial equation. Contemporary urban strategies can be conveniently recycled from Shanghai to Dubai, and the past is either disposed of completely or resurrected in prescribed pastiche and scenographic environments, such as the resort hotel or the shopping mall interior. Even styling is now zoned.

But we need to make the case for the story as the portal to our own identity; that it has a value beyond measure that can add value to that which we do measure. This is not easy. In our work on palaces and heritage sites (undoubtedly historic fragments), we are frequently asked to emulate Dennis Severs' House in Spitalfields. Severs' House is the nearest thing to time travel. It is so convincing because, as in Proust, he uses the key triggers of physical sensation along with the idea that the original occupants have just left the room, insinuated in

the unmade bed, the half-finished plate and noises in the next room: it is the Hogarth setting brought to life. It is the nearest experience possible to the Holodeck in Star Trek Voyager, where the visitor steps over the threshold and into the eighteenth century. Step out of the Dennis Severs' House back onto the street and you face modern Bishopsgate, moving from candlelight to towers of glass soaring into the sky. The transition is extraordinary.

Although this elision between two worlds is extreme, it can be suggested that – unless general discourse changes – there is an inherent naivety in the proposition that storytelling and interpretive design can be a prime generator. Contemporary Spitalfields or a city such as Dubai would provide much more depth and connection if someone started from somewhere other than the simulacrum of Le Corbusier's ideal city and the transparency of steel and glass. In Baudrillard's terms such a place has succumbed to four stages in disconnection and disengagement: urbanization which separates humans from the natural world; multinational capitalism, which separates produced goods from the plants, minerals and other original materials and the processes used to create them; exchange value, in which the value of goods is based on money rather than usefulness; contemporary media including television, film, print and the Internet, which are responsible for blurring the line between goods that are needed and goods for which a need is created by commercial images.[13]

Perhaps another way to put it is this: modern urban place making, be it Spitalfields or Dubai, creates the kind of dystopian place that J. G. Ballard would be inspired by. He is a writer after an event that was built without a text, script or any kind of narrative story. Put like that it sounds crazy: we build cities from only the simple manifestos of Le Corbusier reworked, without any textured narrative, light and shade, colour, atmosphere or humanity. It is a staggering thought. Just as architects are the weakest in museology when museum making, so in the field of urban development there is a similar disconnect between the meaning of place and place making. Writers such as J. G. Ballard see these places in a diametrically opposite way to their designers' fantasy; the Eden-Olympia business park from his book *Super-Cannes*,[14] the Arndale shopping centre from *Kingdom Come*,[15] or, for that matter, the whole of post-apocalyptic Detroit. The language of design and commerce is disconnected from the literature and poetry that describes it – language is used to obscure rather than reveal reality when used by dominant, politically powerful groups.

A narrative environment is by its nature complex, multi-layered, changing and a bit messy, whereas the way many environments are made is very solid. It could be that we are asking too much of architecture and urban design. A narrative environment needs a context for its storytelling and a set of connections, and it also needs an audience rather than a market.

To test this I asked Andrew McIntyre, from the audience research company Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, to use his long experience to speculate how the ways audiences understand story in museums and cultural projects could sharpen our understanding of how they work in the wider environment. He suggests that there are three ways that the built environment is perceived: *The building as the focus* – the architecture tells the story; *The building adds context* – the architecture enhances the story; *The building is the wrapper* – the building is irrelevant to the story. He goes on to suggest that there are probably five types of museum buildings: *Historic* – the original building on the original site; *Relocated* – the original building moved to a new site; *Facsimile* – an original design reconstructed; *Iconic new* – architect-designed flagship building; *Other buildings* – buildings simply utilized for their space, features or location.

Examining the categories opened up between the two sets reveals eight different relationships between the type of building and the use of the building (Figure 9.1). The relationships

		USE OF BUILDING		
		Building is the focus	**Building adds context**	**Building is wrapper**
TYPE OF BUILDING	**Historic**	**Pilgrimage** Quarry Bank Mill Hampton Court HMS Belfast	**Link to the past** Museum of Bristol (Port shed) MAGNA (Steel shed) MOSI (1830 rail shed)	**Reused** Inspire Science Centre (Church) People's History Museum (Pump House) Baltic (Flour Mill)
	Relocated	**Immersive** Beamish (Victorian town) Ironbridge (Blists Hill)	n/a	n/a
	Facsimilie	**Recreated** Globe Theatre West Stow Anglo-Saxon Village	n/a	n/a
	Iconic new	n/a	**Artistic response** IWM North Riverside Museum, Glasgow	**Landmark** Urbis/National Football Museum Museum of Liverpool
	Other buildings	n/a	n/a	**Utilitarian** Royal Armouries, Leeds

FIGURE 9.1   Types and uses of museum buildings.

are fascinating because each one centres on a different experiential proposition. A reused building doesn't necessarily do more than provide a backdrop to the experience or a destination. The historic building when it is the focus permits the audience to stand on the site where it happened, a pilgrimage. When it is a link to the past, it is the right medium for that story of connection such as the converted steel works at Magna. The facsimile is perhaps the most interesting, if one considers a building such as Shakespeare's Globe; it lets the audience feel what it would have been like. Here, well-executed verisimilitude is enough. Which leaves icon buildings. Some are just attractors, such as the Guggenheim Bilbao, whilst others, like IWM North, create a mood and symbolize the story.

McIntyre's analysis suggests that icon buildings can provide a context, a means to the end, but not the end in itself. We use the past to define us, to make sense of our short lives by placing them within some kind of continuum. Fragments of stories, memories, images, sounds and smells are very powerful. They are triggers to a personal connection. Artists use them, as do philosophers and novelists. This chapter suggests that architects and urbanists do not.

In a number of projects we have begun to work with these fragments and connections as our raw material for place making. They all address recreated facsimiles and historic sites and therefore offer time travel and pilgrimage experiences on the site where it happened. One is adjacent to but disconnected from an icon building.

Govan Old Church, Govan, Glasgow

Govan used to be one of the great shipbuilding communities of Glasgow. The shipyard is still there, even including the original fine stone office building. The High Street of Govan is handsome, with public buildings constructed by the start of the twentieth century. But it is beset by four generations of unemployment and all the problems of poverty. At one end of Govan High Street is a Viking burial mound. It used to contain a unique group of hogs-back gravestones that are now displayed in the nineteenth-century Govan Old Church, sitting on the site of a

much older church and historic mound. Govan Old looks across to Zaha Hadid's new Riverside Museum. The new museum is the iconic anchor in a rebuilt Clydebank development.

Although Hadid's museum will focus upon Glasgow's history of transport, the building is disconnected from the local families and cultures that were a part of this industry and live on the opposite bank of the Clyde. There is no bridge, either physical or conceptual, to connect the community and the remarkable Viking mound with the new development. As well as ignoring the Viking past, every last vestige of evidence from the 30,000 ships and 50,000 locomotives built on the Clyde has been removed, such as the original rails and cobbles that surrounded the museum site.

Our original masterplan presented three options for this site, my least favourite being the use of an iconic signature building. However, opting for this type of experience was a political call, no doubt hoping to induce the regeneration of the area through the creation of an iconic building. My preferred option was to house the museum in an original industrial shed like Magna in Sheffield or, failing that, to reconstruct one of the large industrial sheds. My feeling was that the idea of the building, as a temple to manufacturing, was more important than the building itself. I would rather that shed, with distressed cladding and large painted letters, than the Hadid wavy roof. The shed, like the Viking burial mound, expresses the idea of the place whereas the Hadid museum packages up the past, removes it from its scale, smell and grittiness, rinses it of atmosphere and the detritus of the places of making.

The other key component of our original masterplan was a bridge linking the new museum to Govan so that it would be a place easily accessible to that community. I realize now that a bridge would also have been a link between the Viking past and the new Clydebank. The church could have been restored as a community building, and facsimile hogs-back gravestones replaced in the graveyard. This could have been a community project, so that the museum's audiences made that link with their own past. None of this has happened, in spite of the millions spent on the new museum. The new iconic building is therefore left in sole charge of retelling the story, untroubled by the presence of authentic history and memory in the landscape around it, and whatever remains of that heroic past is suspended within the aspic of the museum and the conventions of museum display.

What's going on here, on this little stretch of an old and noble river, the Clyde? The Viking burial mound and Govan Old Church represent the pre-modern period, where the image is clearly representing a real set of ideas. The High Street remains, authentic but marooned and waiting for gentrification. Then there are the postmodern, dystopian, gated developments that could be anywhere and the icon building on the old shipyards. They have become signs of culture and media that (to paraphrase Baudrillard) create a perceived reality, but one which is disconnected.[16]

There is an alternative narrative space that emerges from a different kind of masterplanning. It connects audiences to the authentic pieces of the High Street, the church, the Viking tombstones, the cobbles and rails, the offices of the shipyard, and the place of production to the voices, photographs and artefacts. The conceptual bridge becomes a real bridge and the idea of industrialization is realized in the simulacrum of the reconstructed industrial building. A facsimile is acceptable because it expresses or permits the experience of the idea and triggers the imagination. The noise and smell, the banter and the camaraderie, the sheer scale of what was achieved, can all be recreated, dramatized, just as Dennis Severs does in Spitalfields. As collective building blocks this approach, sampling the fragments, is the very opposite of the iconic architecture of Zaha Hadid.

El Presidio de Santa Barbara, California

In 1925, the year of Le Corbusier's Voisin Plan, the city of Santa Barbara, California, suffered a major earthquake. A group of influential citizens, steered by a remarkable woman called Pearl Chase, decided to rebuild the city in a contemporary 'arts and crafts' Mexican/Spanish style. They were tapping into layers of colonial local history, their own identity as Californios and the pioneering spirit of the Rancheros who ride out onto the chaparrals and sierras. Santa Barbara has since become one of the most beautiful cities in the world and it has retained strict rules about building styles. It is the American city as it ought to be, not as it so often is; it is their answer to Poundbury.

Pearl Chase was also the founder of the Santa Barbara Trust for Historic Preservation (SBTHP). In the late 1960s the Trust realized that a few of the surviving pueblo buildings downtown were part of the original Presidio, the Spanish Fort that was the first colonial settlement. They began archaeological investigations and also to acquire properties that formed part of the Presidio quarter. The 'old' fabric of the fort has been embedded within the contemporary city grid of Santa Barbara, a legacy of the Anglos. Forty years later a substantial part of the Presidio has been reconstructed according to archaeological evidence.

The crucial point about this act of physical reconstruction is that it also acts as a mental construct for contemporary Californians to define themselves by. The site is a microcosm of a 'Once upon a Time in the West' narrative. The layers of history and found objects on the site tell a panoramic story. The Presidio has become a focal point for contested history and the issues surrounding Spanish colonialism. The site became the first place of encounter, both good and bad, between the Chumash Indians and the Spanish Colonialists, then the Mexicans, the Anglos, the Rancheros, until it bestrode both China Town and Japan Town. Here we see the first botanizing of the chaparral by the Spanish bringing peaches, pears and apples and oranges: sweet fruits that the Chumash had never tasted. There are poignant objects buried by Japanese Americans on the eve of internment after Pearl Harbour but also Jimmy's Oriental Gardens where flaming Mai Tai's were served. Amongst the descendants are people who are part Indian, Spanish and Anglo, to name but a sample city's cultural heritage.

Our role was threefold. First, despite the process of uncovering and rebuilding many stories are still out of reach, as visitors currently see empty rooms. A nineteenth-century photograph of one of the pueblo buildings is straight out of a Ken Burns documentary. There is no reason why the care in reconstruction cannot extend to representation. We took our client to the atmospheric representations at the National Trust's Back to Back properties in Birmingham and to Kew Palace for inspiration. Our role here was to masterplan which story will go where, and how these will be phased-in over time. Our second role has been interpreting the site as a whole for passers-by and for tourists on a walking trail. Some of this is done simply by treating buildings as outdoor display, or by dressing the spaces with facsimile period artefacts and with authentic botany in the backyards. It is unlikely that the whole Presidio will be reconstructed in the near future, so we have also set out boundary markers that announce the layout of the original parade ground (Plate 9.2). The third role has been to inspire the Mayor and City Councillors to apply for UNESCO World Heritage Site status.

Reconstructing the Presidio has been like the reconstruction of Shakespeare's Globe in London. As a visceral experience it is the nearest we get to time travel, but it does more than that. It becomes a focus for the exploration of history. To stand in the room in which the Presidio's Comandante met George Vancouver, or to walk on to the stage at the Globe as the

actors would have done, brings a level of richness, engagement and understanding beyond a historic novel or a costume drama. It enables the audience to live for a moment in the past as well as the present. Reconstruction provides a simulacrum of a past: it may not be the actual past, but it triggers our imagination.

Sur-i Sultani, Istanbul

History often turns on key moments, encounters or events. In Glasgow's industrial heritage the pivotal moments were arguably October and November 1914 when the sons of the industrialists were all killed in Flanders, along with May 1940, the week when Churchill became prime minister. The first effectively began the industrial downfall of Glasgow, the second gave it a reprieve. In Santa Barbara it was the meeting between George Vancouver and Comandante Ortega at the Presidio. In Istanbul the two dates are Constantine's conversion to Christianity in 312 and 29 May 1453 when Mehmet II rode into the Byzantine church of Santa Sophia on a white horse.

The Sur–i Sultani peninsula in Istanbul is best known in the west as the Seraglio and for the Topkapi Palace. However, this is only the topmost layer of three remarkable epochs that pivot on those two singular days. Walking around the site it is hard to reconstruct the previous layers without using the story of the site to shape it. The story is 'One City, Three Worlds' and these worlds – Classical, Byzantine and Ottoman – pivot on those two epochal days (Plate 9.3). On this site multiple meta–narratives have become buried in the silt of history, and it is a case of uncovering and then reuniting these significant and interconnected histories. Of course it is all there. The priceless Kaftans of all the Sultans, their books, furniture, musical instruments and carriages are all in storage, as the environmental conditions in the Topkapi preclude display in their original context. The visitor sees but a fraction of Topkapi. The Royal Barges are in the Naval Museum. The Byzantine fragments are either still buried or are on display in the Archaeological Museum. The army has occupied half of the site for over a century, due to the strategic importance of the Bosphorus. The nineteenth-century Imperial Mint, which is like a mini–city with its own streets and courtyards, is now empty.

Our masterplan for the Sur–i Sultani, One City, Three Worlds, is predicated on a simple idea. Everything on the site comes 'home'. The Byzantine artefacts are displayed in the atrium of the church of Santa Irene, which is as old as Santa Sophia and lies within the Sur–i Sultani walls. The Archaeological Museum, with its astounding collections, becomes exclusively a classical museum of the Ottoman World, which is the period in which it was created. The Imperial Mint displays the unsurpassed coin collections in the rooms in which many were pressed, alongside the machinery. Other buildings can be given stable environmental conditions to become the Ottoman Museum of Applied Arts; a V&A of everything that is in storage. The masterplan also looks ahead to the time when the army will vacate the site, and we are able to set out a Byzantine archaeological trail and the recreation of the eighteenth-century Ottoman Gardens. This is both experimental botany, a great employment and training opportunity, and also a way of providing more public gardens for the citizens of the surrounding districts.

The realization of this masterplan will establish Sur–i Sultani as one of the world's great cultural quarters. In area, it is on a par with the Museum Insel in Berlin. But it is more than that. The cultural quarters of Berlin, Vienna, the Smithsonian, and museums like the Louvre, British Museum and V&A are full of artefacts from elsewhere. The Sur–i Sultani, like the Museum

of Anthropology in Mexico City and the Grand Egyptian and Civilization Museums in Cairo, will display artefacts that come from the very place they are shown. A hundred years before Neil MacGregor at the British Museum, the founder of the Archaeology Museum of Istanbul, Osman Hamdy Bei, had a vision for a World Museum. That world was the Ottoman World. Our plan for the Sur-i Sultani is the realization of his vision, and it is planned that it will be completed by 3 April 2024, one hundred years to the day since Kemal Attaturk decreed the Topkapi Palace a museum, and the last, aged concubines left their quarters.

Conclusion

Stories are central to interpretive space. Interpretation is central to design and place making that connects with people and their lives, enabling them once again to live in history rather than apart from it. The past is a foreign country, as David Lowenthal says, but it is one we can visit freely.[17] We can include it in our lives by respecting its fragments and even by reconstructing a simulacrum of it, revealing the idea behind, as in experimental archaeology or botany. Storytelling provides shape and gives us the clues to deploy whatever images and forms we need to take us on that journey. The past is also composed of smells and tastes, atmosphere, encounters, events and feelings. There is no rulebook about what we use to explore the past, about scraping or not scraping off layers. Our approach to narrative place making using the techniques of sampling permit us to use whatever we need to trigger our recollection.

Architects and developers don't get stories. The architect's mind is form-shaped and the developer's is money-shaped, and the politician's is vanity-shaped. Unfortunate, as they are building the world we live in. And we have as yet no common language to describe this approach to them. The architect of the Grand Egyptian Museum brings the visitors up to the pyramids plateau up a massive running stair, a form very popular in the canon of modern architecture. It is a brilliant move that won him the biggest architectural competition ever held, but in itself it is still only a staircase. In our world this is not a staircase but a journey; a journey back in time, starting at the bottom of the stairs with Cleopatra the Seventh and ending with the statue of Khufu facing his pyramid. It is, for the visitor, a journey that encompasses 3,500 years, all of dynastic Egypt, and every Pharaoh's cartouche, and where possible a statue. The Pharaohs built the pyramids, Luxor and Karnak, but the Pharaonic Stair as it is now known, the dynastic 'Hall of Fame', was the one thing these people so obsessed with recording their lives in preparation for their afterlife, never constructed. That's the power of stories. Stories give the past a future.

Notes

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PLATE 2.1 *In Praise of Shadows*, V&A. 'Medusa', 2008 design by Mikko Paakkanen. © V&A.
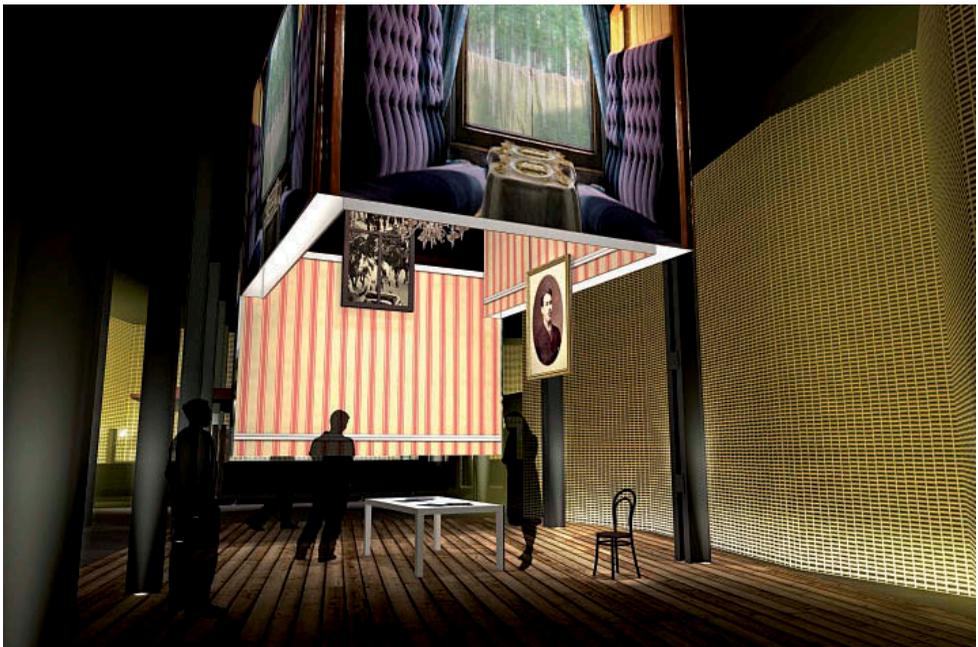
PLATE 2.2 Casson Mann, *Museolobby*, Moscow. © CassonMann.

PLATE 3.1 Drawers of a 'Timestack', Imperial War Museum North, Salford Quays, Manchester. Image courtesy of IWM North.

PLATE 3.2 *Holocaust Exhibition*, Imperial War Museum, London. Reproduced with kind permission of Metaphor.

PLATE 4.1 Parthenon Sculpture Galleries, British Museum, London. Photo: British Museum. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

PLATE 5.1 Henry Moore in the Country Park. Reproduced by permission of The Henry Moore Foundation. Photo: Jonty Wilde.

PLATE 5.2 Underground Gallery, Yorkshire Sculpture Park. Reproduced with kind permission of YSP.

PLATE 8.1 The Rose Center for Earth and Space, New York. Photo: Spheroide, Wikimedia.

PLATE 8.2 Westminster Cathedral, London. Photo: Adrian Pingstone, Wikimedia.

PLATE 9.1 *The First Emperor: China's Terracotta Army*, the British Museum, 2007–2008. Photo: Metaphor.

PLATE 9.2 El Presidio Chapel, render. Reproduced with kind permission of Metaphor.

PALACE

THE OTTOMAN WORLD

HISTORY

THE CLASSICAL WORLD

EMPIRE

THE BYZANTINE WORLD
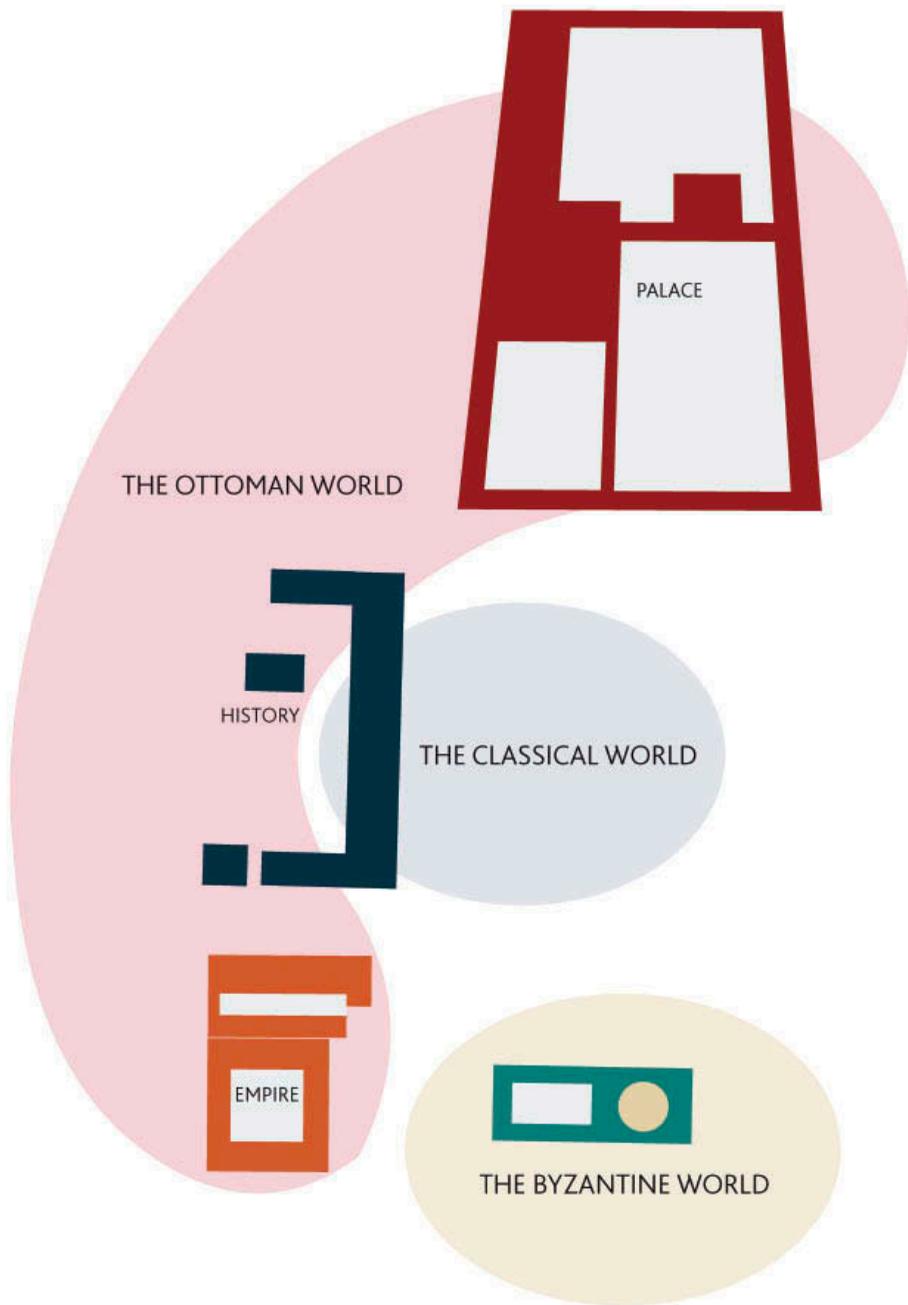
PLATE 9.3   Story Masterplan for the Sur–i Sultani, Istanbul. Reproduced with kind permission of Metaphor.

PART II

Narrative, perception, embodiment

Introduction

The chapters in Part II consider the various ways in which narrative can function within the fully embodied realm of architectural experience in the museum. Adopting a broad definition of narrative as a form of sequential structuring, each of the chapters explores the relationships between objects, spaces and stories in order to better understand the potential of narrative both as a device for ordering spatial sequences and as a cognitive tool for making sense of our experiences.

As opposed to spoken or text-based narratives – whether narratives *of*, *in*, or *as* the museum – the work here tends to reverse the terms of the literary metaphor and to consider the museum itself as a form of narrative in space. In addition to case studies of 'top–down' approaches where ready-made narratives are laid out and presented through an arrangement of objects, several of the chapters describe a 'bottom–up' process, where stories are seen to emerge from the experience of found spaces, artefacts and landscapes. The idea of *unconscious narratives* that can be read from the human traces that these things often carry, reminds us of the 'silent' role of narrative in structuring our basic sense of space, our sense of time, and ultimately our sense of self.

In the opening chapter, Tricia Austin provides a kind of 'road map' to many of the ideas that follow, setting out some of the principles by which a narrative environment can be analysed. Adopting the literary term *narrativity* which refers to the degree of 'storyness' of a text, she describes a series of objects, artefacts, buildings and landscapes, locating them in relation to each other on a simple bi-axial grid. By positioning each example according to its 'degree of narrativity' she aims to show how an analytical framework can help create a common language for collaboration amongst architects, content developers, exhibition designers and theorists.

As a counterpoint to this discussion – while likewise drawing on the ideas of the philosopher Paul Ricœur – in Chapter 11 Dorian Wiszniewski presents a densely argued theoretical analysis of the role of narrative in our 'reading' of both the museum and the city. In order to explore the kinds of narratives we encounter in both our everyday dealings with the built environment and within the special conditions of the museum, Wiszniewski develops a theory of

'radical passivity' based on the ideas of Walter Benjamin, Roland Barthes and the contemporary French philosopher Jacques Rancière. Both in this chapter, and in Chapter 12 by Stephen Alexander Wischer, we are shown a series of short case studies of architectural projects in which constructed artefacts are used as design tools. For Wischer the process involves a direct embodied engagement with materials and experimental forms, whereby a circular process of exploration and analysis is undertaken by the designer. Gradually what emerges from this work is an entanglement of matter and meaning, an intertwining of objects and narratives that provides a touchstone for the subsequent organization of architectural spaces.

Mattias Ekman in Chapter 13 also considers the role of embodied memory in our experience of museum spaces, focusing specifically on the relationship between museum objects and the contexts in which they are displayed. By describing the controversy surrounding the removal and re-hanging of some of Norway's most significant paintings, Ekman demonstrates – among other things – the continuing relevance of Walter Benjamin's influential concept of the *aura*. He also employs Aleida Assmann's intriguing term *antaeic magic*, in order to explain the often mysterious connections between objects and places.

Echoing Ekman's emphasis on the intensification of experience through multi-sensory engagement, both of the following chapters describe case studies of exhibition projects employing various forms of bodily involvement. Sheila Watson and colleagues in Chapter 14 describe the conversion of a derelict fish-curing factory into a museum. Here the role of the design team involved a 'reactivation' of the abandoned spaces, communicating with visitors on a visceral level about the everyday lives of former workers. Another dimension of sensory stimulation is explored by Candice Lau in Chapter 15, this time on a slightly smaller scale through interaction with a digital exhibition installation. To engage its audience with the personal histories of victims of the Estonian diaspora a series of RFID-tagged playing cards are offered which can be manipulated in order to trigger the display of multimedia material. This technique also allows visitors an alternative 'way in' to the experience, as the metaphor of the card game also taps into an unconscious instinct for interaction through play.

In Chapter 16 James Furse-Roberts explores how landscapes can be a source of narrative, as well as how they can be deliberately designed to convey them. Drawing on a broad range of scholarship from biology, ecology and evolutionary psychology, he also describes how the basic structures of narrative can be useful in understanding both our emotional and intellectual responses to landscape. In the final chapter of Part II Jonathan Hale attempts to draw together some of the implications of narrative theory for the way we approach museum architecture. By focusing on the possibilities of storytelling in the embodied medium of three-dimensional space, he assesses the contribution of recent 'body theory' to current thinking on narrative in architecture.

Throughout the chapters in Part II a range of shared theoretical references echo back and forth between the different contributors: philosophers and psychologists such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Paul Ricœur and Jerome Bruner; sociologists such as Maurice Halbwachs; and architects such as Juhani Pallasmaa and Dalibor Vesely. All these and others are used in a number of different ways to highlight the complex intertwining of ideas and things that constitute the fertile common ground between architecture and museums.

10

SCALES OF NARRATIVITY

Tricia Austin

This chapter proposes that narrativity, a term that describes the degree of 'storyness' of a text, can also be applied to exhibition design, architectural practice, urban and landscape design to provide a useful analytical framework and creative methodologies for collaboration among theorists, content developers, architects and designers. A narrativity scale is outlined and five narrative dimensions identified which drive powerful story experiences in space: intentionality, content, telling, audience experience and context.

Theoretical positioning

Narrative and space are both substantial concepts with numerous possible interpretations. The perspective taken here weaves together different approaches to narrative, embodiment and perception and different theories of space to distil a position that prompts fresh critical thinking in the development and design of visitor experiences to cultural, community and commercial visitor destinations.

In terms of narrative approaches the chapter follows Paul Ricœur and Fredric Jameson who both argue that narrative is a key process in making sense of oneself and the world. Ricœur[1] is concerned with the relationship between time and narrative and suggests we do not only experience time as a linear succession of 'nows' but use narrative to create a coherent story of our lives and our history; in other words, we construct our identity using narrative. Fredric Jameson[2] argues narrative is the central function or instance of the human mind. He claims it is part of the way we reason and believe. Several questions arise from these statements. Where does the human capacity to build narrative originate? Is narrative experienced as a conscious or unconscious process? What are the implications for the design of narrative environments and visitor experiences?

According to Paul Cobley[3] there are two contrasting schools of thought that consider the origins of narrative. One, the ontogenetic perspective, suggests our brains and bodies are hard-wired to continually construct narratives and theorizes that narrative arises as part of the human ability to use language.[4] The other, phylogenetic perspective, suggests that narrative is a product of cultural evolution. Jaynes[5] and Csikszentmihalyi[6] argue that people acquire

narrative skills that produce and articulate a sense of self or, 'I in the world' and then see their actions as a narrative of identity. It is not impossible to conflate these positions by accepting narrative may be hard-wired into the brain but can also be prompted and developed through practice.

The spatial nature of this practice and prompting of narrativization is crucial to the design of narrative environments. This is because narrative environments appeal to the visitor's intellect through their body and, vice versa, through their body to their thoughts. In other words, the physical space is designed to tell the story through a variety of sensory means: spatial dimensions and sightlines, volumes and rhythms, forms, colour, light, materials, sound etc., while the content is communicated more directly through written and spoken words, and still and moving images. These, in turn, prompt physical memories and emotions but can also trigger dialogue and physical interaction. This chapter suggests that the corporeal is not more fundamental than the intellectual but that they are entangled.[7]

This chapter also incorporates the approach to narrative developed by Jerome Bruner,[8] who argues from a constructivist position, that stories are not life or truth, they are always constructed. Stories are developed from the interplay between self, others and the world, we consciously and unconsciously incorporate and make sense of life experiences as they unfold. It follows that in the development of exhibitions a compelling story doesn't just emerge from a great deal of information but a narrative must be built and finely crafted in both its physical and intellectual dimensions. Acknowledgement of story construction opens the practice of the design of narrative environments to critical discourse and reflection on intentionality, ethics, ideology, issues of authorship, co-authorship and the incorporation of user-generated content.

Another aspect of narrative that needs to be considered is the ambiguity of the word narrative itself. Following Seymour Chatman,[9] narrative refers both to the story and to the telling, the content and the material form or use of media. Story and telling are inextricably linked and the overall narrative relies on an elegant and judicious combination of the two. Facts, no matter how interesting, do not become an engaging story unless they are woven together effectively and expressed in appropriate media. On the other hand, no amount of immersive interactive media, physical or aesthetic stimulation will be meaningful without content and purpose.

This chapter also suggests that, in a very practical sense, narrative theory can help curators, content developers and designers fold narrative onto space or, indeed, encourage narratives to be exchanged in a space. Narrative theory, which is taken to mean a discussion and application of concepts from literary theory, narratology, performance, and film theory which employs terms such as narrativity, dramatic conflict, causation, plot, agency, event, entity, frame, diegesis, focalization, sequence, rhythm, pace and so on, have not been applied widely by content development, spatial design or architecture and have enormous potential to open up new models of practice.

In relation to discussions of space, this chapter follows positions outlined by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Henri Lefebvre and Bruno Latour. Merleau-Ponty[10] argues that humans develop a body schema that comprises not only our physical body but also its relationship to the surrounding world, in other words we carry with us a sense of depth, dimensionality, flow, movement, form, colour, tactility, texture and lustre. From the perspective of environmental psychology, J. J. Gibson[11] provides a useful concept of affordance which argues that our bodies are constantly making sense of the world by learning and becoming accustomed to the

affordances to act and interact offered by it. Consequently our body schema operates largely unconsciously as long as the flow of interaction between our body and the environment is familiar and uninterrupted.

The position taken here is that the sense of self in a spatial setting relies on both the intellectual account you provide to yourself of who you are and the place you are in, and your bodily schema as defined by Merleau-Ponty. Both need to be stimulated to create a desire to enter and engage with a narrative space. The design team need to appeal to your embodied self and your intellect to enable you to move backwards and forwards between conscious and unconscious self-narrating which in turn prompts you to move through the space. Just as many literary narratives grow out of dramatic conflicts, so narrative environments need to create a story-world that constructs a tension – a sense of orderly unfolding – but also physical and mental elements of uncertainty, in other words unfamiliar surroundings or objects or information, to arouse desire for resolution. If your body schema is unprovoked and a narrative is not developed you remain passive and unchanged. A successful narrative environment will prompt embodied perception, physical action and intellectual change or transformation, this may be described as learning or discovery in an exhibition context but could also be described as a rewriting of your sense of self.

This chapter's central argument also adheres to Lefebvre's thesis[12] that there is no strict division between physical spaces and mental spaces but that all spaces are produced, lived and understood through relationships of power. No space is neutral but always subject to some kind of struggle. The word 'environment' is used rather than space because, as discussed by Lefebvre, space often conjures up an idea of measurable distance, whereas environment more readily includes architectural structures, spatial layout, lighting, objects, people and their behaviours and values, and a certain co-dependency between all of these.

This notion of a complex environment dovetails with Bruno Latour's view that the environment is formed by a network in which, controversially, non-human elements are considered actors with agency. In actor-network theory, Latour[13] critiques conventional sociology and argues that the material world and the world of concepts are inextricably linked and are always in a state of flux, in other words while humans busily shape the physical world, the physical world simultaneously shapes us, and that the relations between people, places and things need to be repeatedly performed to sustain the network. Meaning has constantly to be re-established and reiterated. This position implies that the physical and cultural context of the museum or gallery, the architecture, the collection, the curators, the layout, the lighting, the typography, the materials, colour, forms chosen for the design, the media, the sound and the visitors' expectations and behaviours all have a part to play in producing and sustaining the meaning of the place.

The exhibition space simultaneously addresses and immerses the visitor. The narrative re-articulates the sense our bodies have already made of the world and we can be called to attention by both intellectual and corporeal devices. However, the rhythm and interplay of sensory stimulation and direct narrative appeal need to be finely balanced so that the visitor is engaged, not shocked, disorientated or traumatized into internality. When the visitor is sufficiently engaged they can become an actor in the story-world and move themselves through the story, shifting from conscious to unconscious engagement depending on their own narrativization of self.

The approach to meaning making adopted in this chapter follows the semiotics of Barthes,[14] Eco,[15] Potteiger and Purrington.[16] It is argued that all spaces can be interpreted as

meaningful and therefore carry some kind of narrative. Sand dunes can tell a story of natural forces, in the forms shaped by wind and sea power; high-rise tower blocks can tell a story of socio-political forces, in the forms shaped by urban concentration; *favelas* tell a different story of urban development shaped by dispossession; luxury retail and leisure destinations tell brand stories of desire and aspiration; exhibitions tell, among other things, stories of peoples' material cultures, natural and social histories and scientific discoveries.

The scope of narrative environments

The benefit of taking the view that all environments tell stories is that it opens up the whole world to interpretation, it dissolves the museum walls, it extends the museum and the gallery into the living, changing world and produces an array of fascinating challenges for the museum – for example, how does the museum or gallery collect and curate outside the museum walls? The problem with taking this view is that it produces the potentially impossible task of communicating everything to everybody. The question therefore is, having opened up this broader view, how can the field of study and practice of narrative environment design begin to be defined?

The MA Creative Practice for Narrative Environments, part of the Spatial Practices Programme at Central Saint Martins College of Art & Design, has developed a collaborative approach to narrative environments that includes theorists, content developers, architects, communication and media designers. The scope of practice spans three different categories of environment: cultural, commercial and community environments. Cultural environments refer to museums, galleries and associated public space; commercial environments refer to retail, hotels, restaurants, offices and brand experiences; community environments refer to parks, public squares, libraries, educational institutions and hospitals. This broad scope encourages critical interrogation of the categories and their definitions, brings fresh perspectives to exhibition design and, in turn, suggests how exhibition design can stimulate and inform retail design and the design of urban spaces.

This chapter argues that narrative theory can help focus and define the development of narrative environments and help to produce new analytical models and creative methods. There are many ways into narrative theory but discussed here is 'narrativity' – the degree of storyness of a narrative.[17] Narrativity is chosen because it provides a route to the main goal of the exhibition team, to create a level of storyness that will engage and transform the visitor. This chapter suggests there are different levels or scales of narrativity; in other words, some environments are more narrative than others.

If this is the case, the question that emerges is at what point does any environment (which is always narrative to some extent) become a fully fledged narrative environment, an environment that creates a story-world and prompts resonant embodied and intellectual responses from visitors and/or inhabitants? What are the characteristics of such narrative environments? These questions are answered here by analysing narrativity in order to produce a model of collaborative creative practice that is open to reflection, interpretation and critique.

A scale of narrativity

In order to develop a coherent approach a narrativity scale is proposed, acknowledging that all environments are narrative to some degree but claiming that some environments are more

narrative than others. The level of narrativity progresses from low on the left to high on the right (Figure 10.1).

An example of an environment with a low level of narrativity is a motorway experienced from the seat of a car moving along at about 70 miles per hour. As you burn along the motorway you hardly move your body. You cannot use your full body schema to apprehend passing landscape, you cannot smell the earth, distinguish colours, touch, look and ascertain textures or directly experience the scale of trees, plants in relationship to your body. Time is almost suspended, you are hermetically sealed, as the outside world passes by at a rapid but fairly even pace. Your distanced gaze will probably register a degree of repetition as fields, trees, mountains or buildings pass by. There is little physical connection to the world, there are few events to speak of, there are no characters as such to identify with. There is information on the motorway signs and you find yourself in an unfolding sequence but the information is minimal and hardly intended to draw you in.

A motorway experience, as described above would seem to have very low narrativity to most people. However, if you were a transport planner, for example, with knowledge of the history and rationale for the motorway you may be able to interpret the route as much more of a story. This level of information is not made available to everyday travellers. If content and context could be made available to the traveller, the traveller, equipped with additional information, could be prompted as to where to look, and could be encouraged to adopt a more 'writerly' attitude.[18] This 'writerly' attitude is more akin to a tourist experience of driving through, for example, an American national park. As a tourist you would have made a conscious choice to travel to a particular area, you would probably have examined a map and decided on a route. You would probably have read about the history and culture of the place. You would stop at viewing points, walk through the landscape to derive an embodied experience of place. You would form your own story of your visit and its significance to you as an individual based on a combination of all the dimensions of the experience.

AXIS OF NARRATIVITY

LOW LEVEL OF NARRATIVITY   HIGH LEVEL OF NARRATIVITY

FIGURE 10.1 Axis of narrativity, showing an image taken from a car on a motorway on the left, and the interactive exhibition, *Torino 1938–1948*, designed by N!03 for the Museo Diffuso, Turin, on the right. Photo: Federico Ambrosi

The high end of the narrativity scale can be exemplified by immersive museum experience. Take *Torino 1938–1948, from Race Laws to the Constitution* in the vaulted basement of the Museum of the Resistance, Deportation, War, Rights and Freedom in Turin designed by Studio N!03, a multidisciplinary Italian design group. The museum is devoted to themes of the Second World War. The exhibition takes the visitor underground combining the physical, multisensory journey through subterranean tunnels with testimonies, images, videos, sounds and interactive installations. It leads the visitor through a powerful and evocative space, a metaphor for underground resistance and memory itself. The visitor can pause, touch, smell, listen and discuss the exhibits with people who they came with. They can search and draw up numerous documents from the archive via the interactive table. They can shift from being focused and attentive to certain documents and exhibits to being inattentive and absorbing the narrative through the physical environment. They are immersed and entangled in the story-world through narrative, perception and embodiment.

The scale can now be extended vertically to untangle modes of rhetoric that underpin communication (Figure 10.2). I am referring here to semiotic analysis to help separate denotation from connotation. The denotative is the literal meaning of the text, image or space often consciously apprehended while the connotative is the associative meanings of the text, image or space which are often processed unconsciously. Just as the horizontal axis moves from sparse to rich narrativity on a sliding scale from left to right so the vertical axis should be read as a sliding scale. A position at the base of the vertical would indicate mainly connotative communication but would still include some degree of denotation and, similarly, the top of the vertical would suggest strong denotation but would not eliminate all connotation. There is no sudden break between connotation and denotation. Thus a point on the vertical line just above the horizontal line will indicate a little more denotative than connotative.

The picture of the house on the bottom-left may evoke: home . . . city . . . UK, so it is placed on the lower side of the quadrant. The passer-by becomes aware of the identity of the building through its materiality and its context but the house itself expresses very little particular story so it is placed on the far left of the scale. There are several intriguing stories associated with this house but they are not made explicit to the passer-by.

The picture of a floating wall of light is puzzling and evocative. Is it a structure? A sculpture? An event? It provokes wonder and imagination. It is in fact *Burble* by Usman Haque who specializes in the design and research of interactive architecture systems. *Burble* (2006–2010), is an immense modular construction of computer-enabled balloons that change colour in response to the people on the ground who build, tether and control the wall.

This structure is very evocative, partly because it defies precise recognition to the non-participants. It has strong appeal through precisely the qualities Merleau-Ponty calls 'uncertain', that is colour, lustre and movement, qualities he claims prompt intercorporeal engagement. *Burble*'s ability to stimulate engagement and its power to stimulate the imagination suggest it be located further up the narrativity scale than the familiar urban house. The absence of clear explanation to a passer-by suggests it should be located more towards connotation than denotation and it is placed in the middle of the scale towards the bottom of the page.

The wall pockmarked with bullet holes in the image of the bullet house is extremely evocative. It suggests something has happened here. It contains a sense of events having happened and events are a key constituent of narrative. The image conjures up thoughts of war and the architecture gives the viewer a clue to the possible date, therefore the house is placed
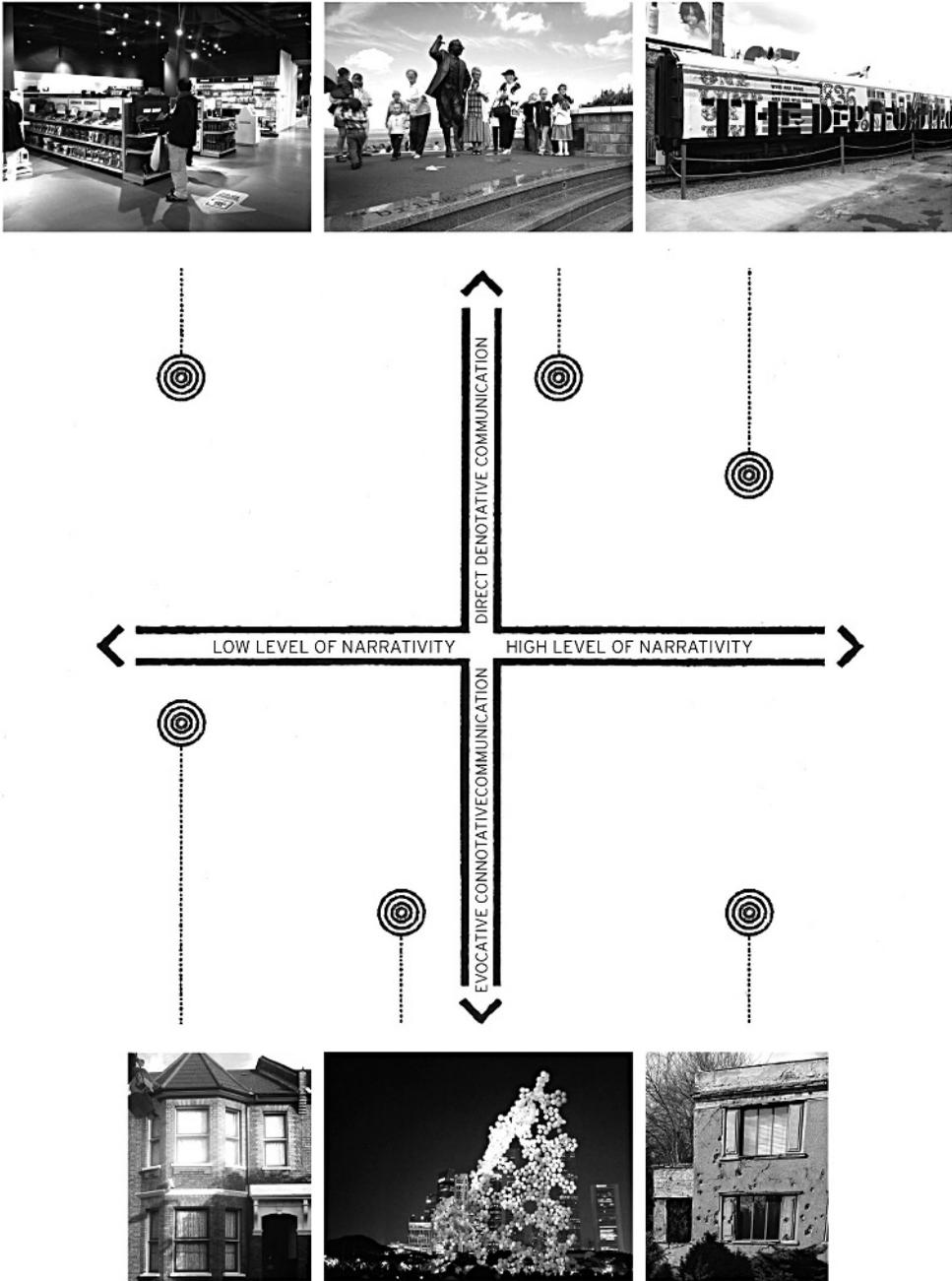
FIGURE 10.2   Narrativity bi-axial quadrant locating from bottom left to right: a house; *Burble* by Usman Haque Design and Research; the house with bullet holes. From top left to right: a retail environment; The Eric Morecambe memorial area, Morecambe, England, a collaboration between sculptors Gordon Young, Graham Ibbeson, Ann Kelly and Shona Kinloch, Why Not Associates and Russell Coleman who implemented the project; Deptford Project designed and produced by Origin and Studio Myerscough. Photo: Eng Kiat Tan.

further up the narrativity scale. The lack of any direct explanation or denotation means the pockmarked house is placed on the bottom right-hand quadrant.

On the top-left is an image of a retail environment selling electrical goods. Customers can access a great deal of information from the graphics or the shop assistant, however there is not much story. This environment reads rather like a list in space, one product following another. There is little attempt to tell brand stories or indeed stories of innovation or digitization. The environment lacks narrativity and so is positioned on the left end of the narrativity scale. It falls into the upper left-hand quadrant because it is very explicit in its communication of facts.

The Eric Morecambe memorial area, seen in the centre-top is a tribute to the comedian who changed his name to Morecambe because of his fondness for the town. The refurbished area is also part of a bigger regeneration scheme for Morecambe. A life-size sculpture of Eric is positioned at the top of the steps that evoke the Christmas dance sequence from the TV show. Lights in the steps run through a sequence every few minutes and reinforce the reference to the TV set. The steps and area are inlaid with catchphrases and names of stars from the show (See Plate 10.1).

The project uses explicit wording and imagery to communicate its message and provides an unfolding and interactive experience for the visitor who can use the steps as a stage and add to the performance if they wish. They can physically stand by Eric, identify with him and become a star in their own narrative. The whole environment envelops you and unfolds as you enter it. At one level it offers a degree of story about Eric Morecambe but it also flags up the story of the town's past and its regeneration scheme. The space tells quite an explicit story and is therefore placed halfway up the narrativity scale rising towards denotation.

The Deptford Project, placed in the top-right quadrant, is first and foremost an element in a regeneration strategy for Deptford, London. The Deptford Project is a public space, café, gallery and Saturday art and design market and, as such, demonstrates how exhibitions can be integrated with retail, leisure and community space and also form part of a bigger development project. It is a temporary destination with an envisaged life span of about five years. It occupies the empty lot around Deptford Train Station and the old Victorian carriage ramp built in 1836.

It is interesting as a model of exhibition design for several reasons. First, it brings exhibitions to the community rather than expecting the community to visit exhibitions in national museums. In fact, it brought a complete train carriage to the empty lot on the back of a huge articulated lorry. This dramatic gesture was, in itself, a spectacular event and performance. Second, the notion of a rolling series of events and temporary presence has been integrated into the destination through the weekend markets and the changing exhibitions while the identity, constructed through the use of the train carriage and the graphics constantly evokes the history of the place. In other words, the project is sensitive to the place and its history but also evolves rapidly to express the present and, in addition, contributes to the life and future of the area as it plays its part in the regeneration scheme. Third, the project provides a destination for local people to meet, socialize and, indeed, exchange stories. It functions as an environment that invites you in, prompts conversation and interaction. It also provides opportunities for local artists and designers to exhibit and sell their work.

The Deptford Project shows a high level of narrativity, telling, as it does, historical and personal stories within a larger regeneration story, acting as a frame for the work of artists and designers and providing a place of exchange of stories from the local community. The narrativity is expressed by the train carriage, signage, design, events, the website and the presence

and behaviour of the visitors. The environment is open and flexible yet intentional, containing multiple stories and has a bold communication aesthetic. For all these reasons it is placed at the high end of the narrativity scale in the top right-hand corner.

This is the quadrant that the design of narrative environments seeks to inhabit. This is because narrative environment teams are aiming for a rich degree of narrativity and a high level of clarity in communicating to target audiences. It should be stressed that explicit wording, clear messaging and web presence do not exclude the use of powerful and poetic connotation. The quadrant diagram helps to make visible the relationships between environments and practices. There is no suggestion that the top right-hand quadrant is the best option for all practitioners. Art practice, for example, will tend to play more on evocative connotations and inhabit the lower section of the page. The diagram functions as an analytical tool to clarify where you might place yourself and examine your practice in relationship with other practices. It also allows you to see your options to move about the quadrant. The question then arises, should you want to move up the narrativity scale towards the right what means would you use?

An answer to this question can be found in narrative theory. The process of narrative can be laid out as a sequence, the author develops a story, the story is then told to an audience. This suggests there are four elements to consider: author, story, telling and audience. Literary scholars have contested all of these elements and there is a vast discourse available to design teams to evolve their methodologies. For example, Michel Foucault[19] in his essay 'What is an Author?' reminds us that many myths and fairy tales do not have authors and that the notion of author only emerged in the late eighteenth century as a function of the publishing industry. The essay critiques and demolishes the common sense concept of authorship and opens up debate which can inform notions of multiple authorship which both echoes Mikhail Bakhtin's[20] discussion of polyphony, heteroglossia and the dialogic, as well as more recent discussions about multiple authorship and user-generated content ushered in by new media.[21]

The approach to narrative environments in this chapter locates the 'origin' of the exhibition narrative in the collaboration among all participants in the team who are developing the project. In this process the intellectual and the embodied are not separated; narrative no more belongs exclusively to the author-writer or the various kinds of author-designers involved; the development of a narrative environment is not a process of starting with an abstract word-based schematic frame that is then gradually fleshed out by the designers. Rather, it grows organically from the physical and intellectual dramatic tensions of the story, from the team's engagement with archives, objects, artefacts, oral histories, etc., and an understanding of their audiences. The approach here seizes the advantage offered by narrative that it engages, it makes memorable and gives substance to what, otherwise, would remain abstract schematics, taxonomies or simply lists of events/objects/time periods/cultures. Narrative environments are performative,[22] they call the visitor to respond bodily and subjectively.

The process by which the writer-author or designer-author develop the narrative varies from person to person and team to team but both can draw on Merleau-Ponty's notion of 'carnal echo'.[23] The term was coined by Merleau-Ponty to describe how painters internalize the visible world into their body schema and then produce works that express both the visible world and their individual state of embodiment. Audiences are invited to literally look through the painter's eyes and feel as the painter did. The same can be said for the writer-author and the designer-author who immerse themselves in the objects, artefacts and archives so the stories that emerge contain dimensions of embodied experience as 'carnal echoes'.

The important design step here is that the team also need to understand and see through the eyes of their target audiences in developing a compelling narrative.

There are many debates to be had to fully unpack the terms author, story, telling and audience and they deserve separate chapters but, here, in order to advance the discussion on narrativity in narrative environments the terms require some further definition (Figure 10.3). For author, the notion of intentionality is proposed; for story, the notion of dramatic conflict and unfolding content is proposed; for telling, the notion of engaging multisensory communication is proposed; for audience, the notion of individual and group reception, and embodied experience and meaning making is proposed. There is, crucially, one more comprehensive element that should be added to the list: that is, context. Here, context is taken to mean the physical, historical, cultural, social and political circumstances within which the exhibition is designed and understood.

The principal examples of designed narrative environments cited so far, the Torino Museum and the Deptford Project, are heavily reliant on the architectural, cultural and historical context. To further demonstrate the importance of context, please consider the bullet house (Figure 10.4). Above it was argued that the house with bullet holes showed a high level of evocative narrativity but is not a narrative environment because it lacks intentionality – soldiers didn't shoot it to create a story, and there is no explicit explanation to inform the passer-by. But if you were there today you would realize that now it has become a narrative environment because in 1982 the artist Wolf Kahlen made it into an art centre called the Ruine der Kuenste, Berlin. It is now signalled even to the disinterested passer-by by the notice under the window and flag outside, and its Internet presence. We now see the house through a new frame. It now moves from the bottom-right quadrant to the top-right quadrant. The lesson here is that context changes everything and captures larger institutional, ethical or political dimensions of the environment.

It would be useful here to summarize the position taken in this chapter on narrativity and visitor engagement. The visitor 'reading' of the space is both conscious/directed and unconscious/distracted as the visitor modulates their attention through bodily/intellectual engagement as discussed in the first section of the chapter. Visitor attention and experience will vary according to the perspective brought by the visitor as discussed in reception theory,[24] but the dramatic tension constructed by the content and design team is based on an 'implied visitor' which has much in common with an 'implied reader' in literary theory. Returning to Merleau-Ponty the 'carnal echo' produced by the team would be expected to resonate with the audience/visitors/inhabitants, albeit on their own terms. While the visitor will decode
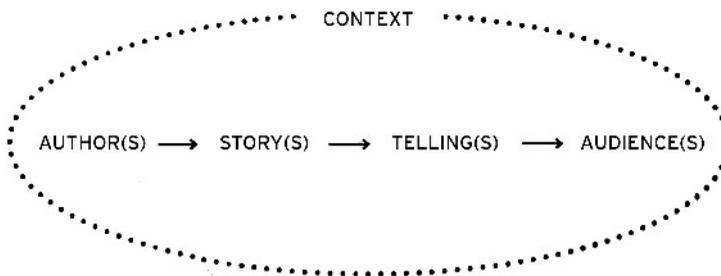
FIGURE 10.3   The narrative process in context.
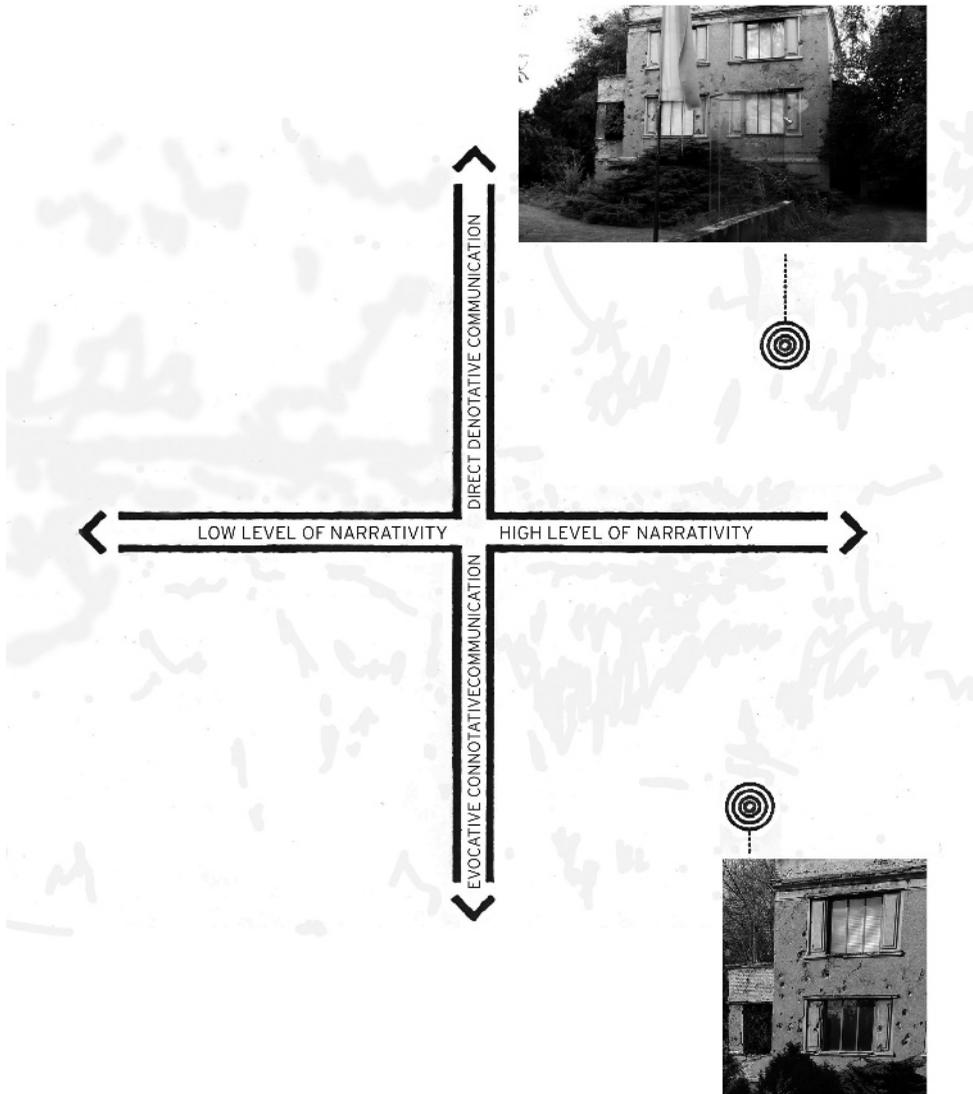
FIGURE 10.4   The change of position of *Der Ruine der Kuenste*, Berlin. Reproduced with kind permission of Wolf Kahlen.

both denotative and connotative meanings, interaction design theory,[25] and constructivist learning theories,[26] suggest that a further crucial dimension of engagement is the degree of active as opposed to passive engagement. Active here means an active entanglement between self, narrative and embodiment and space.

In summary, the chapter has discussed narrative and space by referring to exhibitions and architecture mainly beyond the museum walls. It aims to broaden the scope of the object of study but nevertheless provide a framework that allows for deeper analysis. Thinking of spaces as stories highlights and confronts us with the agents that control and author our environments, the messages or content folded into them, the range of methods to tell a story, the

quality of audience or user experience. Thinking of spaces as stories produces critical thinking. This is an underdeveloped arena where there is much work to be done.

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11

CITY AS MUSEUM, MUSEUM AS CITY

Mediating the everyday and special narratives of life

Dorian Wiszniewski

In drawing parallels between the organizational principles of city and museum I set out in two steps how cultural production might mediate everyday and special aspects of life. The first step outlines how the orders of city and museum can be considered narrative constructs. The second step sketches a few principles that contribute to a theory of passivity and distraction[1] that helps to work the relation between everyday and special narratives of architectural- and museum-life, meaningfully yet without recourse to either 'top-down' or 'bottom-up' privilege. Such a theory sees radical potential in the passivity of everyday experience. I will set out how passivity is to be understood as an important aspect of action and, therefore, how the passive and active can be considered two aspects of the same process of how an audience/readership, fragmented or total, comes to terms with narrative. This enquiry moves beyond establishing narrative as an appropriate metaphor for considering the arrangements of city and museum, to speculate into the character of narratology appropriate to configuring the 'sensible materiality'[2] of architecture and the museum as special yet, simultaneously, everyday contexts.

Step 1 – Narrative and experience

In order to prepare the ground for how we might think the special everyday, the everyday special and the everyday and special roles of narrative, I shall outline a proximity and metaphorical exchange between four important terms that condition the relation between the city and museum: world, community, theatre and narrative. Since ancient times these terms have been metaphorically associated.[3] They are commonly employed to represent each other, with theatrical dramatization as the common metaphor between them. The dramatizations each term operates can be considered as forms of narrative, which act in the range between undermining and underpinning the structures of the world. These dramatizations condition the relation and representational potential between the narratives of architectural, museological and curatorial projects.

In *The Emancipated Spectator*, Jacques Rancière gives a good account of the relation between world, city, community and theatrical representation from ancient to modern times, from Plato to Brecht, Artaud, Guy Debord and, I read also, tacitly, to Baudrillard.[4] There are two key

points for my argument that we can take from Rancière's account of the continuing entanglement between the terms: first, that theatrical, architectural, museological and curatorial productions are equally concerned about representations of the world in the world; and second, that narratives of theatrical, architectural, museological and curatorial productions are presumed to communicate community values to their respective community – in other words, all city institutions assume a representational role for their assumed audiences. However, it can be argued that whilst the world and its representations are as conditioned now as ever by various apparatuses of representation, the apparatuses are more diffuse yet also as politically charged as ever; they carry entanglements of contemporary and past senses of virtue with little consensus either to what now may be considered virtuous or how each apparatus may represent such virtues.

To understand the relationships and representational complexities between city and museum more fully would demand a critical history of virtue and community narratives.[5] Furthermore, such a critical history would also require accounts of the technologies of community-formation, both as internal and external processes of 'subjectivation'[6] – I mean here those processes that work consciously and unconsciously as aspects of either individual or shared enterprise, between reinforcement and resistance, within the spectra of political and cultural representation. This is far too extensive a series of enquiries for this chapter. Therefore, now I simply make the point that the muses, between ancient and contemporary that are presumed to hold virtue, might be more readily understood at best as ruses. It can be argued, rather than city institutions giving clarity and guidance to a common sense of the virtuous they create extra representational entanglement by reinforcing what they suppose themselves to represent (as bastions of intellectual, economic and community value) by reducing or extending the virtues and representational methods of their own specific narrative apparatus (and, perhaps, so they must, as experts in their field).

Therefore, not so much to preserve or promote architecture and museum as event spaces, but more to promote eventfulness without prescribing movement in and between the places that make the city and its museums, I think it important to challenge both how the 'apparatus of narrative'[7] and narrative as a specific 'apparatus'[8] are used in forming the city and its museums. I wish to be more extensive than reductive and preserve a little hazard in the unpredictability of movement within and between architecture and museums.[9] I am interested in rising to the challenge of breaking 'the general habit of judging works of art by their suitability for the apparatus without ever judging the suitability of the apparatus for the work'.[10] My project of *City as Museum and Museum as City* requires vigorous and imaginative configuring between both narrative works and narrative apparatus: between works of architecture/museums and the work of architecture/museums.

Curating the city and serial representation

I am illustrating this chapter with two projects taken from my MArch studio at University of Edinburgh, 2008–2010.[11] I will not give an extensive account of the pedagogy, but I will say that these projects operated to two intersecting themes: *Curating the City* and *Representation and Seriality*. Florence, a museum city par excellence, was selected as a suitable city for speculations into these two themes. The first theme holds a question: how should we see the distribution of artefacts and places in the city? The second theme responds to this question: that is, through a careful understanding of the operations of representation and what it means to experience representations over time and in different places, serially. These two themes provide the key to how I see the *City as Museum* and the *Museum as City*: the projects illustrate

not only something of an urban museology, the city as a series of museums, but they also open the possibility of a museological urbanity through employing an understanding of how both city and museum curate the serial experience of narrative constructs.

I will not explain these projects. I will only describe them very briefly. I cannot say fully how or what to read in them. Why they can only be read in part will become apparent over the course of the chapter. Nonetheless, I hope it is apparent from the outset that they are read‐able. Furthermore, although the projects are expressively quite different from one another, I hope not only that each is to some extent readable but that each has an assurance about their configuration that suggests, if an audience was to take some time over them, the projects might also make a good read.

Figures 11.1 and 11.2, *The Medici Bank Museum* by Paul Pattinson,[12] illustrate a project for a bank and museum of banking on the banks of the Arno adjacent to the Palazzo Uffizi, the Corridoio Vasariano and the Ponte Vecchio, and across from the Palazzo Pitti. Obviously the history of the Medici is bound up in the curating and placing of this project. The pun on placing a bank on a riverbank and a banking table next to a water table is no joke. Historically when a banker was declared bankrupt his table was literally broken. Proposing that the city should reflect on the history of banking and the current condition of its economic and cultural *tavolo* is quite a serious balancing act for our times.
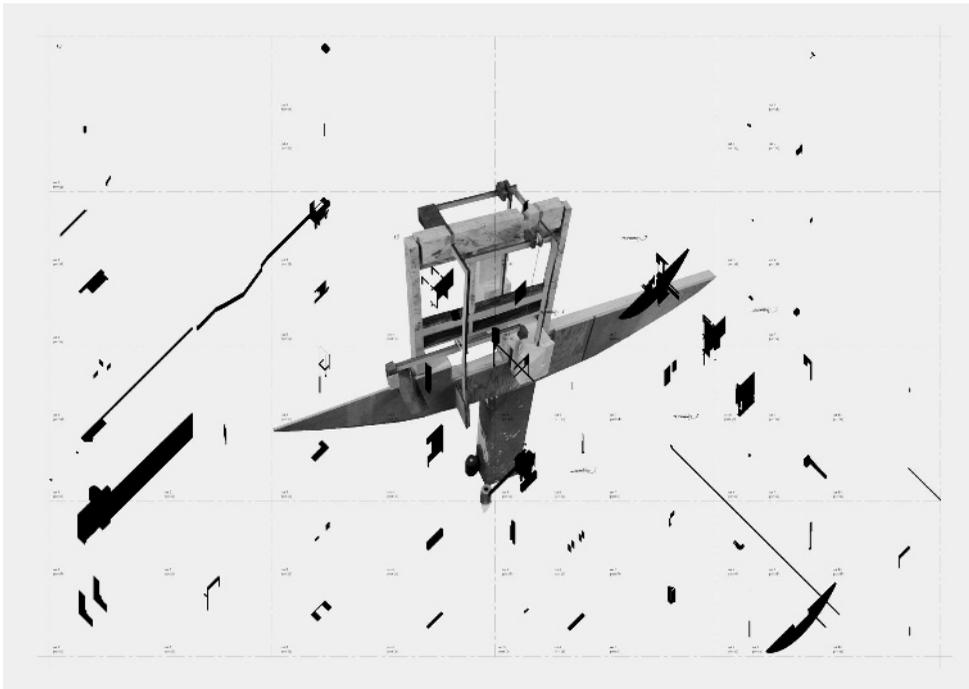
FIGURE 11.1   *The Medici Bank Museum*, Florence, by Paul Pattinson, 'Curating the City', MArch, University of Edinburgh, 2008–10. Allegorical model between banking and building structures: weighted and counterweighted balances.
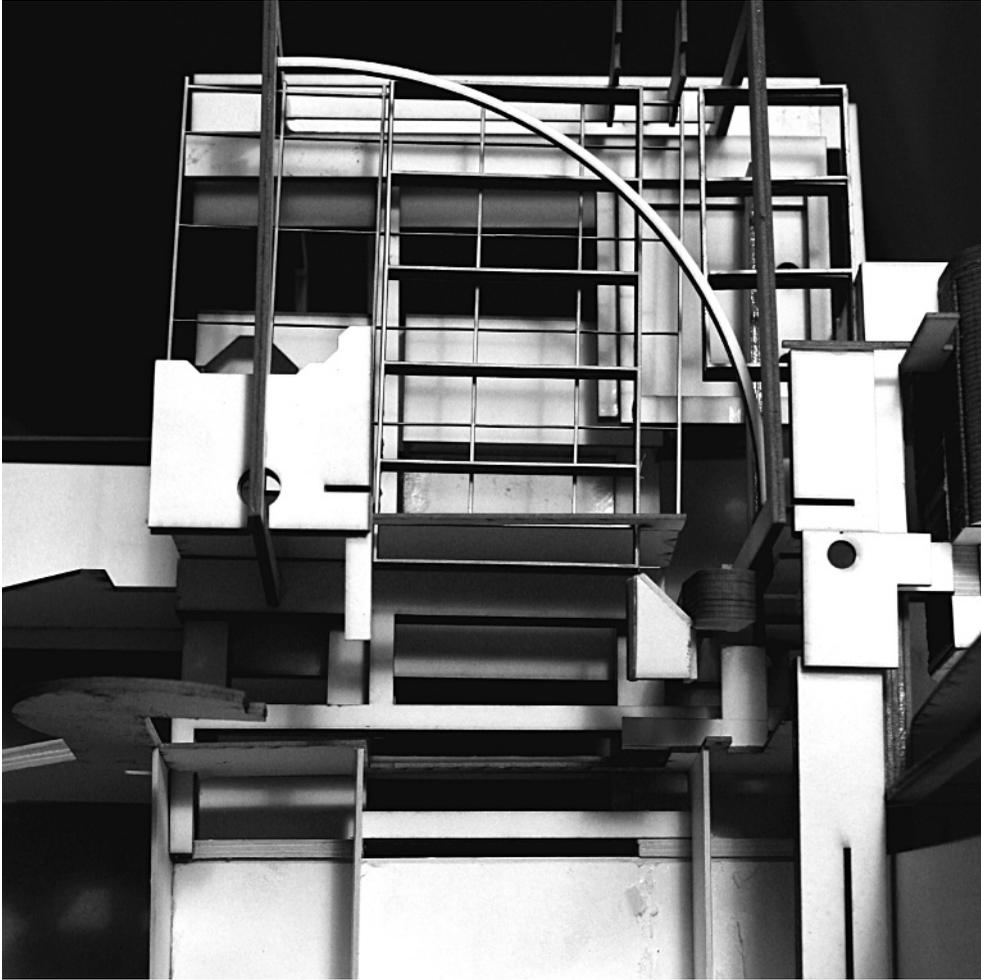
FIGURE 11.2 *The Medici Bank Museum*, Florence, by Paul Pattinson, 'Curating the City', MArch, University of Edinburgh, 2008–10. Building model, River Arno elevation.

Figures 11.3 and 11.4, *Gabinetto Vieusseux* by Hsiao-Wei Lee, illustrate a project for a library[13] – every library is also a museum. It displaces the *Gabinetto Vieusseux* from the Palazzo Strozzi (to where it had already been displaced from the Palazzo Buondelmonti) to the Piazza dei Ciompi. Its collection of International Periodicals was important to Florence's status in the times and movement of the *Risorgimento* (hosting authors such as Zola and Dostoevsky[14]), and the consequent *Risanamento*. Such a commitment to the sensible materiality of a new library that takes on the virtual form of lost narratives is a pertinent project in the current economy of virtual representation. It is proposed to sit alongside Vasari's Loggia del Pesce, created initially to house the fishmarket, displaced from the Ponte Vecchio to the Piazza Mercato Vecchio on the construction of the Corridoio Vasariano for the Medici, and displaced again from there to Piazza dei Ciompi during the *Risanamento* of the Old Town in the late nineteenth century.
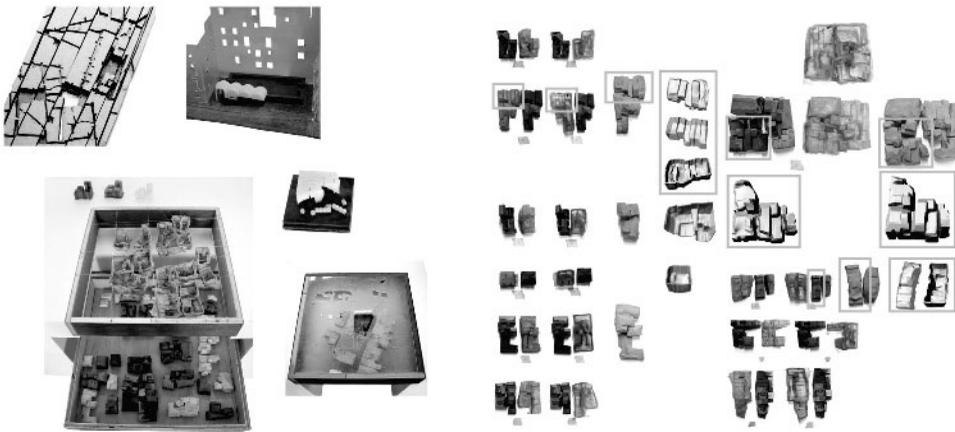
FIGURE 11.3   *Gabinetto Vieusseux*, Florence, Hsiao-Wei Lee, 'Curating the City', MArch, University of Edinburgh, 2008–10. Allegorical model 'casting' traces of ghost buildings (characters and characteristics) erased from the Old Town during the *Risanamento* in the nineteenth century onto the Piazza dei Ciompi, new site of Vasari's Loggia del Pesce.
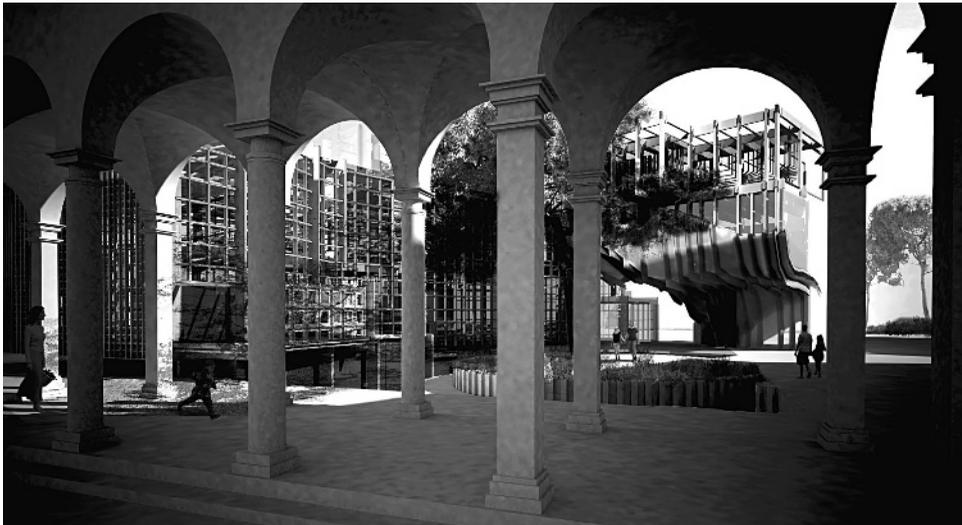
FIGURE 11.4   *Gabinetto Vieusseux*, Florence, Hsiao-Wei Lee, 'Curating the City', MArch, University of Edinburgh, 2008–10. The proposed library as seen through the colonnade of Vasari's Loggia del Pesce.

These two projects embody a version of *narrative space* that my pedagogy and practice promotes: put simply, the point is not only to read precise narratives, but is also to feel the effects of an obvious narratological intelligence that makes the projects available and open to reading. To offer a glimpse of where my chapter is going, I am happy (quoting Rancière) for the 'surplus of plenitude'[15] from these projects to spill over, and at the moment spill over

into how I sketch out the impetus for a theorization on *narrative space*. Rancière's notion of surplus is a theory that conflates the super-abundance of the many aspects of community life into images.[16] I conflate the idea of image with architecture as artefact and narrative; after all, what is an image if it is not suspended rhetoric?[17] This is not such a radical claim, and especially not for architecture. Aldo Rossi claimed that 'the highest measure of an architect'[18] is the 'monument'. He substantiated this by conflating the ideas of architecture as sign, image and narrative. This chapter takes his point but also considers the everyday measure of architecture to be 'monumentally' significant. All architecture is a 'sign upon which one reads something that cannot otherwise be said, for it belongs to the biography of the artist and the history of society'.[19] In other words, in each artefact, monumental or ordinary, we can read something between our own and community narratives.

In such a view of the city there is a super-abundance of reading matter: the city and museum overflow with narrative. Therefore, a crucial point this chapter makes is that community is never wholly consensual, it is multisensual and entangled and as such our relations with it are equally entangled. Therefore, when we serially experience architecture as moving images, syncopated and combinatorially visual and haptic, we experience them as a confluence of narratives, constantly reading something of what we think they are supposed to mean as biography and history together with something of their surplus, that is, something that relates to lives utterly unknown to the maker of the artefacts, lives known to our experience as reader, autobiographical accounts, unconscious aspects of our own life, but also imagined lives of all conceivable communities. The narratives embedded in the work are both weak and strong. However, weak or strong, they are always 'ineffable'.[20] Nevertheless, we experience them in fundamental, gestural and full-bodied ways and come to terms with them in complex processes of reflection.[21]

The ineffability of narrative as a bodily experience can be understood by reading between Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) and his later work *Signs* (1960). We must understand that 'space and perception generally represent, at the core of the subject, the fact of his birth, the perpetual contribution of his bodily being, a communication with the world more ancient than thought'.[22] In other words, before we speak we are already in the world. However, we must also sense that:

> My body immediately signifies a certain landscape about me, that of my fingers a certain fibrous or grainy style of the object. It is in the same fashion that the spoken word (the one I utter or the one I hear) is pregnant with a meaning which can be read in the very texture of the linguistic gesture (to the point that hesitation, an alteration of the voice, or the choice of a certain syntax suffices to modify it), and yet is never contained in that gesture, every expression always appearing to me as a trace, no idea being given to me except in transparency, and every attempt to close our hand on the thought which dwells in the spoken word leaving only a bit of verbal material in our fingers.[23]

In other words, we articulate our language as best we can but we can never say all that we know and experience and, as important, we can never say all that it is possible to know and experience. Nonetheless, what we say says more than we ever intend – it is saturated and can spill over with meaning.

Although the particular narratives that both these projects embody may well be of the special rather than everyday kind, the fact that they are to be experienced every day is not lost. However, furthermore, that they were experienced serially, every day, in the processes that

formed them as the sensible material of the bank and library, is also fundamentally important. Each image made as part of the process of production was recurrently open to reading (by both critics and authors, readers and writers) and reworked. The images (projects or projections) were challenged as merely objects of formalistic aesthetic pleasure and considered more like a series of artefacts in the museum. Each image was always considered as only a part of a bigger cultural narrative and, therefore, as a (saturated) fragment of the possible narratives and virtues that flow in their greater cultural contexts. Each project took on many characteristics as their respective dramatic processes raised and traced out representations of various narrative trajectories and displacements in Florence. Each stage of the process acquired 'plenitude' by being part of a methodology that engaged in a developing narratology that embedded narratives serially. Something of the 'plenitude' of each stage of production was allowed to spill into the next. The conceit is that the processes of spilling and absorption, natural to all processes of reading, are kept fluid by the character of the projects' narratologies. The works are not narratives structured conventionally as beginning, middle and end; they are constructed episodically, arranged serially and presented as curatorial arrangements – heterologies.[24] The projects of *Curating the City*, *Museum as City* and *City as Museum* tap into the ineffability of representation. They immerse themselves in the surplus of narratives, but more than this, they retain their saturated condition so that others may experience something of the hazard of their spatial and narrative fluidity and overflow.

My methodology for how stories may be inscribed in works of architecture and museum, are founded on theorization of how narrativity is experienced. When Paul Ricœur suggests that, 'narrative and construction bring about a similar kind of inscription',[25] it is because each mediates the endurance of time. Time is inscribed in all cultural mediation, be they words or stone. I will not now elaborate the phenomenological/hermeneutical understanding of time, the 'aporetics of temporality',[26] but such an understanding is central to my understanding of series, the seriality of experience and in Ricœur's claim that, 'Each new building is inscribed in urban space like a narrative within a setting of intertextuality'.[27] For the moment I will say that for my work and for these specific projects this intertextuality is not only an inscription of the narratives that museums configure and reconfigure in their own right, as apparatuses of narrative, it is also an inscription of the narratives that become entangled with them in the course of how they are experienced. Therefore, these projects are as much about the 'background' as the 'foreground' of the city (world) and the 'background' and 'foreground' of the writers and readers who experience them.

I will elaborate a little more on the notion of background and foreground in architecture. 'Figure' and 'ground' are conventional architectural terms that speak of formal arrangements between varying architectural constructions (figure) on the landscape (ground) of the city. I argue they might correspond more to the theatrical, literary or artistic terms of 'foreground' and 'background'. This marks a distinction between architecture's formal and narrative apparatus. It is not so much that I deny the importance of form and formality, I only suggest care that the high styles of cultural production are not employed as means to keep the lower orders in place. For example, there is virtue in Rowe's and Koetter's architectural collagist version of the City as Museum. However, such a collage of ironic utopian architectural formalisms, which seems to operate some sort of picturesque Poussin or Canaletto classicism (which would be a terrible reduction of the works of these fine artists), tries desperately to detach the poetic from the political.[28] In my view this is culturally limited, perhaps elitist and potentially reinforces the division between everyday and special narratives. I am interested more in confronting the

tensions between the aesthetic of politics and the 'politics of aesthetics'.[29] My project does this less through a presumption of architectural form as poetic means and more through a methodology that embraces the effects and techniques of 'imbrication'[30] (overlapping) and 'perplication'[31] (folding and unfolding) of narrative and narrative means. My methodology is derived from an understanding of everyday-experience as narrative-experience being enhanced by an encounter with artefacts that inscribe the folding, overlapping and unfolding processes of thought and action in its modes of production. This means that background and foreground are arranged less like Poussin's stage-sets,[32] with the audience presumed to be on the outside viewing another's configuration, and more like Ricœur's everyday city dweller whose everyday *action* is to navigate their own existential trajectory 'in quest of narrative'[33] through the new and pre-existent contexts of over-spilling stories of others. I go along with Ricœur's idea of the 'pre-narrative quality of experience'.[34] I propose only that architecture and museum projects can understand this better and give the user and reader of architecture and museum a right to be co-author of the scene that they play in and plays them out.

Step 2 – The everyday and special narratives: between passivity and action

I begin this next step by contemplating Theodor Adorno's account of the *Valéry Proust Museum*.[35] He says, 'The museums will not be shut, nor would it even be desirable to shut them'.[36] I agree with Adorno. Let's keep the museums open. I would go further: let's make new museums, more museums. Let's develop and extend public collections and, as Adorno says, let's not neutralize or reduce culture through them.[37] Adorno's essay gives a fine critique of the narrative apparatus, but should we agree with his characterization of the museum's audience? He places it somewhere in the dialectical tension between the expert and amateur, the adult and child, advocating something between the experience of '*délice*',[38] the aesthetic pleasure attained by the expert, or the '*joie enivrante*',[39] the 'exhilarating joy' of the amateur enthusiast, respectively between Valéry and Proust. It seems to me that his dialectical partners are somewhat rarefied. Can Valéry and Proust offer us a complete critique of the range of experiences in museums? Are the extremes of aesthetic pleasure or exhilarating joy the only reasons for going to the museum? It may well be that Valéry can be seen as an aesthete, '*artiste*',[40] and representative of the 'fetishist'[41] curator; but can Proust, as '*dilettante*',[42] be taken as an example of an everyday reader? Proust certainly isn't an example of an everyday writer. However, he does write about everyday matters.

Critical theory would suggest the theatre of everyday life is already a theatre of politics and representation. In other words, following the rhetoric derived from Marxist economics, everyday life is compelled by the apparatus of political and economic might; our everyday life as ordinary citizens is caught in the vortices of domination and we must emancipate ourselves by first realizing this point; to do this we must wrench our passivity into action and turn ourselves from spectators into actors/activists – or as Brecht says, we must 'appeal less to the feelings than to the spectator's reason. Instead of sharing an experience the spectator must come to grips with things'.[43]

Of course Brecht acknowledges that part of his process is to stir the feelings of an audience. Furthermore, he probably would have sympathized with Merleau-Ponty; getting to grips with things is a process of both loosening the grip on fixed processes and ideas whilst trying to grip what has become slippery (political and social reality) in the process. However, there is

still a push for raising the awareness of an audience and giving navigational guidance by making its narratives contextually relevant. This apparent dialectical tension between knowing and unknowing, docility and emancipation, fixity and movement, the explicit and ineffable, limit and surplus, neutrality and performativity, spectator and participant, and passivity and action, reaches back and forward from ancient to current times.

However, I do not wish to be ensnared by dialectical tendencies of critical thought. I wish to move beyond dialectical opposition. I do not wish to promote action (the reading and writing of narratives) only in counter-terms to those ideas, politics or philosophies such action opposes. The city and its narratives are too frequently driven by either too bleak or too utopian a view of community. Not only are the cures frequently wrong in their diagnostics and prognostics, such reliance on 'total community' creates opportunity for economic imperatives to be dressed up as ideological cures to perceived community malaise. No matter what end of the political spectrum they emanate from, I am sceptical of procedures that rely on defining identity concepts and then forming appropriate images of community to represent those concepts. I am against any paternalistic narratives, including and especially those that set out to represent particular politics in stylistic uniforms deemed to be what is best for the lowly ignorant masses. I do not hold that 'the architect's [or the museum curator's] job [is] to create the signs or images which represent the functions, aspirations and beliefs of the community, and create them in such a way that they add up to a comprehensible whole'.[44]

In my view, no form of cultural production, no 'form of consciousness',[45] need talk from on high down to its audience. My chapter does not take sides in the argument that polarizes the political and aesthetic sensitivity of cultural audiences. My chapter and the theorization it promotes do not seek simply to stir up audiences from passivity to activity. I operate from the premise that activity and passivity are dual aspects in the experience of any cultural production. My project begins with a similar assumption to Rancière: rather than presuming an egalitarian community we can only presume that there is, in and between those that make up any cultural audience, an 'equality of intelligence'.[46] We get to grips with things in our own way in our own time. Brecht knew this, but his technique of an exaggerated sense of theatricality in experience (surplus) created an urgency to get to grips with at least the possibility of rearranging things (political and social reality). This does not suggest a lowest common denominator to how we should embody narrativity. Rather, like Rancière, this is to see virtue in the natural disunity between ideas and sensible materiality.[47] I am less concerned to unravel 'the tangle of plots a subject is caught up in'.[48] If we can succeed in loosening our grip on things by opening ourselves as readers and writers to the super-abundance of bodily-perceptivity, the point for the writer-reader is simply to choose when and how to catch a further grip and reorder the character of narrative and narratology.

The key idea that simultaneously brings about the special in the everyday and the everyday in the special is what I am calling the 'radical passivity'[49] of everyday experience. The theory of radical passivity concerns both how we participate in the authored works of architecture and museum and how a work may be authored in order to encourage the particular type of participation the theory holds. Although not theorized by Brecht, it seems to me that he is aware that the dramatization at the heart of all our representations makes it difficult to ignore the dramas of everyday life.

According to Benjamin, a good friend of Brecht, neither the optical nor tactile everyday encounter with architecture occurs 'through rapt attention';[50] we engage in it more 'by noticing the object in incidental fashion'.[51] Therefore, on the assumption that we understand

and accept what Benjamin is saying, two questions spring immediately to mind. First, how is both a direct (active) and indirect (passive) reading of architecture possible? Second, can the same be said for the museum?

Taking the second question first, I think we *can* say the same for museums. If we think of the museum as that narrative apparatus that we go to sometimes, serially, throughout our lifetime, I think it is safe to say that we never go to read the whole thing, certainly not all at once; we read it a bit at a time and frequently only notice things incidentally, that is, whilst reading about something else. Therefore, as to the first question, concerning direct and indirect reading, even if we are well read and experienced readers, when reading in rapt attention we are still susceptible to mixed messages. Even when in rapt attention we frequently read either less or more than we bargain for. If we think of architecture and museum in Barthes' terms as an image, as something also intrinsically diegetic (narratological in its descriptiveness), then, his concepts of '*studium*' and '*punctum*'[52] provide ways of thinking indirect or passive reading:

> The term *studium* is used as the 'application to a thing, taste for someone, a kind of general, enthusiastic commitment'. [Valèry's '*delice*'[53]] This contextual application is punctured and disturbed by another factor . . . namely the *punctum*, 'a sting, speck, cut, little hole' interrupting the continued absorbance, and carried by a striking visual element [Proust's '*joi enivrante*',[54] over a *Madeleine* perhaps] . . . meaning . . . is thus carried by this notion of contingency, a hardly explicable fascination with details that seem not only to supplement but also undo the *studium*'s task'.[55]

Whether supplementary or negating, this kind of 'plenitude' further entangles or radicalizes our understanding of an image's/object's narrativity.

Radical passivity operates on the following basis. If it is accepted that a narrative work, be it in literature, architecture or museum, can operate both physically and transcendentally, through body and mind, then it is both placed and non-placed. The action of moving through place and the intelligent action of the reader run in parallel, sometimes crossing and interweaving, sometimes running off at tangents to each other. It may be the foreground or background that becomes the figure of rapt attention, in the process, alternately one displacing the other. Radical passivity is an affirmative theory that gives credence to the process of oscillation between the active and passive. It can be understood as a version of the 'hermeneutical circle',[56] which already confounds strictly rational and instrumental procedures. However, in my project this interpretive fluidity is given greater philosophical and political impetus to transcend also the romantic/aesthetic predisposition that simply considers this gap in understanding to be poetic.

'Radical passivity' is neither irrational nor politically neutral. That it may lead to the poetic is not in dispute. However, I am neither denying nor forcing a sub-Barthes flaunting of 'poetic over historical narrative',[57] but neither am I denying or forcing the historical–materialist version of active history. The point that I wish to underline is that 'radical passivity' describes, on one hand, the natural liberty of a reader of literature, user of architecture or visitor to the museum to make what he or she can out of the narratives before them, but, on the other, that the passive reading, a reading acquired more through disinterest (*désinteressement*[58]) than interest, has a radical potential to change the reading.

Perhaps 'radical passivity' is the basis of a theory of 'distraction' that Benjamin thought

might act as key for the social absorption of change. However, for my project, whether it is to immerse ourselves like Proust in our *mémoires involuntaire*,[59] in the *punctum*-come-lacuna in the narrative apparatus of others, or to saturate the pensiveness of others with the aesthetic fetishism of Valéry-like *studia* in a multiple narrative apparatus, which perhaps is what Rancière is implying,[60] it is clear that architecture and museums can be considered sites of 'heterogenesis'.[61] They can be arranged in ways to promote extended legibility. Rancière's theorizations of the 'pensive image' go further than Barthes' notions of *studium* and *punctum*. For Rancière, images (pensive images) are multiple narratologies. The possible narratives immanent to them do not act in single logical sequences. Images (pensive images) operate on the 'intertwining of [at least] two logics of sequence'. Rancière is interested in the intersection of narratologies rather than just the intersection in narratives. Cultural production, the body language of architecture and museum, can be considered sites of heterogenesis if the processes of both reading and writing allow new narratives to emerge in the various intersections between the narrative seriality of an image (cultural artefact) and the narrative seriality of its reader. It is in this way that we can understand the *Museum as City* and *City as Museum*: 'one [narrative] art serves to constitute the imaginary of another'.[62]

Time will need to be taken to convincingly articulate, carefully craft and skilfully frame and curate the various narratives and times important to the ever-changing character in the community of architecture and museum. Sufficient time needs to pass that we can even action and radicalize our own works passively. Perhaps this is what Benjamin had in mind when he agreed with Georg Lukács that 'the whole inner action of a novel is nothing else but a struggle against the power of time'.[63] It seems this is also what Benjamin had in mind when he then wondered, with an apparent understanding of the entanglement between different modes of narrative constructs: 'Whether the relationship of the storyteller to his material, human life, is not in itself a craftsman's relationship, whether it is not his very task to fashion the raw material of experience, his own and that of others, in a solid, useful, and unique way.'[64]

The everyday reader naturally crafts in no lesser way than the specialist writer. It is a fundamental premise of politico-cultural communication that we must assume there is an equality of intelligence between all readers. The specialist simply understands that the 'tensions between various regimes of expression',[65] which give rise to the plenitude of possible readings in and between narrative works, are the basis of his or her specialist processes, but also what makes his or her specialist productions available to everyday readers. The question is how to write narratives that neither shore-up a single story nor only flood us with plenitude. In my view, for our times, there is no doubt that the appropriate character of narratology is 'heterology'.[66] Only processes that harness and extend multiple narratives can appropriately mediate and contribute to the super-abundancy of the everyday and special narratives of life; they may have beginnings and middles, but they have no ends.

Notes

 1 W. Benjamin, 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction', in *Illuminations*, ed. H. Arendt, trans. H. Zohn, London: Fontana Press, 1992, pp. 211–244.
 2 J. Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. G. Rockhill, London: Continuum, 2005, p. 44. *The Aesthetic Unconscious*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009, p. 29. 'The pensive image', in *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. G. Elliot, London: Verso, 2009, p. 121.
 3 For example, Plato's *The Republic* and Aristotle's *Poetics*.
 4 Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, pp. 2–15.

5 See A. McIntyre, *After Virtue, a Study in Moral Theory*, London: Duckworth, 1994.

6 For Rancière contemporary community practice is better as a politics of 'dissensus' rather than consensus. Although he acknowledges the 'egalitarian trait' that guides much well-intended political and aesthetic practices, he urges us away from the, representational, illusions of consensual politics. Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, p. 92; *Dissensus, On Politics and Aesthetics*, ed. and trans. S. Corcoran, London: Continuum, 2010, pp. 84–90.

7 B. Brecht, 'The modern theatre is the epic theatre', in *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. J. Willett, New York: Hill and Wang, 1992, pp. 22–23, p. 34.

8 See also, G. Agamben, *What is an Apparatus? and Other Essays*, trans. D. Kishik and S. Pedatella, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009, pp. 13–14.

9 'For something to happen, passages must be opened up, but in ways that preserve their hazard'. P. Carter, 'Trace: a running commentary on relay', in *Dark Writing, Geography, Performance, Design*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, 2009, p. 203.

10 Brecht, 'The modern theatre is the epic theatre', p. 34.

11 D. Wiszniewski, *Florence: Curating the City, Representation and Seriality*, ed. D. Wiszniewski, trans. E. Bedarida, Edinburgh: Architecture, University of Edinburgh, 2010.

12 Ibid., pp. 36–43.

13 Ibid., pp. 90–97.

14 Ibid., p. 90.

15 Rancière, 'The pensive image', in *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 123.

16 Ibid., pp. 107–132.

17 R. Barthes, 'Rhetoric of the image', in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. S. Heath, London: Fontana Press, 1977, pp. 32–51.

18 A. Rossi, *Aldo Rossi, Selected Writings and Projects*, ed. J. O'Reagan, P. Keogh, S. O'Donnell and S. O'Toole, London: Architectural Design, 1983, p. 23.

19 Ibid.

20 Barthes, 'Rhetoric of the image', p. 31.

21 'Reflection does not follow in the reverse direction a path already traced by constitution.' M. Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. C. Smith, London and New York: Routledge, 2008, p. 283.

22 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 284.

23 Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, ed. J. Wild and J. M. Edie, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1998, p. 96.

24 Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, p. 65.

25 Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. K. Blamey and D. Pellauer, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006, p. 150.

26 Ricœur, *Time and Narrative, Volume 3*, trans. K. Blamey and D. Pellauer, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1988. *Time and Narrative, Volume 1*, trans. K. McLaughlin and D. Pellauer, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1984, p. 96.

27 Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 150.

28 Ibid., p. 149.

29 Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*.

30 '. . . background is made up of the "living imbrications" of every lived story with every other such story'. Ricœur, *Time and Narrative, Volume 1*, p. 75.

31 G. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, ed. J. Williams, Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2003, pp. 151–153.

32 In Poussin's paintings 'the world of the artwork is distanced as far as possible from the viewer'. D. Carrier, *Poussin's Paintings, A Study in Art-Historical Methodology*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 1993, p. 240.

33 'If there is no human experience that is not already mediated by symbolic systems and, among them, by narratives, it seems vain to say, as I have, that *action is in quest of narrative*. How, indeed, can we speak of a human life as a story in its nascent state, since we do not have access to the temporal dramas of existence outside of stories told about them by others or by ourselves? I shall oppose to this objection a series of situations that in my opinion, constrain us to accord already to experience as such an inchoate narrativity that does not proceed from projecting, as some say, literature on life but that constitutes a general demand for narrative. To characterize these situations I shall not hesitate to speak of a prenarrative quality of experience'. My italics. Ricœur, *Time and Narrative, Volume 1*, p. 74.

34 Ibid.

35 T. Adorno, 'Valéry Proust museum', in *Prisms*, trans S. M. Weber, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983, pp. 173–185.

36 Ibid., p. 185.

37 Ibid., p. 175.

38 Ibid., p. 179.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid., p. 181.

42 Ibid.

43 Brecht, 'The epic theatre and its difficulties', p. 23.

44 Alison and Peter Smithson quoted in R. Banham, *The New Brutalism*, London: Architectural Press, 1966, p. 71; as quoted in G. Baird, *The Space of Appearance*, op. cit., p. 315.

45 Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 18.

46 Ibid., p. 10.

47 Rancière, 'The pensive image', *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 121.

48 Ricœur, *Time and Narrative, Volume 1*, p. 75.

49 T. C. Wall, *Radical Passivity, Levinas, Blanchot and Agamben*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999.

50 Benjamin, 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction', in *Illuminations*, p. 232.

51 Ibid., p. 233.

52 Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. R. Howard, New York: Hill and Wang, 1981, pp. 26–27.

53 Adorno, 'Valéry Proust museum', *Prisms*, p. 179.

54 Ibid.

55 Weussberg, 'Circulating images: notes on the photographic exchange', in *Writing the Image After Roland Barthes*, ed. J.-M. Rabaté, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997, p. 109.

56 'For thinkers of Romanticism, the [hermeneutical circle] meant that an understanding of a text cannot be an objective procedure, in the sense of scientific objectivity, but that it necessarily implies a pre-understanding, expressing the way in which the reader already understands himself and his work. Hence a sort of circularity is produced between understanding the text and self-understanding'. Ricœur, 'Metaphor and the central problem of hermeneutics', in *Philosophy Looks at the Arts, Contemporary Readings in Aesthetics*, p. 589.

57 M. Wellish, 'The art of being sparse, porous, scattered', in *Writing the Image After Roland Barthes*, ed. J.-M. Rabaté, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997, p. 202.

58 Lévinas, 'Essence and disinterestedness', in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. Peperzak, Critchley and Bernasconi, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996, p. 114.

59 Proust suggests we allow our 'involuntary memories' to guide our individual artistic practices. The shock effect of the involuntary memory disturbs the logical sequence of the medium and time in which it occurs. It is a process that places one experience into another, one narrative into another.

60 'It is not the aura or *punctum* of the unique apparition. But nor is it simply our ignorance of the author's thought or the resistance of the image to our interpretation. The pensiveness of the image is the result of this new status of the figure that conjoins two regimes of expression, without homogenizing them'. Rancière, 'The pensive image', in *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 122.

61 Ibid., p. 127.

62 Ibid., pp. 130–131.

63 G. Lukács, *Theory of the Novel*, quoted in W. Benjamin, 'The Storyteller', in *Illuminations*, p. 98.

64 Ibid., p. 107.

65 Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, p. 65.

66 Ibid.

12

NARRATIVE TRANSFORMATIONS AND THE ARCHITECTURAL ARTEFACT

Stephen Alexander Wischer

This chapter seeks to disclose the value of the embodied *artefact* used as an essential part of the architectural design process by exploring the interwoven relationship between our material creations and the narrative potential of design. It is suggested that the designer's involvement with the *artefact* awakens an embodied creativity, which pulls memory and imagination into an empathetic relationship with material reality, inspired by, and for, life as it is lived. In so doing, the relationship between the *artefact* and the narrative creation touches upon the innate intertwining of the body and world, providing a source of vital orientation for design and revealing meaning beyond abstract analysis.

Like poetry itself, *artefacts* and the transformations born from them both draw from life and inspire the imagination to 'leap', provoking 'newness' in our perception, forever changing our understanding of the world. Through the philosophies of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and examples of both the mythological creations of Daedalus as well as student work, this chapter seeks to contribute to the direction of architectural investigation by exploring how this transformative activity either profits from or becomes threatened by the framework of our globalizing culture.

The mythological *Daidala*

The mythological Wooden Cow, built by Daedalus, was an envelope for Pasiphae's body used to seduce the magnificent White Bull.[1] The offspring of this union, half-human and half-bull, was nursed by Pasiphae until the disgrace of Minos and the increasing temperament of the creature provoked directly the construction of the Labyrinth. Built to contain the Minotaur, the Labyrinth is considered to be among the first architectural creations of the Western Tradition. Having been passed on through stories and constructions, it is one of the most significant symbols of path and boundary, city and life. Of interest here is how the role of this initial *artefact* (the creation of the Wooden Cow) was central in conjuring the narrative that led to the Labyrinth's creation, suggesting the vital significance of our creations as the source of architectural invention.

The multitude of constructions created by Daedalus (the *daidala*) were never only 'buildings' but included *artefacts* as wide ranging as sculpture, art, defensive arms, instruments, wings,

boats and jewellery. *The Myth of Daedalus*, by Alberto Pérez-Gómez, describes these as luminous creations,[2] ones that 'are always reproducing life rather than representing it' – an intertwining with the world.[3] At their most basic, these are tools; inspired by natural phenomena, such as a fish spine transformed into a saw, or the inventions of glue and plumb line, translated from other natural phenomena.[4] What is most intriguing is that these creations are described as transformative and 'interdisciplinary' in nature. Through *mimesis* (the act of both imitating and translating) these creations always leave room for memory and imagination – opening upon situations that are familiar and relatable, as well as completely new and wondrous.[5]

Alberto Pérez-Gómez states: 'Daedalus, a *demiourgoi*, creates wondrous objects or magical effects . . . working via *mimesis* he is able to transform natural phenomena, enabling inanimate matter to become magically alive.'[6] Here, 'the sound of blowing wind upon reeds gives rise to musical instruments',[7] the need to escape his imprisonment at Crete, produces wings. In each case, circumstance is paramount, providing inspiration for the particular nature of the *artefact*. Like the *daidala*, our 'tools' of design are capable of opening to the world, inspiring and engaging life – drawing influence from culture and context – while providing newness and direction.[8] However rare it is becoming, the poetic *artefact* and its ability to provide a narrative framework for design is essential for architectural creation en route to genuine meaning.

Traditional grounds and the modern narrative

For millennia, architecture has provided man with an inherently symbolic order based on *sensus communis* (common knowledge and truths) grounded in myths which served as a framework for cultural orientation. Engaging these stories has been the origin for countless creations including temples, theatres, gardens and the imagining of architecture, both drawn and written, in treatise. Only within the last two centuries has architecture been reduced to a linear understanding of 'constructions' defined by 'professional' and 'specialized' aims more and more divided from the oral and written traditions of story-telling. At the same time the understanding of music-as-performance changed to music-as-score, architects too began to expect the 'rules' of theory and practice to correspond in a transparent one-to-one application of aesthetic and objective aims. From an objective idea of the mind-to-drawing – and from drawing-to-construction – we have largely succeeded in minimizing a participatory translation in architectural construction in the name of efficiency and, along with it, the potential of our stories to guide and transform our creations.

We may ask about the consequences of this precision and expediency, and may well question what the thin line on our drawing boards really has to do with our lived experience of the world? Guided by objective aims, many of our creations seem freed from materiality, released from the smells, textures, sounds and stories inevitably woven in the experience of life. In fact, our virtual designs are completely emancipated from gravity and light (the most original and primordial grounds of existence). Thus, we may inquire as to what degree our designs become dissociated from the life that they intend to facilitate.

In seeking alternative beginnings for design, we may seriously consider the grounds (if not 'truths') in fiction, and certainly the creations that facilitate, frame, or open to these stories. In watching a film, listening to a song, when we are reading (and certainly when we dream), we come to recognize that the things we encounter truly affect and steer our memory and imagination. Similarly, architecture, installation, exhibition and the creations used en route to

design are essential in reconciling the 'objective necessity' of our modern world with meaningful experience – inviting us to see more of ourselves through the creation in front of us.

This participation is inevitably contingent upon the origins of design exploration, and I hypothesize that it is in the first touch that an opportunity is either seized or missed in engaging a comprehension of *depth* (and the stories that exist within it). Just as the *daidalon* seduces an exchange with nature, our creations must invite participation between perceiver and perceived – opening intercourse with the world.[9] Whether the body's imagination is awakened or remains dormant is the focus of this research, which may reveal that the availability of the body to the process of creation is directly related to the interpretive potential of design.

Like the Labyrinth itself, our creations present us with a path that simultaneously orients and disorients, an ambiguity and familiarity in the provocation of an essential participation which gives meaning to our world.[10] Just as the *daidalon* borrows directly from and creates cultural stories, the plots of our great fictions open upon a depth that stretches well beyond direct one-to-one correspondence and self-referential signage. There is always more there than what is seen and it is imperative to seek out ways to magnify these apparitions through our creations and the stories they evoke.

The ability of architecture to incite this participation is a direct reminder of the primary way knowledge has been passed on for millennia. In the pre-modern world, culture itself had grown and shifted through stories, transmitted through mytho-poetic overtures which provided orientation.[11] The larger cosmological grounds, based on the rotation of the stars or the cycles of the seasons, could never be directly emulated, yet, through the works of alchemists, polymaths, craftsmen, and in the ritual act of building itself, man's creations always sought to resonate with these larger dramas while reflecting their own particular situation within the lived-world. Creations which involve life's activity through symbolization was always the foremost task of architecture and our 'narratives' were the primary inspiration of pre-modern construction, dependent upon the merging of architecture with the rituals of life. Alberto Pérez-Gómez states:

> The discursive understanding of medieval architecture [for example] was never in terms of a 'simultaneous' appreciation of space . . . Whenever architecture was described, the emphasis was on its accommodation of specific rituals, always in time. Such description is analogous to medieval representations, in which places and individual scenes are located within a frame in relation to a narrative structure and not subject to a unifying (perspectival) space. The spaces for ritual in a church or a cathedral were determined not by geometric space but in view of cyclical temporality that linked days, years, and religious events with the participation in rites involving personal salvation in distinct parts of the building.[12]

Within these approaches, the *depth* of architecture itself was not conceived as a separate geometric entity or homogeneous isotropic space, and the *origin* of design was not abstract measurement.[13] The distance of scalar techniques was a distance of the imagination, linked to a larger understanding of the cosmos and never a prescriptive measurement alone.[14] In other words, the rituals of life reflected in our *artefacts* were always inspired by narratives, which remained central to the development of human knowledge, distinguishing a point where the practical and poetic meet – the imagining body, in the action of life and circumstance.[15]

Systematization and the corporeal imagination

In the modern world, the ability to translate these larger themes and evoke stories through our creations has been more and more replaced with objective analysis and mundane operations. The positivist idea for getting beyond 'doubt', treats 'interpretation as a defect'[16] by emphasizing objective constructs as the most valuable form of knowledge.[17] Obsessed with specialized 'information', these approaches reduce the practical wisdom of perception (*phronēsis*) to a series of conceptual applications.[18] Alberto Pérez-Gómez suggests that since the nineteenth century 'modern aesthetics have tended to describe [and create] monuments in stylistic terms, deliberately divorcing ritual function from so-called aesthetic attributes and have thereby failed to grasp the fundamental thrust of architecture as a poetic representation of significant human action'.[19] The antecedent action of design, its placement in culture and its narrative framework have been missed.

The introduction of the *parti* (or *partitio*) by Leon Battista Alberti (1404–1472) exemplifies the beginnings of this change. His vision of the *parti* promotes a direct transcription of 'harmony' to and from an *idea* of the world at the fore of architectural projects.[20] Anticipating René Descartes and borrowing from Pythagoras and Vitruvius, Alberti's *parti* was based on the theoretical division of buildings into parts relating to the 'harmonious' whole of the building, not in accordance with 'illusory appearance' but defined by exact measurement. This emphasis on an ideal trajectory for design is echoed in his ideas on creativity. Alberti states: 'Let no one doubt, that the man who does not perfectly understand what he is attempting to do when painting, will never be a good painter. It is useless to draw the bow, unless you have a target to aim the arrow at.'[21]

Centuries later, Alberti's theories and the traditional grounding of his practice have been completely replaced with instrumental approaches. The advancement of digital technology demonstrates an increasing *insulation* between the knowledge of our bodies and a larger understanding of our place in the world. Here, *depth* has finally become a 'third-dimension' reduced to arrangements that exist outside our experience; a non-circumstantial, abstract quantity, applied via technological expediency, a transcription never able to engage the practical and poetic situation it creates. More and more, buildings are efficiently constructed without the purposeful involvement of stories, which help to contextualize and amplify the situation for which they are to intervene. This change dismisses the passage of knowledge through interpretation, a bodily and ethical involvement, in favour of instrumental formulas – substituting *perceptual* participation for *conceptual* application.

The philosophical work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty reminds us that this substitution of 'thought' for 'sense' allows us to 'judge what is by what ought to be . . . by what the idea of knowledge requires'.[22] This happens to such a degree that our creations become more and more unhinged from bodily orientation, widening the 'gap' between thought and experience, between ourselves and the world around us. Obsessed with the intangible 'idea' of things, Merleau-Ponty suggests:

> time and space finally appears as the expression of a universal positing power. I am no longer concerned with my body, nor with time, nor with the world as I experience them in antepredicative knowledge, in the inner communication that I have with them. I now refer to my body only as an idea, to the universe as an idea, to the idea of space and the idea of time. Thus objective thought is formed – being that of common sense and of science – which finally causes us to lose contact with perceptual experience.[23]

Following from these changes, it is evident that a bodiless approach to design exists in modern architectural practice to such a degree that students and practitioners alike have no problem applying objective information to the design of a building, yet are more and more perplexed when asked to discuss the experience of a space, its tangible and sensual meaning. This is evidence that the sensitivity to *sense*, capable of awakening the imagination through stories, is waning. Yet, stories are what make life meaningful, providing the symbols through which we may orient ourselves. Clearly, these emerge from our encounter with the world (as a source of lived knowledge) and what has failed to be grasped is that as designers we never create environments separated from particular situations and larger contexts. In order for our creations to invite meaning in a particular and contextual way it is important to recognize that engaging lived-space demands knowledge not gained through objective information alone. Awakening this engagement demands things to look through and to empathize with.

The artefact and narrative entwining

Tangible *artefacts* used throughout the design process seem to resist these systematizing trends by beginning with the world they wish to affect. Involved with stories from their outset they initiate design questioning from the 'bottom up' so to speak, from an immediate and sensual engagement with the material world and not from the 'top down' as a logical understanding applied to architectural ideation. Like speech, language and stories (the very things that allow us to navigate our day-to-day lives), the symbolic potential of architecture seems dependent upon its ability to persuade participation with perception, and with it, an essential act of *translation*.

Citing Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, Pérez Gómez reminds us, how our bodies are the 'locus of all formulations about the world'.[24] Every sensation, learned or imagined, forms a reference for its meaning through the body. Every touch, smell, taste and gesture is infused with corporeal knowledge. Foregrounding this engagement through direct involvement with our creations helps these to gain resonance with the metaphorical knowledge which underlies experience. Beginning from the world of sense the process of creation itself provides a frame through which we can see more of what should come. The fact that these readings will inevitably change and provide various interpretations (and even disagreement) is the very strength of the approach – a place to share each other's questions.

In considering the openings provided by these creations, we may return again to the 'mysterious emanation' of the *daidala*, and their 'power of seduction'.[25] Like film, poetry, or music, our creations become things to imagine through.[26] They are inventions that engage the dexterity of the body in an imaginative association with the world, involving a process that evokes 'the most primary form of ritual', the interpretive and imitative reconciliation of experience via *mimesis*.[27] Like the *daidala*, our artefacts act as a net, allowing the world to be caught up in the creation, which becomes both a weather vane and a compass for our architectural creations.

An example of the interwoven relationship between the narrative and *artefact* is witnessed in work completed for a design studio project held during a Term Abroad Program in Barcelona, Spain. While abroad, students were asked to immerse themselves in the experience of the city in order to prolong design inquiry and to avoid a rush to objective design solutions. This was important for these American students to gain their bearings in a foreign environment, wrestling with ways of digesting and using these experiences over the course of study.

The project was begun through a narrative which was created with and through tangible things. First, students were asked to excavate the experiences of Barcelona by imagining a person – a life – born from a pair of shoes found. The goal was to fill these shoes with stories that 'brush-up' against the life lived there, pulling the history and experience of Barcelona into a collaborative storyline to inform their creations. To do so, they became familiar with the people, the customs and culture; were encouraged to form relationships with the place and its life. Immersed in the locale, students were asked to experientially map everything from the physical texture of the city to the immediate experience of people moving down the streets. They sought to translate the turbulent political history, architectural encounters and their personal experience through 'Xavier's Autobiography,' making information relatable and alive.

From initial rubbings, which transferred the texture of the city onto paper and which saw the body in direct relation to the physical presence of the environment; to tethered packs presenting the dense and folding qualities of the streets and the labyrinthine nature of travel itself; along with stories which distinguish the transition from fascism to democracy and the rich cultural history of Catalonia – the mixture of these stories and creations helped to contextualize the atmosphere of this environment. Intertwined with the stories of 'X', these productions helped inspire essential themes, plots and activities, testing the ability of the studio to compose a 'mythos' for the project.

Through writing and conversation (which resembled more closely the direction of movie scenes than an architecture studio), the class opened a fictional framework through which historical information was translated into an intricate series of narrative vignettes born from an inherently interpretive disposition, drawing influence from the context of the lived-world. The creations provoked student interpretation based on and within the experiential *depth* of the situation presented. 'X' became a 'narrative map'; a 'poetic vessel' that the group could draw upon for inspiration to fuel their designs.

Another, more specific, example of an *artefact* that helped to open narrative inspiration towards an architectural design is witnessed in Craig Martin's design of a *Twin House* for 'Hans and Grace' (Figures 12.1 to 12.3). Based on the premise that Grace was abused by her father (after the untimely death of her mother) an *artefact* was developed to extol the inherent circumstances and emotion of the situation along with the twins' relationship. The *artefact* is a womb – an opening – which, like the old kitchen window through which Grace would look as a child, provides an entrance into their story. The vessel, made of wound steel wire and covered in concrete, symbolized the relationship of the twins and their mutual support. The inner chasm or 'wound' is the vacancy left by the loss of their mother and Grace's abuse.

Inserted into this chasm is a double-ended candle (Figure 12.2). As the vessel is slowly rocked and turned, the candle, sometimes adhering to the walls, always flickering, slowly melts, covering the coarse texture of the creation. The combination of the materials and movement suggest a caress and warmth, the comfort of a distant lantern and the cadence of healing (the relationship of the twins). In time, the *artefact* became more and more 'healed', smoothed over by a scab, like a blanket of snowfall that brings silence. In this way, the *artefact* helped to test ideas from the initial story in a tactile and sensuous way, simultaneously allowing the narrative to grow, informing the design's physical and spatial attributes.

In the end, their childhood home was destroyed, except for a fragment of an original wall – preserving the kitchen window and parts of the foundation beneath – wrapped in the new design (Figure 12.3). Inspired by the narrative which was born from the material *artefact*, the design transforms these qualities into time, space and a distinct atmosphere. Through the entry

FIGURE 12.1   *Twin House* artefact (first evolution), by Craig Martin, 2010. Completed as part of the Architectural Design Studio 271, Department of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, North Dakota State University.

FIGURE 12.2   *Twin House* artefact (second evolution), by Craig Martin, 2010. Completed as part of the Architectural Design Studio 271, Department of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, North Dakota State University.

FIGURE 12.3   *The Twin House for Hans and Grace*, by Craig Martin, 2010. Completed as part of the Architectural Design Studio 271, Department of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, North Dakota State University.

we are invited inwards, along a textural wall. Once inside, the interior spaces revolve around the warmth and glow of an elongated fireplace – the shape of which corresponds to the saved timber planks of the old structure, which provides the fuel for this hearth – a sacral burning of the past that simultaneously sustains the cooking of food while emanating warmth for the house. The combination of the *artefact* and narrative gave way to these elements, symbolizing essential activities and helping to reveal the emotional tenor of the creation towards architectural transformation.

Beyond serving as initial catalysts for design, *artefacts* created either during or after the architecture, either in process or exhibition, help steer the imagination towards a more comprehensive and intentional understanding of the hypothetical spaces of models and drawings. Creations as wide ranging as a *Tea Vessel for Teahouse* design inspired by the *Book of Tea* by Kakuzo Okakura, which warms with the sun as it is moved throughout the day; or one that is carved to reflect the process of refining tea leaves (see Figure 12.4 and Plate 12.1); a stretching bar for a dance studio (see Plate 12.2), which folds and stretches like its inhabitants; or various pieces of furniture, a phone, and other tectonic analogues, help designers and attendees alike to better relate to and test the experiential dimension of hypothetical concepts, becoming perceptual anchors and wings simultaneously. The gravity of the creation both pulls us into the spaces of design and sets free the imagination to ponder spaces, joints and details.

FIGURE 12.4   *Tea Vessel for Teahouse*, by Robert Arlt, 2008. Completed as part of the Architectural Design Studio 271, Department of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, North Dakota State University.

It is mentioned in the essay *Daedalus in the Labyrinth of Ovid's 'Metamorphoses'* by Barbara Pavlock that 'Daedalus uses his inventive powers both for constraint, by constructing the Labyrinth to contain the Minotaur, and for release, by fashioning wings to escape Crete'.[28] The creative facets of the *artefact* seem similar, opening to intercessions between boundary

and opening, a window that frames a particular view of the world; revealing and concealing 'flashes' of *alethia*.[29] Through these creations we are invited to question things left unexplored in objective design methodologies and simultaneously to engage more profoundly the most practical concerns. The way this process interacts with an intended programme anchors the objective framework of the design with ciphers of memory and imagination which then augment reality and transcend the substitutive nature of objective methodologies.[30]

These aforementioned creations open narrative possibility because they resist the reduction of myopic focus due to their 'givenness' to our senses. Following from Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Hans-Georg Gadamer suggests that meaning itself is something *given* in the things we encounter and not something applied to the world. Thus, by involving ourselves with tangible things the 'world of the work' cannot be avoided because the material, location, shape, smell and texture are all present to perception and cannot be reduced to a purely visual property, shape, concept or measurement. Here, the creation is *open* to circumstance and meaning – a context within reach.

In these approaches the immediacy of bodily perception is pivotal, revealing the origin of creativity itself. The encounter with our creations and the skills involved in crafting them reveals that the recollection and significance of phenomena are not only born from our physical interaction as a form of 'external stimuli' (imposing themselves upon us) but that perception is directed towards phenomena through an imagining body.[31] Just as Daedalus is known to 'have abandoned his mind to unknown arts',[32] these *artefacts* engage knowledge not comprehensible by logic alone. For example, in the 'X' narrative, the student writes not about a past experience but from what the body has become. The knowledge absorbed by *being* is stimulated. The intertwining of the city's textures, people, streets and particular encounters are translated through them with an intentional and imaginative necessity. Similarly, when encountering the Twin House *artefact*; its shape, size, texture and movement all incite the body towards the possible events, proportions and movement that may occur in relation to the imagined architecture. In this activity an imaginative form of common sense must prevail – a knowledge called forward beyond objective thought. Here, we may realize that all that we know (the remembered) and all that we could possibly know (the imagined) are present in the immediate perception of 'the things themselves' and not in an abstract or conceptual 'substitution' of them.[33]

Design origins: the artefact and depth

If we consider objective criteria alone we are met with detachment and the expanse between idea, context and sensual understanding is widened. Without the tangible creation, ideas are fleeting, vague and divorced from the particular *way* our creations are given to the world. When we hover too long above drawings we can never imagine the way the design would be perceived from the perspective of the inhabitant and if we create formal manipulations via computer application, we reduce the *depth* of imagination itself to a glowing surface and are unable to 'haunt' the space between us and things in the same way.[34] *Artefacts*, born in-depth, seduce our attention and proximate all relations because we are 'co-ordinated' through them.[35] When we imagine a story, position a piece of wood, encounter a provocative architectural creation, its tangible presence allows the body to digest and ponder, question and imagine – we search our memory and imagine a possible meaning.

In our world of efficient application our lives are many times themselves focused to such a degree on prescribed options that we reduce meaningful involvement and along with it the will (and ability) to interpret. The full contribution of an engagement between ourselves and the world is as Martin Heidegger suggests, stifled, 'concealed' and 'parted against' in our modern life.[36] The tangible *artefact* helps restore a give-and-take relationship with the world, inciting a merging of perceiver and perceived in a meaningful and ponderous unity. Here the corresponding conversation is our narrative. Its possibility to inform has, like drama itself, 'origin in the ritual unity of event and place', an opening of *chora* – the primordial space of communication.[37] This is predicated on an empathic opening of ourselves to the world, to human relationships and opinion, the inter-subjective commonalities dependent upon an 'ethical position, a responsible self that questions and acts'.[38] The wager of poesy is the *way* a situation helps to reveal or conceal this engagement.

As Dalibor Vesely suggests, 'each situation, no matter how specifically or abstractly defined, is always practical . . . and that practical nature is revealed not only in how people act or what they do in a particular setting, but also in the nature of the setting itself'.[39] With the oft-times incomprehensible 'scale' of architecture, reduced to codes, typology, plans or perspectival images, the *artefact* helps to create this setting, through which grows conversation and the narrative direction for design. Tested against the situation at hand, it *opens* to the immediate appeal of light and shadow, touch and smell, necessitating an inherently metaphorical and bodily knowledge not reducible to visual appearance. This is rather a *practical* interaction with circumstance, very different from designs *efficiently* applied to distant locales via instrumental application. Born from–experience–for–experience, the *artefact* is more like architecture itself simply because it is here, in-depth, at the origin of our inquiry. Here, this creation cannot be divided from what *it is* or the way it is put together. Its material, weight and position forecast meaning that stretches beyond typical architectural models and representations – because of their absence.

Most importantly, we may recognize that the transformation between artefact and architecture is not a literal transcription but one that confronts the 'thick' moment of lived-space[40] – an immersion into the fundamental elaboration of knowledge itself dependent upon metaphorical interpretation, a corporeal reverberation that connects individuals, their culture, language, and situation, via the receptacle of consciousness. *Installed* in-depth, the narrative/ *artefact* evokes this lived-response, transcending encoded architectural representation. By involving the act of translation the *artefact*, like the *daidala*, helps restore the ritual conjuring to our modern world. Probing beyond an 'idea', these creations make the situation alive and relevant, evoking passionate participation and leading to a fuller comprehension of *depth* for architectural orientation.

Notes

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3 Ibid.
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 9 M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, New York: Routledge, 2002, p. 83.
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12 Ibid., p. 128.
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15 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, pp. 79–83.
16 A. Pérez-Gómez, *Architectural Representation and the Perspective Hinge*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000, p. 382.
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26 Pérez-Gómez, *Built Upon Love*, p. 212.
27 Pérez-Gómez, *The Myth of Daedalus*, p. 50.
28 Pavlock, 'Daedalus in the Labyrinth', p. 141.
29 M. Heidegger, 'The Origin of the Work of Art', in D. F. Krell (ed.) *Basic Writings*, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993, p. 176.
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31 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, pp. 35–6.
32 Ovid, *The Metamorphoses*, p. 148.
33 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. ix.
34 Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception*, p. 161.
35 Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 176.
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13

ARCHITECTURE FOR THE NATION'S MEMORY

History, art, and the halls of Norway's National Gallery

Mattias Ekman

From the personal to the national context, the built environment appears to be central to our memory. The National Gallery occupies a place in the hearts of many Norwegians (Figure 13.1). It is located in the centre of Oslo, close to other national institutions such as the university, the national theatre, the parliament, and the castle. The institution and its architecture date back to the nineteenth century, when Norway struggled to free itself from the union with Sweden, and sought European recognition as a cultured nation. In 2003 the gallery fused with other cultural institutions to form the National Museum of Art,

FIGURE 13.1   Front façade of the National Gallery in Oslo, designed by Heinrich Ernst and Adolf Schirmer. The mid section was finished in 1881, the southern wing (left) in 1907, and the northern wing (right) in 1924. Digital video still: Mattias Ekman.

Architecture and Design and the permanent exhibition of work from the collection was re-hung in 2005 by the new director.[1] In 2009 the Norwegian government made the decision to have designed and erected a new museum building to which the institution would move.[2] Since 2005 letters to the press in the major newspapers have called for keeping the collection in the gallery and leaving the permanent exhibition as it had been displayed until 2004. My curiosity was aroused by the suggestion that the collection benefits from being displayed in the existing building. Its nineteenth-century design, the cultural intelligentsia argues, lends the art a precious mnemonic function, that would be lost if the collection was to be relocated.

This chapter looks at arguments of the debate that refer to the memory-evoking qualities of the building. With the help of a number of concepts it attempts to disentangle the arguments and delineate the different ways in which the gallery administers and provides space for national and artistic history. With Aleida Assmann's term *antëische magie*, or *antaeic magic* – our expectation that a historical site, in addition to any site-independent information, provides us with an intensification of experience through sensory involvement[3] – and Walter Benjamin's *aura* – 'the associations which, at home in the *mémoire involontaire*, tend to cluster around the object of a perception' and the artwork's embedment in the fabric of tradition[4] – it is possible, on the one hand, to describe the building's capacity to facilitate spontaneous imagination and conjure up scenes of the past by combining learnt facts with perceptual input of space. On the other hand, with Pierre Nora's concept *lieu de mémoire*, or *site of memory*, and Aleida Assmann's *canon* and *archive*, it is possible to distinguish the building's capacity to support a formal organization and dissemination of history. Further, a differentiation between the institution's relevance for Norwegian national history (antaeic magic, site of memory) and Norwegian art history (aura, canon and archive) is suggested. With these distinctions I hope to suggest some reasons why it is so problematic to propose to re-hang the works of art, either in the existing halls or 'on walls, in front of which no one has ever stood'.[5]

The spaces we live in, or where historical events took place, make up constructs in memory with the help of which we organize and retrieve lived experience and learnt knowledge. Made use of as the main principle of the *art of memory*, invented by Theodectes in the fourth century BC,[6] it was sociologist Maurice Halbwachs who would theorize the natural phenomenon in the 1920s under the term *cadre spatial*, or *spatial framework*, in his theory of the *collective memory*.[7] He postulates that the faculty of memory, situated biologically in the brain of the individual, is conditioned by the social and cultural milieu. Thus, collective memory is not different from individual memory, but with the term he asserts the dependency of the individual memory on the social context to at all be able to reconstruct, communicate, and make sense of the past. Moreover, Halbwachs points out, the spatial frameworks are not singular memory images but accumulated schematic representations of space.[8] Families, communities, and nations attach themselves to places, which in turn provide the groups with stability and history, seemingly carrying memories for us.[9] With the help of the spatial framework we structure knowledge, historical events, and lived experiences in our mind. For the visitor to the National Gallery the building gives rise to a spatial representation in memory corresponding to the space, in association with which knowledge of art and national history is arranged. With the concepts by Assmann, Benjamin and Nora applied to the debate, the chapter elaborates on the use of museum architecture as a spatial framework for informal and formal remembering.

Imagining the past

In several texts literature scholar Aleida Assmann traces and defines the memory-like phenomenon of spontaneous imagination in historical environments.[10] She refers to Marcus Tullius Cicero who testified to the phenomenon when writing about a visit to the academy in Athens where Plato had been active:

> when we see the places where we are told that the notables of the past spent their time, it is far more moving than when we hear about their achievements or read their writings . . . Such is the evocative power that locations possess.[11]

Later, nineteenth-century anthropologist Jakob Johann Bachofen distinguishes between two ways to attain knowledge:

> the longer, slower, more arduous road of rational combination and the shorter path of the imagination, traversed with the force and swiftness of electricity. Aroused by direct contact with the ancient remains, the imagination grasps the truth at one stroke, without intermediary links. The knowledge acquired in this second way is infinitely more living and colorful than the products of the understanding.[12]

The perceptual and bodily interaction with architectural remains, combined with knowledge brought there, enabled Cicero and his friends, and Bachofen to conjure up scenes of the past. Assmann describes the one as the mediated and linguistic continuity of texts, and the other as the immediate and symbolic contiguity of images.[13]

Art historian Aby Warburg similarly distinguishes between the two ways to knowledge, suggesting that art transports a memory from one epoch to another and that engagement with works of art facilitated a 'visual revival of the memory matter'.[14] According to Assmann, Warburg proposed the term antaeic magic to describe the release of latent memories through direct contact.[15] It refers to the Greek myth in which Heracles wrestled the giant Antaeos, son of Poseidon and Mother Earth. As long as the giant would remain in physical contact with the Earth, his mother, he would gain new strength and be unbeatable. Heracles eventually defeated him by lifting him up in the air, separating him from his life-giving mother.

Transferred to the built environment, Assmann understands antaeic magic as how we ascribe historic sites the capacity to make the past tangible for us.[16] We seek in these places, she argues, an intensification of experience different from the historical information we would find in, for example, books or site-independent information centres. Trips to buildings, towns and landscapes of historical significance or curiosity, find their reward in the site-bound antaeic magic. Assmann suggests it is an:

> ancient inner willingness of pilgrims and educational tourists to strengthen historical knowledge through subjective experience. Sensory tangibility and affective coloration are supposed to deepen the purely cognitive understanding of a past event, in the sense of a personal engagement and appropriation.[17]

The bodily and synaesthetic encounter establishes a personal and physical attachment to general history in the contact zone of past and present.

In the case of the National Gallery, a similar intensification of experience can be discerned. PhD student in art history Øystein Sjåstad objects to the proposed move of the institution*:*

> The National Gallery, built for art, has an important history as a building and it also looks exceptionally good. It looks like a national gallery should look like. It has the necessary authority required of an important museum. It has the whispers of history! (And the whispers of history do not just appear by themselves.) A museum experience is about the building the art is displayed in.[18]

Sjåstad portrays the institution as closely linked to its architecture, its history, and its aesthetic qualities. The virtue of the building is summed up in the sensed whispers of history, its historical look enables the imagination to roam freely (Figure 13.2). The gallery does not necessarily call to mind a specific historical event or period, but reminds us of its traditional role as the main art institution in Norway's history.

The willingness to sense history in the halls brings to mind the readiness to let antaeic magic deepen cognitive understanding of the past through sensory intensification. Marit Voldsund, who lives in a different part of Norway, explains that the gallery is her loved heritage, 'it gives me revitalization, fresh nourishment to my cultural roots every time I visit it',[19] and Kjell Arild Pollestad, a Father in the Catholic Church, disputes against the professional environments of the cultural bureaucracy, claiming its opinion to be that:

> [i]t should put an end to having people visiting the National Gallery and be lulled into glorious days of old . . . Here, in our small context, where so little connects us to olden

FIGURE 13.2   Langaard Hall with the art donated by Christian Langaard in 1922 is a reminder of the history of the institution and the genesis of its collection. Photo: Mattias Ekman, 2009.

generations and makes the whispers of history audible, the "professionals" want to take from us something of the finest we have.[20]

The pure physicality of the site is not enough to explain the time-machine-like function of the gallery. By moving through the building we embody the arrangement of the halls: through the senses we register the architectural motifs, ornamentation, materiality, and proportions, which are indicative of age and historical period. The embodiment of space is different from and complementary to the intellectual understanding of the institution. Even if we need the learnt knowledge to strengthen the site's ability to mentally transport us to another time, the perceptual-motor acquisition of environmental information seems beneficial for the historical imagination, the antaeic magic. In their amalgamation, the different information of the place seems to trigger the imagination to stage in mind scenes of history, learnt in school or from books, against the architectural backdrop. Here the late nineteenth-century bourgeoisie entertained themselves, here Edvard Munch hung his art, or here king Haakon VII opened the great Munch exhibition, shortly after the Nazi occupation.

The link between the institution's history and its materiality supports what Aleida Assmann emphasizes: the imaginative antaeic magic is anchored in the authenticity of the historical site.[21] And if, as theologian and pictorial artist Åshild Brenne maintains, the 'venerable, old building is of great help for establishing relations backwards [in time]',[22] it would imply that the art institution could lose potency if it were to be relocated, and suffer a fate similar to that of the giant Antaeos, who lost his strength when lifted up from the ground. If that would be the case, then the gallery indeed possesses extraordinary powers as an evocative structure for the imagination.

Extending the artwork in space

Aleida Assmann suggests that sites of memory also are defined by their aura.[23] In her reference to Walter Benjamin's definition of aura as 'the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be',[24] she points to his emphasis on the strange and unapproachable character of auratic spaces. These make the unreachable and alienated past appear to the senses, but stress the gap between here and now, and here and then. The 'whispers of history' may describe this felt combination of proximity and distance, using a slightly different figure of speech than the 'peculiar gossamer of space and time' that Benjamin used in his definition of the aura.[25]

Supplemental to Assmann's identification of the aura with the historical site, I suggest regarding the aura as a quality of the art which impacts on the surrounding space. In his essay 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction' Benjamin asserts that the aura of the artwork is lost with its reproduction:

> The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced. Since the historical testimony rests on the authenticity, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction when substantive duration ceases to matter. And what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object . . . the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition.[26]

The provenance of the art object makes up its aura. The institution lends it authority and historical testimony since it has chosen to collect and exhibit it over time. But in the context of the National Gallery it is the relocation of the artworks, not the reproduction, that threatens to detach the art from tradition. Moving the art would remove some of its authority. Tradition here, it can be postulated, is the inherited amalgamation of art and space over time.

In an essay on Benjamin's aura, philosopher Samuel Weber emphasizes the uniqueness of the artwork in spatial terms, in its setting, by referring to Benjamin's comment that 'the characteristic feature of genuine aura is ornament, an ornamental halo [*Umzirkung*], in which the object or being is enclosed as in a case'.[27] In the debate it is suggested that something like an aura can extend from the artwork to include the spatial envelope of the halls. Artist Jeff Wall declares:

> The National Gallery in Oslo is a place where I experienced the presentation of a significant moment in the evolution of modern art. The presentation is a combination of the pictures in the collection, the way they are presented, and the nature of the building . . . We can revisit that moment any time we enter the National Gallery.[28]

We expect the original artwork to hang on the wall, but also to find it in its original spatial embedding. Benjamin proposes that nineteenth-century architecture is more likely to enter into a relation with its contents than architecture of other centuries. The nineteenth century, he says,

> encased [the person] with all his appurtenances so deeply in the dwelling's interior that one might be reminded of the inside of a compass case, where the instrument with all its accessories lies embedded in deep, usually violet folds of velvet. What didn't the nineteenth century invent some sort of casing for![29]

The nineteenth century popularized a museum typology of casings in which art lies embedded in architecture of classical motifs. To many, the National Gallery is the original case, tailor-made for that very collection of art. If this is not correct when it comes to details – many works of art were in fact produced or acquired after the building was completed – at least it appears so. It has, with time, evolved into becoming its case. Artist and art historian Paul Grøtvedt claims that '[o]ur art museums are established so that the users could meet the old art in a context with historical character' and emphasized how the museum should make visible the interplay of the artwork and the historical context: 'If the time dimension, that is the context, is removed, you will get a reduced and incorrect impression of the artwork.'[30] Voldsund suggests that 'the art, here, and the environments are one, perfect for each other, and as such indivisible',[31] and professor in art history, Anne Wichstrøm, argues that the 'National Gallery is a perfect place for displaying older Norwegian art, and the art needs the historical frame of the old museum building'.[32]

The quality is the property not of the art or the architecture isolated, but of the combination of both. It has something imaginative to it and appears to intensify experience in a similar way that the antaeic magic does. We learn to expect certain architecture to strengthen certain art experience: the nineteenth-century architecture that of nineteenth-century art. Brenne asserts that '[b]y removing the frame [of the National Gallery] the connection between old

and new is broken . . . we now knock the National Gallery off its feet and openly proclaim our missing connection with the past'.[33] The gallery has become the aura of the art object, 'the associations which, at home in the *mémoire involontaire*, tend to cluster around the object of a perception'.[34]

If, in the mind of the visitor, antaeic magic is the property of place, counting the art as the historical purpose of the halls and investing the artworks with historical authenticity, the aura is the property of the art, a historical authenticity extending into its architectural locale. Both are catalysts for imagining the past and imply the loss of imaginative insight and authority, if the link between art and architecture is broken.

Structuring the national past

If the antaeic magic and the aura have an informal and imprecise character, the sentiments concerned with the National Gallery in its official role stress how the building forms, and makes formal, the experience of national and artistic history. Space becomes an organizing principle, an educatory mnemonic: 'The exhibition as a whole gives us the opportunity to learn our own art history, read our own cultural history, gain insight into our political history', Wichstrøm says.[35] The building, art historian Morten Stige explains to us, 'tells the story of how a young and poor nation invested in art and culture to build up self-esteem and give new generations the necessary education to build the country'.[36]

At the beginning of the nineteenth century Norway was freed from centuries of Danish rule, only to find itself forced into a union with Sweden. The state intended to raise its self-esteem and recognition as a cultured European nation. A national art collection was founded in 1837 with the aim to promote artistic activity in the country by providing new generations of artists with exemplary art.[37] After decades moving between temporary premises, in 1882 the National Gallery moved into the building that had been taken into service the year before by the Sculpture Museum, and the two institutions fused. In 1905 Norway peacefully seceded from Sweden, and new wings were added to the gallery in 1907 and 1924. In the 1930s an inner courtyard was built over to give room for the Edvard Munch paintings (Figure 13.3).[38] In Europe private art collections had often been used as foundations for the public collections. The Norwegian National Gallery had to start from scratch, and built its collection through state-funded buys and private donations.[39] The collection today includes a large number of Edvard Munch artworks, some of which are considered his most important; Norwegian and French nineteenth-century art; and Norwegian art from the first half of the twentieth century. Less prominent parts include medieval sculpture, plaster casts of antique sculpture, and etchings.

The historical process of acquiring cultural self-esteem seems to have perpetuated as one of the central ideas in the public understanding of the gallery. Journalist Tone Mørkved talks of it as administrator of 'Norwegian heritage, the nation's shared memory',[40] and Wichstrøm suggests making the building into a permanent exhibition of the nation-building period.[41] Journalist Per Anders Madsen depicts it as one of the institutions

> in which the young nation, on its way towards full political independence, mirrored itself and its history, and told the world who it was. Can the move [of the art collection] be made without putting the great narrative of the nineteenth-century nation-building to silence?[42]

FIGURE 13.3   A group of tourists in front of Edvard Munch's *Madonna*. The Munch Hall was opened in 1937, replacing a courtyard in the southern wing. Photo: Mattias Ekman, 2009.

Architect Peter Butenschøn considers the gallery as one of the most important symbolic buildings of the nation, 'built more than a hundred years ago to ground cultural autonomy and pride, as well as international belonging. These are buildings that shape some of the nation's most important narratives'.[43] A similar rhetoric had been used in the proposition to the parliament in 1836, that aimed at the establishment of the national art collection and the foundation for the National Gallery:

> Science and the arts foster the development of the human spirit, and are the sources for the true enjoyment of the spirit, to all convenience of life. At all times, they have been highly esteemed by the cultivated nations, and the level of ardour that the nation has shown for their prosperity, has always been a mark of its culture – on which the true respect from other Nations depend.[44]

French historian Pierre Nora has investigated national fellowships through what he calls *lieu de mémoire* – a 'significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community'.[45] These sites of memory appear in the latter half of the twentieth century, in an era of commemoration that is marked by the shift from a memory culture to a history culture.[46] Having lost the real environments of memory in which communities remembered naturally, we must have institutions to remember for us in appointed sites, Nora asserts. Material or immaterial, these places crystallize values and secure the identity of the fellowship by attaching the present to the past. I suggest that the National Gallery is such a site of

memory for the Norwegian fellowship. It may explain the recurrence to the 1836 rhetoric in the debate: cultural autonomy and European belonging should not need to be questioned in today's internationally engaged Norway, but the story has become a founding legend and identity marker of the nation. The gallery provides the physical link to the national narrative, available for new generations of Norwegians to set foot upon and embody. The site is critical; metonymically it comes to stand for the cultural self-image. Archaeologist Sjur Harby makes this clear in his description of the gallery as one of the

> jewels in the Norwegian cultural heritage . . . Certainly, these are paintings, but also notions and phenomena, which, on the walls of the National Gallery, have become inseparably connected to our self-understanding as people and nation. This building is the brother of Prado and the cousin of Louvres. Its language is universal and its ancestry belongs to the noblest in Europe.[47]

A feeling of Norway's lack of refinement in comparison with major European nations has also manifested itself in the debate. Stige claims that '[c]ultural capitals like London, Paris, and Berlin maintain their old institutions as a matter of course',[48] and Wichstrøm argues that:

> Ignorance of history is also apparent when we look at other nations with whom it is natural to compare ourselves. They don't abandon their old national galleries . . . Norway is in danger of becoming a country of indifference. That is not worthy of a cultural nation.[49]

Pilen, a pen name, writes that '[i]t hurts to see Norwegian inferiority complexes come into view in this way',[50] and architect Bengt Espen Knutsen suggests that '[u]nlike these nations [Great Britain, Germany, and Denmark] that have a solid cultural foundation . . . the culturally weak Norway is a pathetic upstart'.[51] Brenne concludes: 'Had we only been a secure cultural nation, such an absurd decision as to move the National Gallery would never have been made'.[52] The planned move of the art collection threatens a precarious self-esteem.

Organizing art history in space

So far in the chapter the art collection has been seen as one entity, sustaining a relation to a building seen as one environment. By using Aleida Assmann's differentiations of the canon and the archive in relation to the institution, I would like to point to how different parts of the collection form varying relations to the architecture.[53] While canonical artworks are explicitly associated with the exhibition halls, the lesser-known work forms only discreet relations to storage and conservation spaces.

The canon and the archive are distinctions of the *cultural memory*, a concept devised by Aleida and Jan Assmann in the 1980s. It could be understood as how societies transfer information to recipients in other times and places by the use of cultural texts. Using Konrad Ehlich's definition of text as a 'speech act, released from its primary and immediate speech situation and stored for a second speech situation', the Assmanns describe how texts of the cultural memory – the written and printed word, painting, photography, architecture etc. – substitute for temporal and spatial co-presence of a communicative relation.[54] The cultural memory has an intimate connection to the remembering mind: 'Things do not "have" a memory of their

own, but they may remind us, may trigger our memory, because they carry memories which we have invested into them'.[55]

Aleida Assmann understands cultural memory to be defined by the tension between its two modes of remembering, perspectively positioned in relation to each other.[56] In the foreground, by means of the canon, society's working memory keeps actualized a small fraction of the total memory, including, 'among other things, works of art, which are destined to be repeatedly reread, appreciated, staged, performed, and commented'.[57] In the background, the archive, society's reference memory, holds all bits and pieces currently unused or meaningless, 'de-contextualized and disconnected from their former frames which had authorized them or determined their meaning'.[58] Storages and archives hold this reservoir that could be used for future alterations of the canon.

Space and attention is limited in the curriculums of schools and universities, in the number of commemorative days in the calendar, or in the canons of art or architecture. Carefully selected and administered by the authorized institutions, such as universities, museums, libraries and archives, the canonized cultural memory serves to distinguish the cultural group from others, and to promote cultural fellowship. It legitimizes cultural and political hegemony.

The exhibition halls of the National Gallery have provided a place for the canon of Norwegian art history. The paintings have been placed in the halls similarly to how images were mentally assigned to spaces in the antique art of memory.[59] The museum provides the national community with a mnemonic tool to assist the spatial organization of the most important artworks. With themes such as 'Munch' or 'Norwegian landscape' the halls sort and label Norwegian art history in a pedagogical and chronological manner (Figure 13.4).[60] The

FIGURE 13.4   The hall of nineteenth-century Norwegian landscape painting, National Gallery, Oslo. Photo: Mattias Ekman, 2009.

National Gallery is licensed to make publicly available the canon of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century art. It should also preserve the reservoir of art currently not displayed, as well as maintain a library and archive of related material.

Authorized by the state-funded institution, and by the universities that gave them their degrees, scholars and professionals at the National Gallery administer and research the art and secondary sources such as sketches, photographs, books, notes, protocols, etc. Sigurd Willoch, director of the National Gallery from 1946 to 1973, states in a report:

> In reality there are few research institutions that have such a close and direct relation to the material on the one hand, and with the general public on the other, as the museums, and where the step from the primary research to popularization is so short.[61]

The production of exhibitions, publications and lectures is a never-ending process that re-evaluates the canon of art, and suggests new meanings to be publicly embraced or rejected. The revision of the canon is the constant move from the reference memory to the working memory and back again, often through careful alterations, little by little. But, at times, major changes are made to the selection of the displayed art. In 2005 the new director Sune Nordgren, a Swede, orchestrated a substantial change to the permanent exhibition in the National Gallery. It caused an outcry and led to his resignation. Artist Karl Erik Harr asked Nordgren how it feels, 'when we now approach the centenary for our liberation from the Swedes, . . . to be able to juggle with history, past, future, and elevate yourself above it all in your almightiness?'[62] The changes were understood as discrediting to many Norwegians. Nordgren had simply let artworks from the stores take the place of artworks in the permanent exhibition, remodelling the bonds between the canonized art and the exhibition halls. The order and categories of display changed, but the complete collection was still in the possession of the National Gallery. The mere spatial reorganization of the art within the institution proved to be an inflammatory action, and the public rejected the suggested modification to the canon.

Conservator Kari Greve and head of collections' management Françoise Hanssen-Bauer at the National Museum are among the few professionals who have raised their voices in favour of a new museum.[63] Sanitary problems, lack of space and daylight, and variations in humidity in the conservation studios and storage areas are put forward as arguments against keeping and presenting the art heritage in the gallery. For the protectors of the National Gallery, these arguments are insignificant. It may sound obvious, but the public debate on the gallery has not been concerned with the spaces of conservation, storage and archive. For the institution, however, the secondary spaces are important; they house the reservoir of art and the upkeep of it. These are the spaces for the reference memory, the odd bits and pieces of art history that are passive today but maybe praised tomorrow. However, it is the working memory, or the selection – not the collection – of art that distinguishes Norwegians. Only the public halls of the gallery can constitute the site that sustains the link to art history, and only in them can the artworks come to sustain a relation to Norwegian history.

Architecture for a nation's memory

In this chapter I have shown how a national art museum can form a spatial framework in the mind of the public to capacitate cultural remembering. On the one hand the imagination in the historical setting allows for personal access to the national past. On the other hand the

exhibition halls order pedagogically national and artistic history for the benefit of cultural identity. The spatial framework of the National Gallery – so the debate indicates – when seen in light of these concepts, does not only take on a practical role. Moreover, it sustains an emotional and identity-securing function through the combination of the immediate contiguity of present and past in the perceived and embodied environment, and the intellectual appropriation of historical and art historical knowledge through texts and other documents. Also, with this elaboration of Maurice Halbwachs' term spatial framework, the chapter has intended to contribute to the debate on the value of particular architecture for the presentation of certain art, and on how the relationship between architecture, art and memory can be justified and argued for in transparent ways.

Notes

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3 A. Assmann, *Der Lange Schatten der Vergangenheit. Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik*, Munich: Beck, 2006, p. 223. All translations from German and Norwegian in this text are by the author.
4 W. Benjamin, 'On some motifs in Baudelaire', in W. Benjamin and H. Arendt (eds) *Illuminations*, New York: Schocken Books, 1988, p. 186; W. Benjamin, 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction', in Benjamin and Arendt (eds), *Illuminations*, p. 223.
5 K. A. Pollestad, 'De autoritære fagmiljøene', *Morgenbladet*, 5–11 November 2010.
6 H. Blum, *Die Antike Mnemotechnik*, Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1969, pp. 86ff.
7 M. Halbwachs, *Les Cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, Paris: Librairie Felix Alcan, 1935 (1925); M. Halbwachs, *La Mémoire collective*, Paris: PUF, 1950.
8 Halbwachs, *Les Cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, p. 181. For an introduction to the spatial frameworks, see M. Ekman, 'Remembering home: displacement, return, and spatial frameworks of memory', in J. Muñoz-Basols and M. David (eds) *Defining and Re-Defining Diaspora: From Theory to Reality*, Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, forthcoming, 2011.
9 Halbwachs, *Les Cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, pp. 176–7.
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11 M. T. Cicero, *On Moral Ends*, ed. J. Annas, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 117–18.
12 J. J. Bachofen, *Myth, Religion and Mother Right: Selected Writings of J. J. Bachofen*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967, pp. 11f.
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14 A. Warburg, 'Kommunale pflichten und allgemeine geistespolitik', in D. Wuttke (ed) *Aby M. Warburg: Ausgewählte Schriften und Würdigungen*, Baden-Baden: Valentin Koerner, 1980, p. 305.
15 A. Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume: Formen und Wandlungen des Kulturellen Gedächtnisses*, 3rd edn., Munich: Beck, 2006, p. 174.
16 Assmann, *Der Lange Schatten der Vergangenheit*, p. 223.
17 Assmann, 'Das Gedächtnis der Orte', p. 203.
18 Ø. Sjåstad, 'Nasjonalgalleriet må vernes', *Dagsavisen*, 18 March 2009.
19 M. Voldsund, 'I Nasjonalgalleriet i ærbødighet', *Aftenposten Morgen*, 2010.
20 Pollestad, 'De autoritære fagmiljøene'.
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22 Å. Brenne, 'Historiske linjer', *Dagsavisen*, 24 December 2010.
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24 Benjamin, 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction', p. 222.
25 'Ein sonderbares gespinst aus raum und zeit', W. Benjamin, 'Das kunstwerk im zeitalter seiner technischen reproduzierbarkeit. Erste fassung', in R. Tiedemann and H. Schweppenhäuser (eds) *Gesammelte Schriften. Erster Band. Zweiter Teil*, I.2, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1990, p. 440.
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14

ARSENIC, WELLS AND HERRING CURING

Making new meanings in an old fish factory

Sheila Watson, Rachel Kirk and James Steward

During 2002–4, a fish factory in Great Yarmouth, Norfolk, the Tower Curing Works, was transformed into a new museum, *Time and Tide, Museum of Great Yarmouth Life*. We authors were all museum employees working virtually full-time on the project. Watson was Display Team Leader. Kirk, as Project Manager controlled budgets, timescales and the final museum product, liaising between the museum and the architect. Steward, as Project Curator, managed all the collections and headed up subsections of the displays. We worked with the owners of the building, the Great Yarmouth Preservation Trust, and the architect, along with designers and community groups, to accommodate the different needs of the collections, spaces and historic fabric, and local aspirations for a new museum. This in turn produced complementary or contrasting meanings that encourage thinking and sensing responses from visitors. In an ideal world all concerned would have developed an integrated approach that recognized the interconnected relationship of objects, spaces and the building. In practice the importance of this was only realized, at the outset, for parts of the building, where the sensory quality of the space was particularly dominant. The final result, the museum as a whole, was a product of compromise and serendipitous accident. The building was regarded as much as a problem to be solved as an opportunity, for it dictated the order of the display themes, the positioning of the collections and visitor movement around the site. As a consequence its complex challenges (for example, arsenic in the smoke houses, wells in the courtyard, different room sizes) resulted in series of negotiations and compromises that led to something that is both more and less than the original vision. Objects that were integral to the original purpose of the building attained a new significance by their survival, leading to questions about how and why we attach values to material culture within its original setting, and what this tells us about the process of the preservation of the past. At the same time old meanings were overlaid with new ones becoming something experiential, with a narrative that is more than the story of the building or the collections in their separate domains. Drawing on recent research[1] into the importance of the sensory mode of engagement with objects and spaces here we acknowledge that the architecture, and the spaces visitors inhabit, together create embodied sensations that may be as powerful as the visual impact of the displays.

This chapter locates the production of the new museum within an understanding that the past is not naturally implicit within spaces and objects but is performed by architects, conservators, museum professionals and the visiting public.[2] This performance, however, is rarely informed by abstract theory alone but is, rather, the result of a range of influences that include funding, time, expertise, personal preferences and community influence. Negotiations between conservators, architects, planners, museum staff and community representatives during the process of rescuing the building, salvaging materials within it, conserving certain structures and demolishing others, deciding on key themes for the museum and how they were to fit within the spaces, resulted in series of compromises whose results sometimes surprised the project team. While acknowledging the role of the museum visitor in the performance of the visiting ritual, we here explore the practice of creating new spaces and experiences, and how this in turn impacts on the messages that this type of heritage implicitly disseminates. At the same time, with the benefit of hindsight, we will interrogate some of the decisions we made and query a few of the absences in the narrative as well as some of the unexpected results of the production of new narrative stories in an old space.

Background: the Tower Curing Works

The Tower Curing Works was the only large-scale curing works complex to survive from the Victorian heyday of the Yarmouth herring fishery and was used to process this fish. It is located outside the medieval town opposite one of the surviving town wall towers, hence its name. Originally founded about 1850, the works were enlarged in 1880. It remained little changed in layout and use until it was closed in 1988 (see Plate 14.1).

Surprisingly, perhaps, the works continued in use for some 30 years after herring ceased to be landed in Yarmouth, using imported herring caught as far away as the coasts of Newfoundland. This fact, in itself, is a testimony to the efficiency of the operation and the success of the business which prospered almost to the end.[3]

Reduction in demand for its smoked herring forced the factory's closure in March 1988. Over the next few years the building suffered from arson attacks that gutted some of the smokehouses, and from general vandalism and theft (see Plate 14.2). At the same time a lack of maintenance combined with the harsh east-coast weather resulted in a building that was structurally unsafe. Threatened with demolition, the building was eventually acquired by the Great Yarmouth Preservation Trust with the expectation that it would be converted into a museum by the county museums service. With the support of a budget in excess of £4.5 million,[4] *Time and Tide Museum of Great Yarmouth Life* opened on the site in June 2004.

Changing values

By 1996 the Tower Curing Works was situated in an area of severe economic and social deprivation, on land that was worth little with no prospect of any future industrial use (Figure 14.1). This small complex of buildings was in the heart of a residential area with terraced housing sharing a party wall at one end of the site. The Heritage Partnership members (a group of local and national heritage agencies working together with people in this area to improve the historic built environment and local museums) were aware that the building had iconic significance for local people. In consultation sessions in the form of focus groups, led by Suzie Fisher in 1996 to establish and develop a heritage strategy in the town, people raised the future

of the site and indicated they wished it to be turned into a museum, despite the fact that the topics under consideration were the existing museums on the Quayside, and not potential new heritage sites in a residential area. In her report to the partners in 1996 Fisher wove the aspirations for this building through the various slides she presented to politicians and officers responsible for the area. Not having been briefed about it she inadvertently spelled the name incorrectly. Nevertheless the message was clear. She concluded: 'The tile [*sic*] curing works is a persistent symbol to local people of industry and employment. They are desperate to have it preserved.'[5] The herring fishing industry, once a key part of the town's economy, was intimately associated with the building and had become symbolic of the town's sense of self-esteem and pride.[6] The site thus assumed an importance beyond its original function as a curing factory. However, no one at that stage thought that such a project (the rescue and renovation of the building) was a realistic aim (except the local conservation officer whose vision and support throughout the project was invaluable). Suzie's final words summed up the views of the local people who aspired to more than the partners (which included the Borough Council) had offered to them and dared to dream of a new museum in the old Curing Works that would belong to them and represent a part of their history they wished to celebrate and commemorate: 'Some of your locals don't think you're up to it.'[7]

The site was bought by the Great Yarmouth Preservation Trust whose technical adviser, the Borough Conservation Officer, had the vision and foresight to include the Tower Curing Works in a long-term regeneration strategy for the area. 'With this dual role, he [could] both protect, enhance and save buildings at risk in the town.'[8] As a member of the Heritage Partnership in Great Yarmouth, the Borough sought to support the museum service in every way it could and, through his different but complementary responsibilities, the Borough Conservation Officer became a keen champion of the site's reuse as a museum. The Preservation Trust valued the material evidence of the site in the context of the industrialization of the working environment and prioritized the conservation of as much of the original as possible. For the architectural historian the Tower Curing Works was an excellent example of a small-scale Victorian factory complex. However, the building embodied a range of values that were related not only to its location, its original function and the history of the area but also to its relationship with the local community and what it represented.

Between 1996 and 2002 (with the exception of 1999) focus groups were held annually along with other consultation exercises to develop the new museum of Yarmouth within the derelict building, with community input not only into the main display themes, key stories and display methodologies but also into interpretation of the building.[9] The Maritime Museum on the seafront (much disliked by many focus groups as being unrepresentative of their lives) was closed and its collections, along with many from the social history, art and archaeology stores, were used to develop the story of the history of the town in the new museum.[10] The building and its association with the fishing industry was one of the main attractions to the groups but from the start they also wanted to ensure that the museum told the history of the town. Certain key themes and display preferences were established. The groups wanted a recreated Row or alleyway to walk down and a recreated Quayside of the 1950s. Other key themes they prioritized were the fishing industry (the most important theme), the development of the town from a sandbank and its medieval importance, shipwrecks, port and trade, the two world wars, post-war seaside holidays and the 1952 floods. Discussions with focus groups indicated that they wanted the building to retain as much of its original character and materiality as possible. However, the very act of turning the spaces inside the building into a museum would

require the transformation of empty, dirty industrial spaces into clean museum galleries. The challenge for the project was thus to create a new museum within a historic building in a way in which neither the final function (the museum) nor the original structure and purpose (the curing works) overwhelmed the other. At the same time what was left of the building would determine some of the final layout of the museum and the roles allocated to different areas.

The Tower Curing Works' shape and various structures created very specific challenges for those wishing to turn it into a publicly accessible and welcoming museum. A relatively narrow entrance led to a large, irregularly shaped trapezoid-like courtyard, enclosed by smoke houses, and stores, steeps (big tanks sunk into the ground for holding the fish), a cooper's shop with a forge (for making iron hoops for the barrels), and packing spaces, along with a manager's house on the west side by the entrance. The smoke houses extended above the first floor in the north side and along part of the south side, and the roofs of the buildings around the courtyard, were irregular in size and height, indicative of an industrial site that had been extended and reused over time. On the first floor the floors themselves were on different levels with steps leading up and down to different sections of the building. Arson attacks on the smoke houses on part of the north side and on the south side had left the building open to the sky. In other areas damage to the roofs had left the steeps full of rain water. The Norfolk red brick was very weathered in places. The structure of the areas not fire damaged was reasonably sound but some areas were inaccessible for health and safety reasons. Those carrying out risk assessments and surveys had, in some cases, to guess at the state of the building as they could not access key areas. A conservation plan was made to assess the relative importance of the structure and contents that had survived the years of neglect.

On the ground floor the most damaged areas were on the south side where little remained of the original building and it was here that most reshaping of the building could be done to

FIGURE 14.1   Site before restoration, Tower Curing Works, Great Yarmouth. © Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service.

accommodate the needs of the museum. This area incorporated an entrance and shop, along with toilets and cloakroom and, the most challenging of all the interpretive devices, the reconstruction of a long alley or Row from Edwardian times. Only here would the destruction of the fire damaged interior of the building permit the creation of a two-storey void into which the Row could be placed. This is what visitors would see first. The other ground floor areas into which displays were inserted were across the open yard and in a space next to the smoking houses. Here the fishing displays recreated the Quayside in the 1950s and told the story of the fishing industry and the curing process, with visitors moving in and out of the curing houses as they moved through the fishing spaces. This area was chosen for this story because of the location of the curing houses and the need to have a large space into which the 1950s' Quayside and other displays with large objects could be inserted. On leaving the fishing industry area the visitor then goes to the first floor and here the story of the town begins with the history of its rise from a sandbank followed by thematic topics – wreck and rescue, seaside holiday, port and trade, industry, and twentieth century (Figure 14.2).

FIGURE 14.2   One of the finished galleries, Tower Curing Works, Great Yarmouth. © Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service.

The smoke houses (in which fish curing took place) were one of the least problematic areas of the building to incorporate into the museum design. They were so large and the decision to conserve those that remained relatively intact and include them as part of the history of the fishing industry was a given within the project plans. By leaving the spaces as far as possible as they had been found, with minimal interpretation, it was hoped that the public would not feel too disappointed by the lack of real curing. However, since the museum's opening the smoke houses themselves have been one of the most popular areas of the museum. In an evaluation carried out in August 2004 and June 2005 the smoke houses were the second most popular displays after the recreated Row.[11] They are dark, smell strongly of fish, and stretch into the distance above people's heads, about 10 metres from floor to ceiling. Why should this be?

Embodiment and experience

There has been a move recently within museum studies away from the 'dominance of language and discourse and the later pre-eminence of vision and ocularity, in both method and critical analysis',[12] towards an interest in a more sensory mode of engagement with the material world. A historic building is of itself one of the most powerful agents in engendering sensory responses, particularly when it can be entered and lived through the body – through the smell and physical encounter with the space that is confined and structured by past uses in the site.

The architect and theorist Juhani Pallasmaa argues that 'Architecture articulates the experiences of being-in-the-world and strengthens our sense of reality and self; it does not make us inhabit worlds of mere fabrication and fantasy'.[13] When we consider this statement in relation to a historic site, we can agree that to be able to experience some reminders of past activities – touch the walls, walk on the floor and, in the case of *Time and Tide*, smell the fish – all these make the past real in a particular way. However, such experiences also require imagination and empathy. This is not fabrication or fantasy but it does require some ability to think beyond the here and now and imagine the past. In such spaces sight is important but it is also the smell, sound, sensation of walking into a dark, tall space. The immersive experience of the body moving through an unfamiliar space engages the visitor at one level with sensations unmediated by interpretive techniques such as text. The place is sensed rather than understood intellectually. According to Anderson these forms of 'affective atmospheres' are produced by our bodies but are not reducible to them. They are 'quasi autonomous . . . a kind of indeterminate affective "excess" through which intensive space-times can be created'.[14] However, our rational understanding of such experiences is mediated through our cultural backgrounds. In the smoke houses the visitor engages with a 'space-time' of their own making – a mixture of their intellectual understanding of the former uses of the spaces mediated by their own interests and backgrounds and museum interpretation, along with both a conscious and unconscious embodied reaction to the spaces themselves.

In most museums located within historic buildings there is an understandable desire on behalf of the museum designers to reconfigure the spaces to enable the creation of narratives in museum displays, through interpretation. Museum interpretation is often premised on the idea that meanings are not self-evident but require ordering and explanation[15] through a range of media which usually includes text and graphics, and that 'the life of human beings, as a historical life, is understood as a life reported on and narrated, not life as a physical existence'.[16] When this happens something is lost of the experience of the original space, the something that can be sensed rather than understood. Of course the experiences in the smoke houses in

Time and Tide cannot be authentic in the way that the sensation is the same as that experienced by those who originally worked in the Curing Works. It is something artificially engendered by the conservation of what remains of the original and experienced as a form of leisure not work.

There is no doubt that an experience within a historical space is a very powerful one though perhaps not well understood. It is often associated with memory.[17] However, in the case of the smoke houses and the materiality of the Tower Curing Works building, such as the bricks walls, stone flooring and permeating smell of fish, this memory is not a personal one for most visitors. Rather, we might suggest, the experience creates a new sensation that enables the visitor to imagine something that they feel connects them to the past in some way. This connection is embodied in their physical reactions to the spaces: they have to adjust their eyes to the dim light in some areas, they tread carefully over uneven original floors, and they touch the sides of the building and feel the dip in temperature as they move into an enclosed, unheated space, and smell the residue of decades of fish curing. It thus seems more 'real' to them than when they merely look at a case of objects.

Compromises with space and time

Consultation indicated that people preferred a chronological approach to the themes so they accessed them in a logical sequence, encountering the earliest time period gallery first and the latest last. Ideally the Rows and fishing sections would come later in the visit. However, early discussions with the architect and the Preservation Trust which owned the building established key parameters within which the display team worked and the spaces dictated to a great extent the positioning of the displays.

At an early stage we realized, therefore, that we had to work with the building to make the most of its idiosyncratic layouts and the solution was to create a sequence of spaces in which each theme was developed. The displays stood alone and all had very different styles to emphasize their independence from one another. As Psarra points out, narratives have to have a beginning and an end 'enacting a relation to space and time'.[18] Thus there were a series of individual narratives within one set of spaces. The overarching narrative – the history of Great Yarmouth – was offered in segments as parts of a whole. The building itself provided another set of narratives as the public was drawn to areas where the original building has been conserved and interpreted. For example, people moving through the Early Years gallery on the first floor have the opportunity to step out onto balconies which jut into the smoke houses. They can then look down to the floor and then up to the rafters, experiencing the view seen by those whose job it had once been to climb up the walls to secure the fish. Evaluation suggests that the public have no problems understanding and enjoying the different sections of the building and moving from one themed area to another.[19] Indeed, the unexpected juxtaposition of themes and building interpretation appears to add to their sense of discovery and enjoyment.

Authenticity and interpretation

Objects are often regarded as dispassionate and impartial representations of times past. They stand as 'memorials to the events of history'.[20] They have the aura of authenticity.[21] They are often iconic and represent different values.[22] Their selection and presentation in displays are means by which identities are constructed.[23] Work with focus groups from all sections of

society, preparing for the new museum, indicated that few objects on their own could lead narratives or stories, or were chosen as iconic. There were exceptions. One of them was the Tower Curing Works building itself. However, this site was not associated with the individuals who owned, managed or made money from it, nor specifically with the processes of curing that took place within it, but with the fishing industry generally in all its manifestations over a wider time period than that covered by the site itself (1850–1988). Research into other places with landmark buildings has suggested that most are chosen because they are associated with white, wealthy males and their architects[24] and some groups feel dispossessed by this selection. However, here a large building, one that could be interpreted as a site of capitalist oppression or of entrepreneurial success, has become associated with the workers and the industry which is now seen as emblematic of the town. Dicks, considering the ways in which some heritage sites are selected, suggests that there can be too much emphasis in academic discourse on the ways in which some forms of heritage represent elite and power structures in society.[25] She points out that heritage sites can provide positive affirmation of vernacular identities of localities. Her exploration of the development of the Rhondda Heritage Park in Wales and the way it has been interpreted by the local populace, with tensions between the authentic (local) and inauthentic (professional) interpretation of mining and the mine, illustrates how strongly felt particular attachments to places can be and how much the interpretation of these sites by outside professionals can be resented. In Great Yarmouth, where local people chose this building to represent their past, we can see how large-scale structures that become heritage emblems may develop a set of local meanings which ignore hegemonic readings and can provide specific communities with very different meanings for local people from the academic discourse identified by Dicks. Thus the narrative of the building – the story interpreted within it and the ways in which the physical site was envisioned by museum professionals and the architect, working from summaries of the focus group findings, represented not the strength and power of specific individuals, nor the imposition by the wealthy of a work pattern that relied on long hours and irregular employment, but the hard work ethic of the general populace over time as imagined by community memory – but not individuals.

While the community remembers it also forgets. Some memories are lost or suppressed in the process of turning a space that was once the site of low-paid labour into an iconic symbol of the community past and present. While individuals may have held dissonant memories of hard work and cruel taskmasters, for the majority the physical space of the building with its smoke houses, fish tanks and packing sheds, was symbolic of a positive lost history. Such communal public amnesia is understandable in a place that is representative of a town's lost pride. Resistance to the representation of the darker side of history in spaces that are communally owned and public is not uncommon.[26] However, such resistance poses an ethical dilemma for museum staff. The political and social role of the museum in the UK is constantly shifting according to intellectual ideals and government directives. History displays – the narrative of space and time within a historic site – are never neutral. Those who argue that certain events or activities should be presented in specific ways because that is 'what happened' are disingenuous. As Jenkins points out 'history is a contaminated discourse which cannot be purified of the tensions and ambiguities – never fully knowable – of situation . . . .'[27] At *Time and Tide* we took the decision to be guided by the general consensus of the community as expressed through the focus groups and to provide the story of their past. In doing this we recognize that we suppressed or ignored certain versions of the industry remembered by some who worked in it but, at the same time, the retention of some spaces such as the brine tanks (in

which men would work waist deep for hours in fish-filled cold water) enabled us to portray the realism the focus groups wanted, and to preserve something of the harshness of the working environment.

A few narratives within the building were the consequence of the accidental survival of certain objects in the Tower Curing Works. Some were so large and unwieldy that they remained *in situ* long after the building had been stripped of most of its fixtures and fittings. For example, the stapling machine on the first floor remained in relatively good condition and the conservation plan required its preservation *in situ*. It was here that, in the past, one worker stapled the light wooden boxes together into which were packed the herring for export. There was no suggestion that this particular machine was more important in the process of manufacturing the packaging of the herring than any others nor that the story of the packer (whose narrative is implicit in the survival of the machine) was any more important than that of other workers whose machines have not survived. The remnants of a conveyor belt along which packed boxes were conveyed to the ground floor also survived. Most other material relating to this part of the industrial process had been lost and thus these objects – the stapling machine and the conveyor belt – became imbued with archaeological significance according to current values that place a great deal of importance on objects being preserved wherever possible *in situ*, and the assumption that material culture provided 'a direct and tangible link to the past'.[28] Nevertheless this machine became, by virtue of its accidental survival in its last original location, a more significant object than perhaps its origin merited.

Conclusion

This chapter has reflected on some of the issues that the authors faced when working on the Tower Curing Works project and has attempted to understand how the processes, decisions and solutions were made and how these impacted upon the museum in its final form. The process of developing a new museum in an old building raises interesting and important questions about whose values should dictate the decision-making process and how community memories suppress dissonant voices. Revisiting the project several years later we find our perspectives on what we saw as important and what we understood to be problematic have changed. With hindsight we acknowledge that, as museum practitioners, we tended to see the building and its specific qualities as an obstacle to the process of museum creation rather than an integrated and enhancing element of the new spaces the museum inhabits. The areas that the public enjoy the most, such as the smoke houses, were those we thought, as museum professionals, the least satisfactorily interpreted or recreated, in that we were unable to reproduce the actual process of fish curing as our community groups wished, instead creating within those spaces some text, images, models and a video of fish curing taking place elsewhere. However, the spaces themselves with their smell and atmosphere of dark voids provide the public with a memorable embodied encounter with the physical remains of the past. This project thus illustrates how the building itself enhances the experience of the visit so that in the museum the site of interpretation itself becomes as important as the collection it contains.

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Notes

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15

ACCESSING ESTONIAN MEMORIES

Building narratives through game form

Candice Hiu-Lam Lau

Imagine a space of immersion into living memory – the telling of stories unaffected by histori-cal ideals, a realm of pure recollections. This is Maurice Halbwachs' notion of the 'collective memory', the organic knowledge of the past.[1] The *Estonian Exhibition Experience* is an interac-tive installation, a rich sensorium of audio and visual projections inside a dark cube, momen-tarily transporting you beyond the whitewashed walls of the museum.

This installation was first exhibited at the Powerhouse Museum of Science and Design in Sydney, Australia (2009), and then named *Memories Passed* when moved to the Kiek in de Kök Museum in Tallinn, Estonia (2010). It is an exploration of embodied interaction as a central part to immersion and the meaning-making process in the museum. Here, immer-sion is driven through play with a set of electronically tagged playing cards that is designed to alter the audio-visual environment. Through the interaction with the physical reality of the Estonian playing cards, which have traversed the route of human diaspora, the installation becomes a gateway into the memories of four Estonian diasporans. These cultural objects are 'not inert and mute but they tell stories and describe trajectories'.[2] This chapter describes the developmental process of this installation.

Background

The *Estonian Exhibition Experience* was originally inspired by 'Our New Home: Estonian Aus-tralian Stories' (2007) from the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney. The objects and stories contained in this exhibition were borrowed from the Estonian Archives in Sydney, and the members of the Estonian community in Thirlmere, NSW, Australia. Marta Joelaid was the first of the network of Estonians from the retirement village to recall the memories of her Estonia. She was nervous and exclaimed, 'I don't know what I can tell you . . . I can hardly see'.[3] Her eyes were watery. I didn't know if it was because of her failing sight, or the effect of her returning memories.

Remembering the war she had experienced was undoubtedly very difficult, but she man-aged to give a rendition of her life at the displaced persons' camp in Germany and the United Kingdom thereafter; the inevitable decisions that she had to make so that she wouldn't have

to suffer the fate of being sent to Siberia, like the rest of her family. 'I didn't want to leave, but I was very afraid of the communists.'[4] At times, she choked through her words, but then swallowed and hastily continued to relive her memories.

Over the next two weeks, I engaged in unique experiences with three other Estonian diasporans at the retirement village. Their memories were faltering but there were clear moments of reverie. Each had come away from Estonia during the Second World War between the ages of 9 and 25. The Soviets were fighting the Nazis, and the Estonians along with their Baltic counterparts were caught in the midst of the bloodshed. If not sent away to Siberia, or remaining as partisans, most Estonian men were yo-yoed between the Soviet and the Nazi army. At the end of the war, the Soviets won, and began 50 years of occupation.[5]

Throughout the research into the Estonian past, it became clear that notions of memory and history are particularly important for Estonians today. Amongst other dictatorial actions under the communist regime, the Soviets monopolized the recording of history. They imposed a 'single, state-produced version of the past'.[6] It contained a finite point-of-view: the Stalinist template of 'triumph-over-alien-forces narrative'. Alternative accounts were systematically obliterated by the 'rewriting and censorship of national history' and also the 'destruction of places of memory'.[7] There were no distinctions between analytical history and collective memory.[8] Maurice Halbwachs' notion of the 'collective memory' had no relevance.

Halbwachs' collective memory is based on a shared framework of remembering the past, such as the common symbols and beliefs that are upheld by the cohesion of the social group. For example, diasporan communities are notably bound by a shared geographic space, such as their country.[9] In this instance, the unfortunate reality for the four Estonian diasporans, much like many of their compatriots, was that the war had severed their ties to their homeland. This destroyed their bond to a spatial framework of living memory. However, what was observed amongst the Estonian diasporans was a development of an alternative framework, the use of objects to draw the past into the present. As Maie Barrow from the Estonian Archives exclaimed, 'every object [at the exhibition] had a long story that came with it. It wasn't there; but I knew it. It sort of resounded in me'.[10]

Background – the museum

Over the last 20 years, criticisms have risen regarding museological practice in the handling and representation of history and culture.[11] Practices accredited to the conventional methods of Franz Boas' anthropological groupings, or Pitt Rivers' evolutionary arrangements have been shown to be no longer effective in reaching the diverse topography of audiences and addressing the social responsibility of providing an accessible platform for learning.[12] These traditional museological approaches are now perceived to efface the 'organic' qualities of the object, the intangible and immaterial 'life force' that gives it meaning in the world. As such, it removes the veracity of the artefact, and obliterates the possible knowledge that can be drawn from it. Tony Bennett describes these artefacts as 'corpses in a mausoleum'.[13]

One of the ways to understand these museological approaches is through the sociological theory of Maurice Halbwachs.[14] Halbwachs surmised two main concepts regarding the representation of the past, the 'collective memory' and 'historical memory'. The collective frameworks of memory 'do not amount to so many names, dates, and formulas, but truly represent currents of thought and experience'.[15] They are 'held in living memory, and it is so remembered only as long as it serves present needs'.[16] The fluidity of this form of

recollection, as historian Jeffrey Olick describes, adheres to an 'organic relation'.[17] Meanwhile, historical memory differs as it covers a much larger expanse of time, often on a global historical scale. Deprived of details and a personal voice, the past is reduced to 'comparable terms, allowing their interrelation as variations on one of several themes'. The entirety of the past is demarcated and ordered into a temporal schema to give a 'summary vision of the past'.[18] Based on Halbwachs' theoretical framework, the amassing and display of objects in the ways of Franz Boas and Pitt Rivers, which are still presently practised, can be understood to be predominately arranged within the 'historical memory' framework. Reflectively, if a 'collective memory' framework were applied, the voice and perspective, the immaterial 'life force' could resonate beyond their community and their land, and into the abstracted space of the museum.

In the cases where there has been a remittance of the collective memory framework in museological practice, they pertained mainly to oral testimonies as documentary, using videos or audio technologies as part of the exhibition. However, these methods can be problematic from an experiential perspective. Videos require the audience to remain in one position for a period of time, thus altering their natural flow across the exhibition space.[19] The question to be asked therefore is whether the audience is stimulated, engaged or immersed enough to remain stationary at these displays?

According to museologist Susan Crane, museums are 'sites for interaction between personal and collective identities, between memory and history, between information and knowledge production'.[20] A museum is more than a place for stored artefacts on display. It is an environment of informal learning, where the mind is activated in thought and processing, galvanizing mere factual information into knowledge. This potential may not always be acknowledged by the individual visitor to the museum space, but it is the underlying thought in contemporary museological literature.[21] However, to effectively trigger this sort of mental activity is a challenge for the curator and it is often undertaken within spatial, financial and political limitations. Museological learning is not usually a direct transmission of information from teacher to student, but is more commonly described as a space where information is laid out across an open area to be explored by the visitor. For the visitor, it is about making sense of the information presented. For the curator, it is about mediating the transference of information in the most accessible way for the diverse audience, and engendering the process of meaning making.

The possibility of the museum as an informal learning setting has often been overlooked. However, contemporary curatorial and design practices could positively aid visitors' interpretation by exploring learner-centred approaches to assist in stimulating engagement, with models such as Lave and Wenger's situational learning approach of 'legitimate peripheral participation'.[22] This approach directs the observers to become fully functioning agents. Learning occurs within social environments where one gradually enters into physical interaction with the objects around them. Embodied interaction plays a critical role in the meaning-making process because it involves the creation, manipulation and sharing of meaning through engaged interaction with artefacts. This is most significant within the museum context, a place informed by its objects. This correlation can be understood through the philosophy of phenomenology, as developed by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who argues that only through bodily experience, our physical interaction with the world, can we derive meaning.[23] This suggests a model of 'see and understand' where perception precedes consciousness, with the two aspects inextricably interconnected. Hence, we engage in constant negotiations with the world in order to form relationships.

Effectively, the visitor's interpretation and the subsequent learning that could occur within the museum are essential when the museum is perceived as a space for informal learning. First, objects are not latent and mute, but are containers of stories and information about the groups to which those who possessed them belong, prior to its placement in the abstract world of the museum. Second, exhibitions that encourage embodied interaction with the objects displayed support and aid the visitor's interpretive experience and meaning making.

The development of the exhibition

The *Estonian Exhibition Experience* was an approach to Estonian collective memories through the senses. It was a platform which enabled the most 'affectual'[24] possibilities and drew audiences into a deep emotional involvement. The installation was developed through an incremental process of prototyping. 'Play testing', a method termed by Salen and Zimmerman where users are invited to 'play' with prototypes, informed the importance of user interaction.[25]

The replica set of Estonian playing cards was the one physical artefact in this exhibition (Figure 15.1). It was conceived as a physical interface where visitors must 'play' with these cards to enable the exhibition content to reveal itself. The original cards were first made during the first republic of Estonia between 1918 and 1940 to denote their prosperity and celebration for having broken away from the Russian regime after the collapse of Russia in the First World War.[26] Amongst the cards, the Ace of Spades was stamped with the name of an Estonian diasporan, Aldur A. Urm. This set of playing cards, a small piece of his country, travelled the route of the diaspora with him. It held a place in the years that followed as a trigger for his memories, and as a framework for his remembrance.

The playing cards inspired a game where visitors were invited to play and take control of the experience. This enabled the memory fragments of the four Estonian diasporans, Marta Joelaid,[27] Mall Juske,[28] Hektor Mesilane[29] and Georg Goeschel,[30] to live again through the interest and physical interaction of the visitors (Figure 15.2). First, an image of a specific playing card would be projected onto the centre of the table. The visitor then must find the cor-

FIGURE 15.1   Estonian playing cards. Photo: Candice Hiu-Lam Lau.
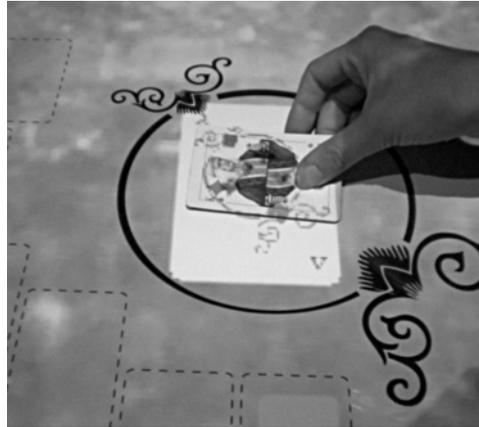
FIGURE 15.2 *Estonian Exhibition Experience* at the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, Australia. Photo: Candice Hiu-Lam Lau.

responding physical card and tag it at the centre, in order to enable the memories to appear in audio and visual projections. The past was brought to the present through the hands, the eyes and the ears of the visitors, relived through their embodied interaction, drawing them into an 'affectual' experience. Through this engagement, the stories of the diasporans would stimulate immersion and trigger the emotional involvement of the visitors.

The diasporans' stories contained connecting threads and themes of the sequence of events throughout the Second World War in Estonia, which offered a framework to which the exhibition content was developed. This included the Estonian landscape projection, which was a montage captured in the context of the four diasporans' stories. The footage is a journey through Marta's home in Tartu, to the sea where Georg did his military training, to the countryside in Hektor's childhood, and Tallinn, Mall's last image before her escape. Their stories became a storyboard that dictated the route of my own journey of visual content-gathering in Estonia in July 2009 from Tallinn, Tartu, Tostomaa, to Narva. They were panoramas and close-ups, shifting in and out of abstraction. At times, it was a flickering of colours, squinting at the flame at the Estonia Song Festival, looking towards the Baltic Sea, or pulsating with the rushing river that separated Russia from Estonia, creating a dynamic backdrop in the exhibition space.

Adding to the contemporary footage of the landscape, the archival photographs offered a visual, temporal and real context to the Estonian memories. At the Estonian Film Archives in Tallinn, thousands of photos marked historical moments during the Second World War. However, most photographs had a Soviet influence given its dictatorial monopoly over the recording of history in the past.[31] The photographs included moments when the Soviets entered Estonia in Russian tanks, or the 'herd' of people being shepherded onto the cattle trains, heading for Siberia, the bombardment in Tallinn, or the blowing up of the port. Images of the collective farms established by the Soviets resonated in Hektor's story: 'All the farmers had to give to the government. Hardly anything was left to ourselves. The farmers had to give rations, grain. We had to find ways either to cheat them or any other means of how to get through. So it wasn't easy.'[32]

The audio as part of the exhibition comprised the recordings of the four Estonians' testimonies. The stories and the archival photographs were then laid as latent fragments of

memory contained in each playing card. Each storyteller was represented in one of the four suits of the playing cards, whilst all stories were marked thematically from Ace to King, such that each number across the four suits suggested a similar theme.

What evolved from this process was the *Estonian Exhibition Experience*, an interactive installation. It comprised of a circular table in the centre of a darkened room (Figure 15.3). A video of the Estonian landscape, playing in a continuous loop, was projected onto the table with printed graphics remnant of the Estonian playing card design. A replica set of the Estonian playing cards embedded with 20mm RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) tags was laid along the edge of the table. Each card was programmed to activate a fragment of the audio and visual content using the Adobe Flash software. The RFID reader was placed beneath the centre of the table so that each card would need to be tagged to this position to trigger the embedded audio/visual content. When the RFID reader was activated by a card, the associated audio/video would be played and the archival image projected onto the tabletop would momentarily bring forth specific content of the exhibition (see Plate 15.1).

Visitors' interpretation

The first working prototype of the *Estonian Exhibition Experience* was exhibited in Beta Space at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney from 19 March to 12 April 2010 to observe the visitors' response to the concept and to what extent the exhibition had engaged and immersed visitors into the Estonian memories (Figure 15.4). The following is an interpretation of what was observed with one visitor's experience.

> Inside the darkened room of Beta Space is the circular table, the interactive interface. The visitor takes his time to read the descriptive text. He gazes back towards the table, perhaps imagining how this experience would unfold.
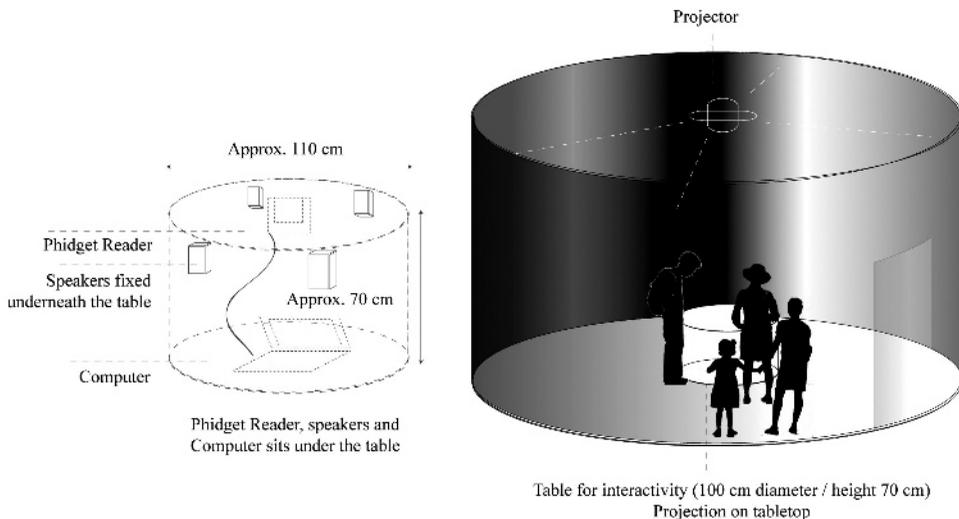
FIGURE 15.3 Wireframe diagram of exhibition installation, *Estonian Exhibition Experience*. Illustration: Candice Hiu–Lam Lau.

FIGURE 15.4 *Estonian Exhibition Experience* at the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, Australia. Photo: Candice Hiu–Lam Lau.

He examines the table interface, gradually comprehending the possible experience. He places the card on the central black ring. Something is triggered. Instantly, an accented voice begins to speak along with a black and white projected image, saturating the room with an Estonian memory. Noticing a digital black card had been animated towards one of the thirteen cardholders, he moves the card towards it.

Feeling slightly more confident, he continues in pursuit of the stories being told through the audio and visuals. He has now played several cards and he is aware that the back of the cards when placed on the cardholders forms an image. It seems a moment of realization is sparked.

This time, he begins with the ace, two, and then three. A face is gradually constructed like a puzzle. He quickens the flow of action by ordering the cards around the border in consecutive order while waiting for the previous segment of the story to finish. The flow of his action, and that of the storytelling becomes more fluid. He seems excited by the dynamism offered by the installation and touched by the emotional content released on the screen every time he triggers the reader with a new card.

About ten per cent of visitors had a similar emotional experience as the one reported above. For instance, a sort of competition was observed amongst young friends, where they would compete in placing the card on the central ring. They would not wait for the stories to be told, but were simply intrigued by instant audio/visual response. Meanwhile, children were eager to show their parents their new found skills after having understood the interaction. Other visitors, who were more engaged in the emotional and historical content of the installation, would help each other find cards to maintain a steady flow of the storytelling. Conversely, there were visitors who, when met with this unfamiliar sight, headed right back out.

Among some of the more intrigued visitors, a woman reported that she felt that the memo–ries of these Estonians were held in her hands. The responsibilities became hers to ensure that their stories were told, or that their memories could be brought to the present. For this visitor,

the stories became a large part of her experience. It was a mix of taking pride in revealing the speaker's face formed by the back of the cards and connecting the stories to the face. This process of embodied interaction via a direct experience with the installation clearly had an emotional impact on the woman.

Another visitor stated that she had gained new knowledge from the experience, such as understanding the role that the Germans played in Second World War Estonia, one that was far different from the light in which they have been painted in history books. The Germans, rather than mere enemies to the Estonians, were considered as the lesser evil compared to the Soviet army. The stories heard through the interaction with the installation influenced some visitors to wonder about these Estonian experiences so clearly distant from their own lives. At the same time, they attempted to find ways to sympathize with the Estonians. For one visitor, it shed light on her own parents' migration experiences. It added another association, another piece to the skeletal structure of what Mark Johnson calls the 'embodied schema',[33] enhancing her memories of her parents' stories.

Reflections

The aim of the *Estonian Exhibition Experience* was to utilize card games to encourage embodied interaction with the artefacts on display. This was designed first to sustain the visitor's engagement for long enough to enable the storytelling content to reveal itself and, second, to immerse visitors into the Estonian diasporans' stories and inspire learning about the Estonians' collective experiences.

Designing the interaction was the most difficult component of the process. Paper testing, prototyping, play testing, and participatory design workshops were used to address and solve issues, and at times foreground them. The efficacy of the playing cards as a physical interface established familiarity with the object and the probable interactions that could occur. Paper prototypes preceded the making of the digital version as they could be quickly composed and implemented for testing. However, as the installation was ultimately a mixed-media (analogue and digital) installation, the paper prototypes were only effective in the preliminary testing stage as there were clear contrasts to interacting with mixed-media prototypes. In the paper testing, users would readily pick up and begin to play with the cards. However, there were some misgivings about the mixed-media prototype once they realized that they were interacting with digital technology.

The original assumption that visitors would not need to be instructed or urged to interact was incorrect. An initial instructive phase was essential for the game experience to begin. Instructive texts were added to the graphics printed on the table. This was then further simplified by the use of diagrammatical prompts that corresponded to the visual language and made it more easily understood. Although the need to interact was made clear, it was still difficult to persuade some visitors to break away from the 'please do not touch' approach prevalent in most object-based exhibitions. Eventually, the word 'play' printed on the final design of the graphics was the trigger that propelled the bashful visitor into becoming a committed participant.

This exhibition is composed of many levels of engagement, from the tactile, audio and visual, to a deeper emotional, 'affectual' experience associated with the storytelling. From the responses reported above, the visitors who were interviewed after their experience did engage to a depth that inspired them to reflect on the Estonians' memories, as well as their own

personal past. The affectual response triggered by the interaction with the installation parallels the phenomenological model whereby bodily perception precedes intellectual understanding. The historical, emotional, tactile, visual and auditory content delivered within the *Estonian Exhibition Experience* was therefore effective in enriching the visitors' understanding of Estonian diaspora.

Conclusion

The *Estonian Exhibition Experience* was an interactive installation that enabled visitors to experience the memories of four Estonian diasporans through the physical interface of RFID-tagged playing cards. This experience and the exploration of what Halbwachs calls the 'collective memory' in the museum context were achieved by enabling the voices of the Estonians to resound. Their collective memories 'do not amount to so many names, dates, and formulas, but truly represent currents of thought and experience'.[34] Their remembrance hinged on whatever served their current purpose of recollection, and was not based on a historical framework.

The aim of this exhibition was to maintain the organic nature of the Estonian memories without the abstraction normally forged by the curator. However, throughout the development process, the stories were segmented and placed within a framework according to the sequence of events that occurred from the start of the war to the storytellers' eventual immigration to Australia. This was essentially the historical memory framework. Retrospectively, this sequencing was a way of mediating the representation of cultural/historical content. It did not conflict with the organic and personal nature of the stories, nor the visitors' experience. Maintaining the collective memory framework was more about enabling the collectives to represent their own artefacts, letting their voices resound. The exhibition was imbued with what Bennett calls the 'life force'[35] which is held within the memories of individuals who are unique, with a different past, face and voice.

The creative combination of the analogue and the digital in the exhibition was initially an exploration of technological possibilities in mediating the representation of content. It was about using visualization technology to add deeper levels of information to the initial static platform. In this case, it was about adding to the physical and primary layer of the playing cards, an actual material artefact, by embedding both audio and visual digital content in the display. Furthermore, this concept also created a cross-modal experience for the visitors. When combined, these two familiar elements were a surprise to the visitors, a different and innovative way to access this content. Conclusively, the creative tension between the analogue and the digital was not only an exploratory exercise with emerging technology in the delivering and representation of content, but it also contributed to the subsequent experience of the visitor.

This exhibition was designed to encourage the physical interaction of the visitors. The installation recognized the importance of tactility as a viable way of learning which was very much a part of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century museum experience but was gradually discarded during the nineteenth century when visual spectacle became predominant.[36] The tactile experience with the playing cards was a dominant feature in the *Estonian Exhibition Experience* which encouraged embodied interaction. Once the game and interaction was learnt, the action became familiar. The physical and engaging game experience was a gateway into a deeper secondary level of engagement, the stories of four Estonian diasporans. The stories offered another level of engagement that immersed the visitors into the war experiences of these Estonians. By instantiating physical interaction, it managed to 'engage the audience for

a period of time that is long enough to allow a piece to reveal its content'.[37] It momentarily detached the visitor from the immediate moment, and into the deeper reflections of the Estonians and their memories. As such, a possible 'affectual' experience occurred, thus triggering the meaning-making process.

This exhibition harnessed a user-centred approach in the design process. It aimed to address and perhaps resolve the issue of disengaged visitors with cultural/historical exhibitions of glass-cased objects in an artificial environment. Each visitor's 'play' with the installation was unique and related to their personal recollections, experience and state of mind such that a specialized relationship was formed. This was immersive because, as described by Messham-Muir, immersion occurs when one effectively 'diminish(es) the critical distance' between the physical space and the ethereal realm of where the stories are embedded.[38] Ultimately, the visitors to the *Estonian Exhibition Experience* could become more deeply immersed in the Estonian diasporans' collective memory.

Notes

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16

NARRATIVE LANDSCAPES

James Furse-Roberts

Interpretation can occur anywhere and, whether this be in a museum gallery, a cathedral, a cave or a clearing in a wood, many of the techniques and approaches used to deliver it in these different locations are similar. However, the settings themselves differ and this can offer opportunities and constraints to telling stories about and within them. This chapter concentrates on landscapes, both 'natural' and built. These can come in all shapes and sizes. They can be bigger or smaller than a typical museum gallery; they might be owned by the interpreting organization or they might be owned by a number of other people. Access to a site might be uncontrollable or prohibited and certainly there is no control over the temperature, humidity and light levels. One might also find that there are communities living within the landscape to be interpreted.

It is the aim of this chapter to explore how landscapes can hold narratives as well as how they can be designed to convey narratives. To do this I will make use of a model derived from an understanding of our evolution as a species, whereby we share innate responses to the landscape which can be supplemented by learnt, cultural responses. A similar model is also applicable to language where common, innate responses to sounds and a predilection to simple language structure exist which is supplemented by learnt, cultural association of words with specific objects or meanings.

Landscape and our influence on it

The landscape we see today is the result of a combination of millennia of geological processes and the influences of creatures living within it. While animals halting the succession of an area through grazing, or allowing the development of woodland through the burying of nuts, can have dramatic effects, it is humans who have developed the greatest ability to influence the landscape.

Evidence suggests that 2.5 million years ago our distant ancestors learnt to manufacture stone tools[1] and that 1.5 million years ago they began to manage fire for protection and cooking.[2] These were two important steps that led to the evolution of *Homo sapiens* 200,000 years ago, and, in particular, Mitochondrial Eve, the descendant of these hominids who was to

become the ancestral mother of every human alive today. However, these humans had not yet developed 'behavioural modernity' (i.e. had not developed finely made tools, figurative art and jewellery, nor did they perform burials). This occurred approximately 80,000 years ago, possibly triggered by a neurological mutation and a sudden shift in the selective pressures, perhaps caused by a dramatic change in the climate of sub-Saharan Africa.[3] By 60,000 years ago, Y-chromosomal Adam lived in Africa and had developed a culture that included language and music. His descendants would go on to leave Africa and populate the rest of the world. Over the next 50,000 years these humans lived as hunter-gatherers and, by the end of this period, had developed bows and canoes to assist with this; they had become Mesolithic Man. Then, around the same time as the beginning of the current inter-glacial period, this changed; humans started to adopt a different strategy, the nomadic hunter-gatherers became Neolithic farmers. Up until this point, although humans were using fire and stone tools to manipulate the landscape,[4] the impact on the landscape had been limited to small-scale alterations in the vegetation. However, this change, between 10,000 and 6,000 years ago (depending on location), had huge implications for the landscapes chosen for settlement.

In Britain, the Neolithic settlers brought with them new crops and animals. They cleared large areas of woodland using the wood for tools, buildings and firing pottery.[5] The land was grazed and cultivated. As agricultural techniques improved our ancestors had more time on their hands; time they used to take ownership of the land by manipulating it for purposes not relating to subsistence. Evidence of this is still visible today at locations such as the 5,000-year-old earthworks and standing stones at Avebury, England, or the more recent 3,000-year-old stylized image of the Uffington Horse carved into a hill in Berkshire, England, or the 2,500-year-old Nazca lines in Peru. This has continued until today when the development of technology allows us to make greater and more rapid changes to landscapes.

Landscape: its influence on us and how we relate to it

Evolution is the process by which species change genetically over time as a result of selection. Those individuals most well-adapted for survival in a particular environment successfully pass on a range of the characteristics that contributed to their success, thus improving the chances of survival of future generations and, over time, changing the structure and appearance of the species. In humans, response to pressures from our environment over the 200,000 years since the appearance of our species and the millennia that preceded it has resulted in our current form. It should be remembered that evolution has a bearing on everything about us, including the way we think, learn and interpret information we receive. It is also worth noting that, assuming a familial generation of 20 years, of the approximate 10,000 generations of *Homo sapiens* there have been, only ten could have lived in the current urban/industrial landscape and 390 before them in an agricultural landscape. Therefore, 96 per cent of the opportunities there have been for our form and make-up to be altered to suit our landscape have occurred in a time when we were nomadic hunter-gatherers.

The biological drive of all living creatures is to live long enough to reproduce and humans are not exempt from this. In 1943, Abraham Maslow devised his 'hierarchy of needs'[6] in which he ranked a number of physiological and psychological needs in the order required to attain self-actualization. He noted that the desire to have sex is a fundamental psychological driver and placed it at the base of his hierarchy of needs along with his other 'physiological needs': breathing, food, water, sleep, homeostasis and excretion. Closely related to these, and placed on

the tier above, are the 'safety needs', which include security of health, the body and property. Whether or not you agree with Maslow's ranking of these and the other needs, and some don't,[7] there is still validity in a model that asserts that we are driven to ensure that these base needs are fulfilled. These base needs are also satisfied through our environment. Our food is grown in it or gathered or hunted from it, water comes from it, threats to our safety come directly from it or from the creatures that reside within it, but shelter from these can also be found within it. We are fundamentally linked with the landscape and genetically programmed to respond to it. Wandersee and Schussler have been looking at the genetically programmed response humans have in relation to plants and vegetation. Their work revealed that humans have a tendency to show preference towards animals rather than plants; a phenomenon they have termed 'plant blindness'. In their 2001 paper, *Toward a Theory of Plant Blindness*,[8] they note that we are fully conscious of only a very small amount of the information our eyes receive and that, while flowering plants represent the majority of what we see, they form the minority of what we are aware of. Wandersee and Schussler provide a few visual principles that help explain this plant blindness.

1 Humans recognize (visually) what they already know. That is to say that, unless we have had reason to note the differences between types of grasses, we will lump them all together under the broad title 'grass'.
2 We are attracted to moving objects over static ones such as plants.
3 Humans tend to group objects that are spatially close together into bulk visual categories, thus individual plants may be de-emphasized, with the totality being labelled simply as plants (i.e. not seeing the trees for the wood).
4 Plants are perceived as non-threatening so are given a low priority. Where plants are threatening, e.g. poison ivy, people focus on looking for them.
5 The human brain looks for changes in colour, pattern and position over short periods of time and gives weighting to objects that respond in this way. As a result, plants receive low attention.

It has been proposed that our genetic programming also leads us to prefer locations within landscapes that satisfy our needs, i.e. those listed by Maslow. Appleton used responses to works of landscape art to develop a theory of 'prospects and refuges' that suggested that people favour scenes that give the impression of good views from a sheltered spot; a location that would be beneficial for survival as it would allow concealment from predators and prey while permitting the chance to observe them.[9] In actual landscapes, Doss and Taff have shown that proximity to certain types of wetlands, those with shrub vegetation or open water as opposed to swamps and forested wetlands, have a positive effect on house prices, thus suggesting that it is desirable to live close to water.[10] In developed countries, we no longer require this proximity to resource for food and water as they are piped to our houses or available from shops, but it could be suggested that our genetic programming means that we still identify these locations as being valuable and are willing to pay extra to live near them.

Our genetics are the reason for our similarities but they are also responsible for our differences, including differences that affect the way we relate to landscapes. Some of these are differences between the sexes, such as the studies which have shown that men and women relate spatially to the landscape in different ways, or red-green colour blindness, which is a trait exhibited by far more men than women. Other genetic differences are more evenly

spread across the sexes; mutation of the DRD4 gene affects approximately 5 per cent of the population. This gene describes how the chemical dopamine, which is in part responsible for regulating our feelings of motivation and pleasure, is processed in the body. People with the mutated gene tend to require greater stimulus to achieve the same levels of pleasure as the rest of the population, thus causing them to go to extremes when thrill-seeking. In these cases, an experience that might be thrilling to one person may be uninteresting to them.

We can see that the landscape has influenced our form and our basic reactions. However, one of the characteristics of modern *Homo sapiens* is cognitive ability or intelligence. This has allowed us to go beyond functional cognitive processes related to survival tasks and develop complex cultures. The landscape of a community becomes an integral component of this culture and can gain value because of this. Müller notes that within the discipline of anthropology, there has been increased discourse about the relationship between landscape and culture.[11] This intangible heritage, the cultural associations embedded within the landscape, has been recognized by UNESCO[12] within the World Heritage Convention.[13] As well as attributing meaning to specific locations, cultures categorize types of landscape and apply meanings to these. Smith states that: 'The meaning attached to "wilderness" has shifted over time . . . from a hideous, uncultivated, savage, desolate and bewildering place to be conquered (the "enemy"), to one of sublimity, a sacred place to revere (a "sanctuary").'[14]

From this section, we can see that our responses to the landscape can be influenced by our genetic make-up or come from learnt, cultural associations or, as is most likely, a combination of both. We have also seen that landscapes can hold meaning that exists either within individuals or within cultures; but how do these relate to narratives? Before looking at the relationship between narrative and landscape, let us address what is meant by narrative.

Narrative: its structure and origin

Most animals have some method of communicating with fellow members of their species. In the vast majority of cases, this communication is limited in its range and complexity and is therefore not considered to be a language. Some species, such as the European Honey Bee, have developed simple languages. It has long been known that the scout bees perform specific dances when they return to the hive from foraging[15] but, in 1947, Karl von Frisch showed that the pattern of the dance correlates with the position of the plants from which the scout bee has returned and is used to recruit forager bees to join them for the next trip.[16] Humans, on the other hand, have developed complex languages that include grammar, syntax, tenses, etc. It is thought that two changes were needed to allow the evolution of language in humans; first, a morphological change of the vocal tract and, second, changes to our brains to promote vocal imitative ability. Pinpointing the timing of these events, and thus the birth of language ability in our species, has proved difficult.[17] Whatever the timing of its development, the pertinent question is, while a physiological change was needed, was there also a genetic change that predisposes us towards creating and using language? Chomsky's work on this has resulted in what he refers to as Universal Grammar; he suggests that we are born with an innate basis for a simple language structure which is then supplemented during childhood with the additional cultural conventions of our language.[18] An argument can also be made for there being an innate association between certain sounds and meanings. For example, laughing and the cry of pain are universally understood regardless of culture. So, as humans, we have a predisposition towards language. But what is a narrative?

When reduced to its base elements, a narrative can be considered to comprise a linear sequence of concepts and/or emotions. If we take the most obvious forms of narrative, the book or the film, we can see that, before entering the cinema or opening the book, the audience may have no idea of the content. As they progress through the film or book, concepts, including characters, props, locations, etc. are introduced; relationships, associations and contradictions between these are formed and the emotional reaction of the viewer is controlled. The end result is a narrative that either takes the audience on a journey through a thesis or a range of emotions or both. It can therefore be seen that narratives are tools for communication and, as such, require the use of a language.

From this, we could summarize a narrative as a linear sequence of concepts or emotions but, as we all know from our own experiences, not all linear sequences of concepts are memorable or exciting. As a way of understanding what makes an engaging narrative, many attempts have been made to categorize stories, such as Frye's 'Anatomy of Criticism'[19] and Booker's 'The Seven Basic Plots',[20] and to find a universal formula. Focusing on ancient Greek plays and those of Shakespeare, Gustav Freytag showed that these dramatic works are comprised of five parts that contain three crises:[21]

1   Introduction – introduction of the setting and characters and the setting of the goal.
2   Rising Action – the protagonist encounters challenges while progressing towards the goal (1st crisis).
3   Climax – the point at which the fortune of the protagonist changes for the better, if it is a comedy, or the worse, if it is a tragedy (2nd crisis).
4   Falling Action – the action resulting from the change at the point of climax (3rd crisis).
5   Catastrophe (conclusion) – the conclusion of the story.

Freytag used a pyramid to illustrate this dramatic structure as shown in Figure 16.1. More recent analysis of films, such as that by Hill,[22] share the same characteristics of a rise to a climax with several crises but, rather than positioning the climax at the mid-point in the experience, it is placed much nearer the end, with the post-climactic conclusion sometimes only lasting a few minutes (Figure 16.2).
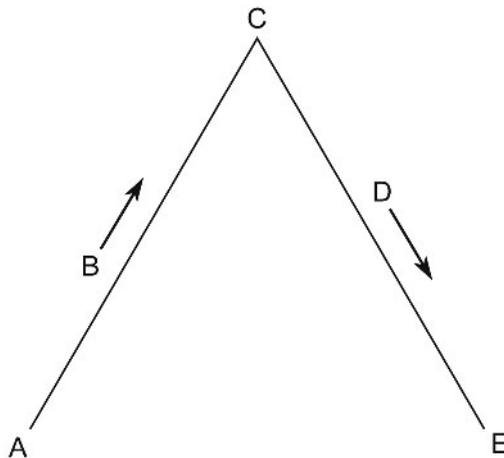
FIGURE 16.1   Freytag's analysis of Shakespearean and Greek dramas (after Freytag 1863).
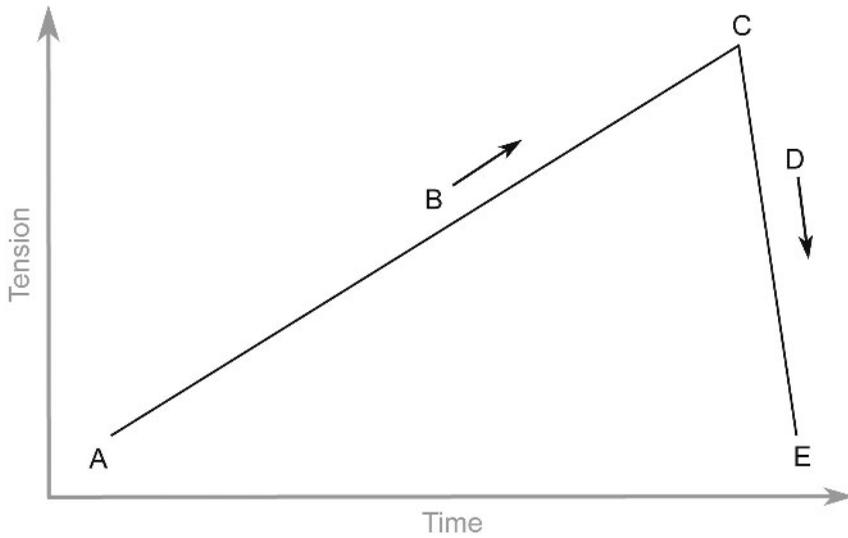
FIGURE 16.2   Hill's analysis of drama in modern film (after Hill 2010).

So far we have discussed narratives that are created by a sentient author with the purpose of communication to a reader. However, it is also possible for a narrative to be created in a situation where the author and the reader are the same. For example, to a geologist, the folds in a rock formation tell of the compression and upheaval of the land, while a bush tracker can read from small indentations in the soil the time, speed and direction that a certain animal moved through the landscape.

Landscape as narrative

From the above sections, we can see that our constant presence within the landscape and our predisposition towards communication and finding meaning has resulted in an intertwining of landscape and narrative. Conceptually, these combinations of landscape and narrative can be thought of as occurring in two ways; one being where a story is overlaid on to, or derived from, an existing landscape, the other is where a landscape is altered to represent a particular narrative. In reality, if the constructivist view is adopted, the narrative of each landscape will differ from person to person and be the result of each one's unique prior experiences.

Knowledge sharing is important within a community or, more specifically, ensuring that the same knowledge is shared amongst its members is important. Stories play an important role in this and, in recent years, this has been rediscovered in the business sector where there has been an increase in the number of consultants using storytelling as a way of addressing and changing cultures within companies.[23] Our attraction to stories may well have been established alongside the development of language and, therefore, would have been bound up with the need to understand and communicate information about our surroundings.

An example of this community sharing of knowledge through narrative is 'beating the bounds'. This is the tradition of a community walking the boundary of the land they own or manage on a given day each year and beating certain key locations with sticks or, in some

cases, by knocking a child or children against them. In England, this practice dates from the Anglo-Saxon period (1,500 years ago) and, at a time when many were illiterate and the accuracy of maps limited, provided a way of ensuring that the community shared a common knowledge of the extent of its property. Natural features, such as rivers or large trees, were often chosen for these markers but, over time, additions were made to the landscape, such as ditches or marker stones that reinforced the boundaries and became markers in their own right. The act of everyone walking the boundary together, combined with the ritual performed at each marker, creates a memorable experience, a shared narrative intrinsically linked to the landscape. Another example is the well-documented Dreamtime mythology of the Australian Aboriginal communities. With this, songs contain descriptions of key features in the landscape, providing a map to important natural resources.

The two examples above illustrate occurrences where narratives and landscape have been combined because of the importance of the locations within them. However, we have seen that landscapes can evoke responses in us and, therefore, it is plausible that a sequence of different landscape elements might create a basic narrative. Where a natural landscape forms an appealing narrative one would expect it to be favoured above other arrangements of landscape. I believe that analysing, in this light, one of the most popular walks in the Peak District of England helps to explain why it has gained popularity beyond other routes.

The walk in question is a seven-mile circular route starting from the village of Castleton, climbing up to Mam Tor and then following the ridge to Hollins Cross, Black Tor and then up to the top of Lose Hill before descending into the valley and back to Castleton (see Figure 16.3). But what is it that makes this such a popular walk? In all likelihood it is a
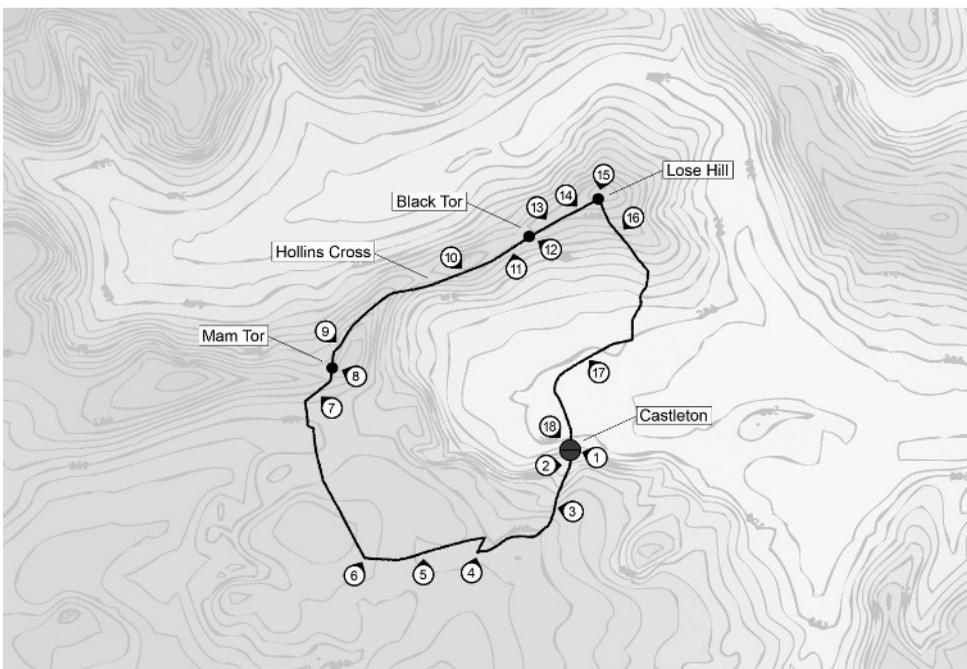
FIGURE 16.3   Route of Mam Tor seven-mile circular walk in the Peak District, England.

combination of factors including ease of access of the start point, the quality of views, the length and difficulty of the path and the quality of pubs/tea shops at the end. However, I believe that this route also embodies a good narrative which accounts for a great deal of its appeal. Table 16.1 and Figure 16.4 summarize the plot line of this narrative while Figure 16.5 illustrates key points along the walk.

Figure 16.4 shows the changes in elevation that are encountered along this route and the position of the various plot points given in the table below. It can be seen from comparison of these that periods of tension are associated with periods of exertion (uphill walking) with climaxes occurring at peaks and process of conclusion associated with descent to the start point. This elevation diagram closely resembles Freytag's plot diagram (see Figure 16.1) complete with two peaks of excitement before the climax of the 360-degree view from Lose Hill.

Changing topography, elevation, degree of wilderness, path type, degree of enclosure etc. all contribute to this walk having a strong base emotional narrative that makes it enjoyable for the walker to experience. Because these are base emotional responses they are accessible to all that undertake this journey. However, overlain on top of these, there are also cultural narratives associated with this space. For example, the point at which a path crosses over the ridge between Mam Tor and Black Tor is called Hollins Cross. Some of

TABLE 16.1 Key points (plot summary) of Mam Tor seven-mile circular walk in the Peak District, England.

|	Location	Pace	Description
1	Castleton	Start	The journey begins.
2		Movement	Transition from urban to nature, houses on either side are replaced by the dramatic limestone cliffs of a ravine, movement away from safety.
3		Movement	Course of travel obvious, feeling of confinement due to steep sided ravine.
4		Movement	Ravine narrows to a small gap before releasing walkers on to the flat open top of the first hill. Transition from nature into wilderness.
5		Movement	Openness with no clear path results in a sense of being lost.
6		Movement	Path turns 90 degrees bringing Mam Tor into sight. The previous feeling of being lost is now juxtaposed with a new sense of purpose.
7		Movement	Increased exertion to reach top of Mam Tor.
8	Mam Tor	Pause	Summit, previous effort rewarded with views.
9		Movement	Summits of the next hills laid out before us.
10		Movement	Black Tor looks steep close up.
11		Movement	Steep climb up to Black Tor.
12	Black Tor	Pause	Summit, rewarded with views.
13		Movement	Attention turns to final hill.
14		Movement	Slow climb up Lose Hill.
15	Lose Hill	Pause	Summit, rewarded with 360 degree views.
16		Movement	Start of final descent, path back to Castleton laid out in front of us. Begin moving from wilderness back into civilization as open moor gives way to enclosed fields.
17		Movement	Views of ridge just walked allows contemplation of the day, sense of achievement.
18	Castleton	Finish	Return to start, the circle is completed, return to civilization, sense of achievement.
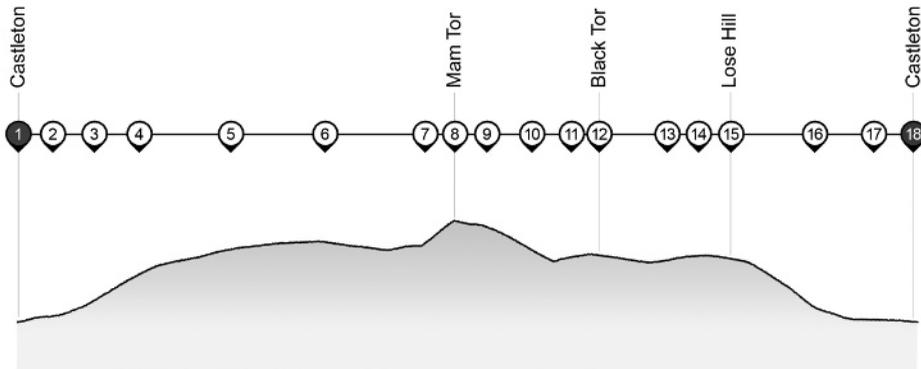
FIGURE 16.4 Sectional view of route of the Mam Tor walk, Peak District, England, showing changes in elevation encountered. Numbers refer to comments in Table 16.1.

the people meeting this route, perhaps those who have been brought up locally, will know that its name comes from a cross that once stood here and that the path is known as 'coffin road', as this was the route used to get from Edale, on one side, to the church in Hope, on the other.[24] There are also cultural narratives associated with the walk that have much smaller pools of knowledge. When I last walked the circular route described above it was with someone with whom I had also walked the coffin road. Therefore, when we reached Hollins Cross it held different associations for us than it did for another member of our group who hadn't walked either path before.

The elements that prompt the base emotional response described above are not designed. Their occurrences are the result of natural processes or landscape management practices not directly related with the creation of a pleasant walk. However, the sequence has been selected by humans and enhanced by the addition of paths. It is possible to take these elements and create them in landscapes where they didn't exist before. Some of the most obvious examples of this can be found in gardens.

The word 'garden' and its Latin equivalent, *hortus*, have their etymological origins in words referring to an enclosed space; thus suggesting that they are parts of the landscape that have been isolated and taken under human control. This is a labour-intensive process and in past times few people could afford the effort involved in doing this for non-agricultural reasons. As a reflection of the effort taken to create them, early gardens included symbolism and design that manipulated the emotions of the visitors.[25]

Some of the finest examples of gardens that use design to both elicit basic emotional responses and convey detailed narratives symbolically can be found in the English Landscape Garden movement. One of the richest examples is Stowe Landscape Gardens in Buckinghamshire, England, which was dramatically transformed between the end of the seventeenth century and midway through the eighteenth. At this time, the owner, Lord Cobham, found himself shunned politically and the garden he built can be thought of as consisting of two parts. The eastern garden contains a narrative relating to his political beliefs, while the western garden deals with personal relationships. Before we look at how the garden communicates these, let us first examine how the design makes use of manipulations of our base emotional reactions to form a narrative.
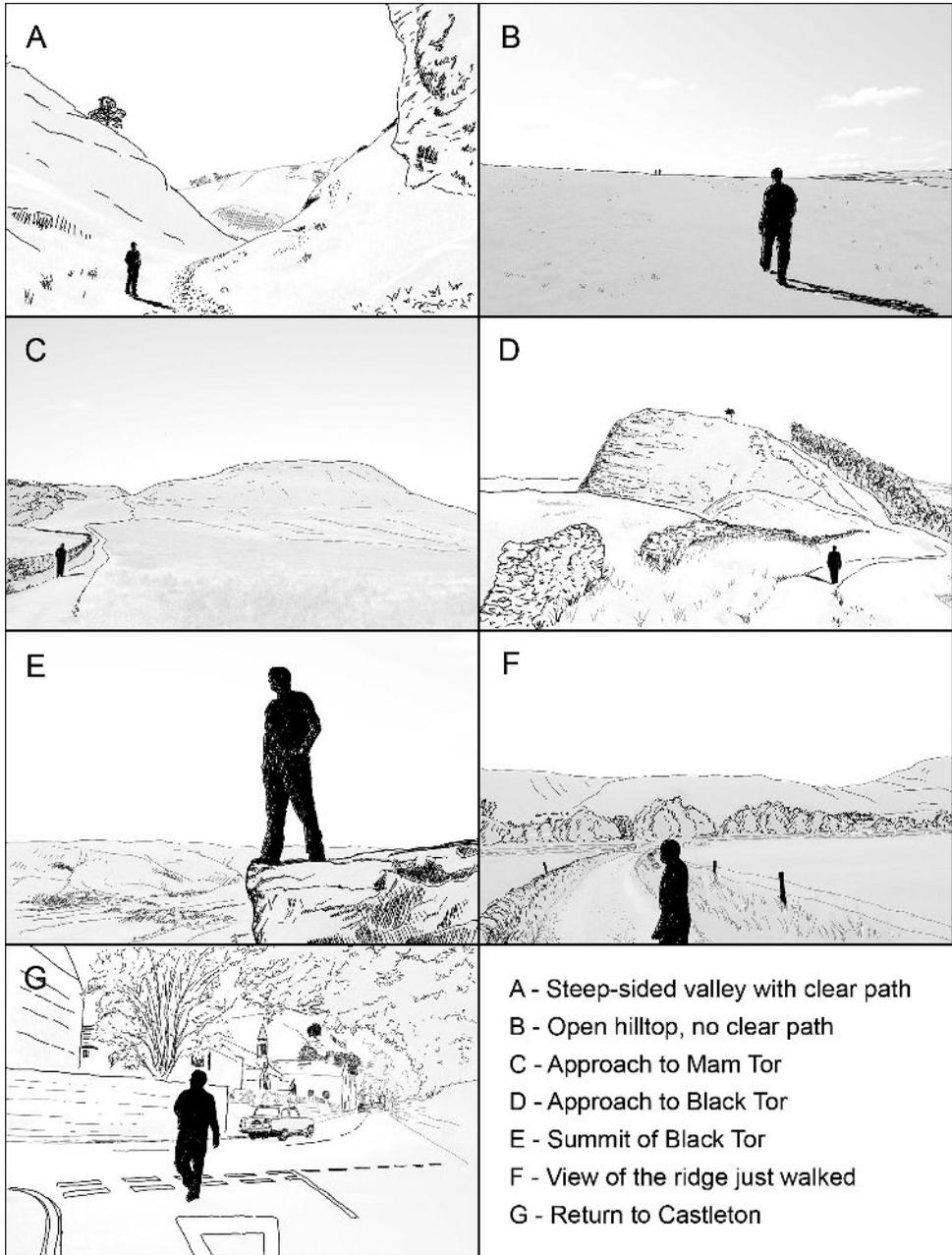
FIGURE 16.5   Illustrations of the view at seven points along the Mam Tor walk, Peak District, England.

The approach to the house consists of a straight, 2.3km tree-lined avenue through pasture. Rather than terminating in the mansion itself, there is no focal point at the end of the avenue. Instead, the mansion only becomes visible when, at the end of the avenue, the approach road

turns 80 degrees, bringing it into view, 200 metres away. This sequence uses the repetitive nature of the avenue to build tension and anticipation as the approach road is travelled, which is then dramatically released as the building is revealed. Incidentally, this closely matches Brendan Walker's description of how he designs 'thrill' in to theme-park rides.[26]

It is interesting to note that the use of avenues as landscape interventions has a long history. In England, a 4,400-year-old avenue of standing stones, the West Kennet Avenue, can still be seen today and, while we cannot be entirely sure of its significance to the people who originally constructed it, its form still promotes in us a desire to walk its length. Stowe is also not the first example of landscape being carefully designed to control the pace of the user. The seventeenth-century Japanese designers of *kaiyu-shiki* gardens (strolling gardens) were particularly careful about how they laid out the paths in these gardens, using them to control the pace of the visitor and where they looked.[27] Stepping stones slow down and direct attention to ones feet, allowing direction to be changed and a view to be revealed when the path resumes and attention can be returned to the garden (see Plate 16.1).

For those that can read it, the gardens at Stowe contain a variety of more detailed messaging. For example, in the eastern (political) section of the garden a valley was dug and a stream widened into a lake. This area was given the name the Elysian Fields, associating it with the Greek mythological resting place of heroes and the virtuous. Within this space two follies were built; one dedicated to the ancient virtues and, facing it, another dedicated to the 'British worthies', a collection of ancient and modern figures admired by the owner. For visitors with knowledge of Greek mythology and British history, this arrangement clearly demonstrates the regard the owner had for the values of the British worthies. When a member of the family was killed during a naval battle, a column (the Grenville Column), decorated with naval motifs and topped with a figure of Neptune holding a splinter of wood from his vessel, was erected in the Elysian Fields. It was positioned in such a way that it could be seen from the south steps of the main house and where it had views of the temples of British worthies, ancient virtues and a monument dedicated to Captain Cook. Yet again, the positioning of these elements within the landscape and the creation of a landscape that hides and reveals these means that, as one walks through the grounds, one is presented with a series of juxtapositions and associations that build to a narrative that reveals the feelings and opinions of the owner (see Plate 16.2).

The western garden, the garden that deals with personal relationships, uses different mythical and historical characters as embodiments of different types of love. By juxtaposing these, the visitor is prompted to consider the merits and demerits of each, a technique that was commonly used in the theatre of this time.[28] However, in a garden, unlike a play, the designer is limited in the degree to which he can prescribe the route taken by visitors and thus the order in which the content is encountered. Indeed, it is interesting to note that Stowe is thought to be the first garden for which a guidebook was written that recommends a route through it.

As current visitors to Stowe don't share the same culture as those from the past, many of the messages contained in the garden go unnoticed. However, the garden's design provides an emotional experience that is as valid now as it probably ever was. It can be seen that, as the messages that are to be communicated have become more complex, the language used to deliver them has also had to become more complex. While simple landscaping techniques are sufficient to convey an idea of the status of the owner in a way that may well be readable by someone from outside the culture of the creator, conveying the owner's attitudes towards politics or personal relationships requires a system that relies on previous knowledge of the culture. In the examples given above, the symbolic values of the garden's contents,

such as the ships and anchors on the Grenville Column depicting a naval background or the statues representing people, form this language. However, the most abstract form of symbolism is text itself and there are examples of where this has been used as an addition to the landscape.[29]

Conclusion

Whether we find ourselves in a museum gallery, a cathedral, a cave or a clearing in a wood, we will have a response to that environment. It is possible for us to alter what that response is by manipulating the environment. This chapter has shown that there is a long history of the landscape influencing us and us influencing it. Our evolution as a species and the fact that we depend on it for our survival means that we are inseparable from landscape and have incorporated it into our narratives.

We have seen that, either through intentional design or coincidence, it is possible for landscapes to deliver narratives in two ways. They can either (through variations in their form) evoke a series of innate reactions within us that suggest a narrative, or (through a more deliberate process of us imposing meaning onto elements within a landscape) they can hold a collection of symbols that together represent a narrative. The first of these is a result of our ancestors' genetic response to the landscape. As such, it is widely shared but produces only basic emotional responses that allow only simplistic narratives to be conveyed. In comparison, the second relies on a complex language of symbols that must be learnt through immersion in a culture. As a more complex language, it has the scope to tell more detailed narratives but the comprehension of these will be limited to the culture that created them.

This has two implications for designing spaces that convey a narrative. First, we should consider our basic emotional response to the space as well as symbolic meanings. By using the gross form to set an emotional mood, the impact of the symbolic messaging can be enhanced. Second, culture plays an important role in the creation and communication of narratives. The same tools used to manipulate a space in order to convey an emotion can also be used to create an environment that is conducive to the sharing and thus strengthening of narratives.

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26 Brendan Walker, an aeronautical engineer and theme-ride designer, has developed 'The Walker Thrill Factor', which claims that thrill isn't an emotional state but the rush felt from the sudden change from one level of arousal to a higher one. A thrilling experience usually follows a slow build-up where additional, sometimes unrelated, stimuli build arousal. B. Walker, *The Taxonomy of Thrill*, London: AERiAL Publishing, 2005.

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28 J. D. Tatter, 'Sexual Politics in the Western Garden at Stowe', unpublished paper presented at the *Landscapes and Politics Conference*, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, Scotland, 2001. Online. Available at: http://faculty.bsc.edu/jtatter/sexpol.html. Accessed 2 September 2011.

29 A well-known example of this in Britain is Little Sparta, the garden of artist and poet, Ian Hamilton Finlay. This two-hectare garden contains approximately 275 pieces of artwork, most of which contain text and poetry written for a specific location.

17

NARRATIVE ENVIRONMENTS AND THE PARADIGM OF EMBODIMENT

Jonathan Hale

> (I)t is not a question of whether the physical language of theatre is capable of achieving the same psychological resolutions as the language of words, whether it is able to express feelings and passions as well as words, but whether there are not attitudes in the realm of thought and intelligence that words are incapable of grasping and that gestures and everything partaking of a spatial language attain with more precision . . .[1]

Despite the apparent ubiquity of debates around 'The Body' in social and cultural studies since at least the early 1980s, it is only in the last few years that some consensus has begun to emerge on the deeper philosophical implications of what could now be called the paradigm of embodiment. As philosophers have continued to wrestle with the 'hard problem' of consciousness within the framework of Cartesian mind–body dualism; and as psychologists and cognitive scientists have begun to exploit new experimental techniques and technologies; and as computer scientists have struggled with the real-world limitations of combining artificial intelligence and robotics, a new appreciation has emerged, across a broad range of fields, of the fact that human beings are essentially embodied creatures.

In the 1970s and 80s the great surge of interest in the body within the field of cultural studies was for the most part both inspired and dominated by the work of Michel Foucault. His hugely influential series of writings on the history of political power and its gradual subjugation of the unruly 'masses', presents the body as a basically passive victim of repressive institutional practices. As individual subjects we are inevitably born into a world already fully formed – a game already under way, so to speak – and therefore have to play according to the rules established by others. For Foucault this meant that subjectivity is primarily an 'effect of discourse', a cultural construction that obliges us to fall into pre-established social roles. What is not so clear is how the body fights back, what opportunities and mechanisms exist for the subject to carve out a unique place within – and in spite of – the impersonal institutional structures set up to constrain it.

More recent scholarship in the sociology of the body has gone some way towards addressing this imbalance, reasserting the agency of the individual human subject on the basis of its physical embodiment. By drawing on some earlier sources in twentieth-century philosophy

and experimental psychology (as I will also do later in this chapter) social theorists such as Chris Shilling,[2] Nick Crossley,[3] and Ian Burkitt[4] have attempted to develop a more subtle and constructive understanding of subjectivity as emerging from a process of embodied interaction between the individual and society – an interaction that necessarily takes place through the medium of the 'lived body'. This work also appears to offer something of a reconciliation between what are often seen as antagonistic schools of twentieth-century philosophy – phenomenology and structuralism – and it is this broader notion of embodiment as a potentially unifying theme that I will be using as the basis for what follows.

In architecture the recent resurgence of interest in the related themes of embodiment, sensory experience and materiality,[5] can be seen as part of a more general backlash against the predominantly textual (and therefore 'dematerialized') model of architectural communication and meaning prevalent during the 1980s and 90s. This view of the building as a form of writing – in part a consequence of Jacques Derrida's famous remark that there is 'nothing outside the text'[6] – in fact first gained popularity during the late 1960s and 70s due to the impact of semiotic models of interpretation sweeping through many areas of cultural analysis. In architecture this was also part of a reaction to the post-war modernists' apparently total neglect of questions of meaning. This resulted in a number of architects and theorists such as Robert Venturi, Michael Graves and Charles Jencks reviving some of the nineteenth-century debates about architectural style and decoration, leading to a sudden proliferation of historical details and period references, often playfully reinterpreted in modern materials. The downside of this new spirit of freedom and eclecticism was the often superficial application of historical forms, literally flattened out into a flimsy scenographic layering of signifying surfaces – what Venturi was happy to label 'decorated sheds' – a process that ultimately devalued the very sources from which these formal references were drawn.

In the 1990s the historical references largely disappeared, at least in most major public projects, but what remained was the dominance of the textual model of designing, debating and deciding about buildings. Virtually no designer wanting to be taken seriously was not also writing about their work, and no major project, design or competition entry was complete without an accompanying quasi-philosophical text, usually a densely argued defence of its 'deconstructivist' credentials. In fact it was Derrida's direct engagement with the work of one or two high-profile designers such as Bernard Tschumi and Peter Eisenman that largely fuelled this frenzy of philosophical borrowing, but its effect was to further reduce the emphasis on the materiality and sensuality of the physical building itself. The ultimate validation of a design was its level of conceptual rigour, mediated by its accompanying textual commentary, rather than the finished building's functional performance – let alone its experiential richness.

This situation could perhaps be paralleled in the museum world by the long-standing dominance of the curatorial commentary – often still seen as a key element in the 'disciplinary' role of the museum as a public institution.[7] The officially sanctioned interpretations that are commonly manifested in labels and text panels, together with gallery maps and guidebooks, can also serve to create a kind of mediating layer between viewer and object that can even lead to some exhibitions becoming little more than a book on the wall. This kind of 'tyranny of the text' as it might be called has also been challenged in other areas of cultural activity where a written script can come to dominate over a multi-dimensional and multi-sensory medium. One example of this is the classic statement in performance theory written by Antonin Artaud in the 1930s, *The Theatre and its Double*, which proudly proclaims the embodied language of gesture as the real essence of theatrical communication:

> This language created for the senses must from the outset be concerned with satisfying them. This does not prevent it from developing later its full intellectual effect . . . But it permits the substitution, for the poetry of language, of a poetry in space which will be resolved precisely in the domain which does not belong strictly to words.[8]

Currently there is also good evidence to show that museums are fighting back in a similar way, reasserting the uniqueness and emotional power of the embodied encounter with three-dimensional artefacts arrayed in physical space. In the editorial introduction to the book *Museum Materialities: Objects, Engagements, Interpretations*, Sandra Dudley takes issue with the now all-too-typical emphasis on text-based communication:

> [M]useums' preference for the informational over the material, and for learning over personal experience more broadly and fundamentally conceived, may risk the production of displays which inhibit or even preclude such affective responses. Inevitably, the object-information package can still have the power to move us, but most often does so almost entirely through textually-provided meaning, and threatens to foreclose a more basic, but no less potent, bodily and emotional response to the material itself.[9]

Elsewhere in this and other recent publications in museum studies there are numerous reminders of why text is still such an important vehicle for communication, largely due to the persistence of what could be seen as a master-metaphor for museum making: the idea of the exhibition as a means of storytelling in space. Before examining in more detail the particular nature and opportunities offered by the experience of the 'lived body' moving in architectural space, the next section will briefly consider some of the reasons for the continuing relevance and power of the idea of narrative itself.

The narrative self

As described in the introduction to this book, one of the reasons why narrative has been such a powerful and persistent idea is the fact that it seems to capture something fundamental about the nature of human subjectivity. From Daniel Dennett's notion of the self as a 'centre of narrative gravity',[10] back to David Hume's description of the subject as a 'bundle' of properties and perceptions,[11] the self in these formulations acts as a subjective centre from which 'strings or streams of narrative issue forth'.[12] This idea also implies that we have a natural capacity for narrative that helps us make sense of the events happening in the world around us, which the psychologist Jerome Bruner has described in terms of an inherent predisposition towards narrative. In his book *Acts of Meaning* from 1990, Bruner draws both on his own and others' research in developmental psychology, focusing in particular on studies of language acquisition in children:

> Certain communicative functions or intentions are well in place before the child has mastered the formal language for expressing them linguistically. At very least, these include indicating, labelling, requesting, and misleading. Looked at naturalistically, it would seem as if the child were partly motivated to master language in order better to fulfil these functions *in vivo*. Indeed there are certain generalised communicative skills crucial to language that also seem in place before language proper begins that are later

incorporated into the child's speech once it begins: joint attention to a putative referent, turn taking, mutual exchange, to mention the most prominent.[13]

Bruner goes on to discuss the idea of language as a kind of prosthetic device – a tool for reaching out beyond the confines of the individual body and making things happen in the world. The acts of 'indicating, requesting and misleading' all bear testimony to this instrumental aspect of language, while also highlighting the importance of the intersubjective relationship between the child and a typically adult interlocutor. Bruner refers here to the work of the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin on the 'dialogic imagination', claiming that 'all single voices are abstracted from dialogues'[14] – implying that the individual sense of self is something that emerges only gradually as a consequence of these early attempts at communication and interaction with others.

Another aspect of these early learning experiences is the role of narrative in the development of what philosophers often refer to as 'folk psychology', the everyday and common sense understanding that we have of the behaviour and actions of others, based in part on what could be called a primitive 'theory of mind'.[15] The building blocks of this theory involve the triad of 'belief, desire and action', meaning that we normally interpret people's actions as the result of their underlying beliefs coupled with their current intentions. For example, we might infer that the sight of people running towards a bus station is probably the result of their desire to catch a bus, combined with their belief that it is about to depart. A number of competing explanations have been put forward to account for this cognitive ability to grasp the underlying causal structure of everyday actions and events, with opinion generally divided between what has been labelled 'theory-theory' and 'simulation-theory'. The basic argument asks whether we grasp these causal principles not by mentally figuring them out in a conscious process of reasoning and inference (i.e. whether we literally possess a *theory* about what other people are thinking) or whether instead we inwardly *simulate* the actions we observe, sensing them intuitively on a deeper and less-conscious level. The neuro-scientific explanation of this kind of bodily understanding of action (also referred to as 'motor cognition') involves the recently identified activity of the so-called 'mirror-neuron' system – neural pathways in the brain that become active both when we see someone performing an action and when we engage in that same action ourselves.[16]

All of this evidence suggests that our developing sense of individual identity is closely tied to our growing sense of bodily agency, an assemblage of the many embodied 'micro-narratives' of action and interaction that comprise our everyday commerce with the world. Embodied experience is therefore vital in constituting a bodily repertoire of skills, habits and capacities that equip us to deal with the environment around us. And as the 'simulation' theory referred to above suggests, this is something that begins with an instinctive process of unconscious imitation. The central role of the body as the primary vehicle by which these mechanisms operate is something that recent body theory has begun to explore and explain.

The embodiment paradigm

The current resurgence of interest in the body as a theoretical paradigm across a range of arts, humanities and scientific disciplines is partly a consequence of the influential work in social and cultural studies cited at the beginning of this chapter. More significantly it also takes its philosophical inspiration from similar sources in continental philosophy, albeit from

a generation earlier than the French structuralists who inspired Michel Foucault. The school of philosophy known as phenomenology, inaugurated in 1900 in the writings of Edmund Husserl,[17] set out to provide a description of the elementary structures of experience, in order to understand how it is possible for a mind seemingly locked away inside the head to experience a world 'outside'. A key objective of phenomenology was to escape the limitations of mind–body dualism, entrenched in the history of philosophy since at least the time of Descartes. Phenomenology instead described a continuum between mind, body and world, with the body playing a pivotal intermediary role and providing the vital conduit by which information about – and interaction with – the world can be achieved. By suggesting that to be human is to be embodied, to be 'extended' into the world through the medium of the lived and experiencing body, phenomenology offers a model of perception and cognition grounded in the structures and patterns of everyday behaviour. The body is seen as the vehicle of our 'primordial encounter' with the world and the means by which we gain our basic 'grip' on it.

Recently this bodily framework has been revived and extended in a number of important directions. While it is not possible here to give an exhaustive and detailed survey, I will attempt to briefly summarize what I consider the most important current developments. In cognitive linguistics the Americans George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in the book *Metaphors We Live By*,[18] traced the origin of many figures of everyday speech back to the basic structures of embodied experience. Examining spatial relations such as front-back and up-down, as well as more abstract ideas such as good-bad and past-present, they argued that many of our conceptual categories can be mapped directly onto our intuitive understanding of space as it is experienced by the body. In their later book *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought*,[19] they produced a radical reassessment of the history of philosophy, turning up many typically overlooked examples of the influence of embodiment on philosophical concepts.

The idea that we extend ourselves (and our *understanding* of ourselves) into the world through the medium of language – partly by reference to our bodies as a source of metaphor and analogy – has also been developed in relation to other examples of our everyday interaction with the world through physical tools and technologies. A notable statement of this idea is contained in an influential paper from 1998 entitled 'The Extended Mind', co-written by the philosophers Andy Clark and David Chalmers.[20] In it they describe the various commonplace ways in which simple mnemonic devices such as notepads and diaries act as a kind of 'cognitive scaffolding', not only storing lists of static data but also creating an extended cognitive realm in which the thought process itself can take place. We come to rely on these externalized methods to help us work out solutions and clarify our thinking, much as an artist or architect might use a sketchbook to begin to visualize a vague and partially formed idea. In a later book Clark goes as far as to claim that we are in fact *Natural-Born Cyborgs*,[21] instinctively programmed to co-opt elements of the environment around us to enhance our ability to survive. Rather than treating examples of new 'invasive' technologies such as mobile phones or even medical implants as a threat to our essential humanity, the French philosopher Bernard Stiegler has also tried to situate these developments within a longer evolutionary framework. By considering the positive impact of early tool-making techniques on the expansion and refinement of the human brain, Stiegler makes a convincing case that being human is already to be a partially technological being: 'The prosthesis is not a mere extension of the human body; it is the constitution of this body *qua* "human".'[22]

Another important dimension of embodiment that is emerging from current research in neuroscience concerns the role of emotion in the processing of information within the brain. Antonio Damasio has published a series of influential books over the past 15 years or so describing his research into – among other things – the impact of emotion on the storage and retrieval of memories. Damasio's key innovation is the 'somatic marker hypothesis', the idea that all information that passes into the brain carries with it some kind of emotional charge that helps to determine whether and to what extent it will be accessible to recovery. This idea helps explain why the details of particularly traumatic experiences are so much more vividly remembered and it suggests that their recall involves some form of re-enactment of the experience itself along with its accompanying emotions. This also goes some way to illustrate the importance of personal connection and empathy as part of any educational process – as proponents of so-called 'situated learning' have often claimed.[23]

Other important areas of neuroscientific research which are helping to bridge the long-standing mind–body divide include the work on mirror-neurons already mentioned above, which is also shedding light on the mechanisms of empathy and 'social cognition'. More significantly, philosophers such as Evan Thompson are also beginning to assimilate this research into a broader explanatory framework that illustrates the evolutionary emergence of human intelligence from its roots in basic biological processes. In his recent major book *Mind in Life*[24] Thompson draws on the work of his previous collaborator the Chilean neuroscientist Francisco Varela, including their co-authored publication *The Embodied Mind* from 1991 which has since become a classic source for many of the ideas mentioned above.[25] The crux of their position is that consciousness begins in its most basic form as the ability of an organism to respond to changes in its environment, a fundamental characteristic of all biological life. More than simply a passive registering of sensory stimulation it also necessarily involves a cycle of action and reaction – the activation of a circular feedback loop whereby every movement of the organism brings about further changes in the sensory input. For sophisticated beings like us, equipped with a nervous system that allows us to move ourselves around within a range of different environments, movement becomes one of the primary modes of engagement and communication with the world. This fact is not lost on philosophers such as Maxine Sheets-Johnstone who has used this idea to help explain a whole variety of phenomena from technology to language to dance, claiming that what is unique about human intelligence is its embodied grounding in the 'primacy of movement'.[26]

What all of the above developments share, to a greater or lesser extent, is a deep intellectual debt to the ground-breaking work on the philosophical implications of embodiment by the French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–61). The final section of this chapter will consider some of the key elements of his analysis of the role of bodily movement in perception and cognition, with the aim of understanding the unique potential of narrative in a spatial as opposed to a merely verbal or textual medium.

A history of interactions: objects, artefacts and situations

In the later part of his life, in the work that remained unfinished at the time of his early death in 1961, Merleau-Ponty had begun to develop a radically new understanding of the relation between human consciousness and the 'outside' world. Based on the idea that knowledge emerges from the interaction between the body and the space around it, Merleau-Ponty described the process by which what we think of as a unified individual self is in fact a

continually unfolding project. From an initial state of immersion in a primordial entity which he labels the 'flesh of the world'[27] – in which no distinctions yet exist between perceiving subjects and perceived objects – Merleau-Ponty described how through the bodily experience of movement and action a sense of the self as a distinct entity begins to develop. Parallel with his studies in the history of philosophy Merleau-Ponty was also hugely influenced by contemporary research in experimental psychology, particularly from the Gestalt school, along with the seminal work on child development by the Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget. In an essay written during his time as a Professor of Child Psychology at the Sorbonne, Merleau-Ponty anticipated his later formulation of the emergent self:

> [T]he perception of others is made comprehensible if one supposes that psychogenesis begins in a state where the child is unaware of himself and the other as different beings. . . . The progress of the child's experience results in his seeing that his body is, after all, closed in on itself. In particular the visual image he acquires of his own body (especially from the mirror) reveals to him a hitherto unsuspected isolation of two subjects who are facing each other. The objectification of his own body discloses to the child his difference, his 'insularity', and, correlatively, that of others.[28]

Another key element in this process of individuation is the development of what Merleau-Ponty variously calls the 'body image' or 'body schema', described in his major work from 1945, the *Phenomenology of Perception*.[29] Beyond being simply a static visual image or 'map' of the form and structure of the body, the body schema actually consists of a largely unconscious repertoire of learned skills, routines and bodily capacities that give us an intuitive sense of who we are, in terms of what our bodies are capable of in relation to the possibilities offered by the environment around us. Another French philosopher, Henri Bergson, also a significant influence on Merleau-Ponty's early thinking, had anticipated this notion when he claimed that: 'The objects which surround my body reflect its possible action upon them.'[30] This idea that our understanding of an environment begins with a grasp of what the American psychologist James J. Gibson called the 'affordances'[31] it offers us for action is nowadays often referred to as 'motor cognition'.[32] Merleau-Ponty develops this notion in order to emphasize the fact that perception is not something that simply happens to us, as if we are passively registering incoming sensory stimulation as claimed by the eighteenth-century Empiricists. In fact there would be no perception and thus, effectively, no surrounding world if we were not also involved in actively reaching out towards it, projecting our expectations of what might be found there based on our previous bodily experiences. It is this gradually accumulating 'history of interactions' between ourselves and our environment that helps to define what actually 'shows up' in perception and counts for us as experience. The central role of the body schema in this process reminds us of the fundamental relationship between perception and action, both in terms of the child's process of 'learning how to perceive' described in the quotation above and also in all our attempts to establish an optimum perceptual 'grip' on whatever we are currently confronted with. As Merleau-Ponty describes it:

> For each object, as for each picture in an art gallery, there is an optimum distance from which it requires to be seen, a direction viewed from which it vouchsafes most of itself: at a shorter or greater distance we have merely a perception blurred through excess or

deficiency. We therefore tend towards the maximum of visibility, and seek a better focus as with a microscope.[33]

The process of acquiring the bodily skills to negotiate complex spatial and social environments is a key element of the 'body schema' and, therefore, also in the development of our sense of self. The American philosopher Hubert Dreyfus has taken Merleau-Ponty's idea further in his description of the various stages involved in the learning process as we progress from novice to expert.[34] Dreyfus uses familiar examples of skill-based activities such as chess-playing and woodworking to illustrate the gradual transition from conscious rule-following to (almost) unconscious performance. Drawing also on Martin Heidegger's analysis of the skilful deployment of hand-tools,[35] Dreyfus describes a process whereby the tool becomes more and more 'transparent' in use. As the user becomes more competent the tool gradually recedes from view, allowing the focus to shift from tool towards the task itself. This is similar to what happens when a competent driver sits back to enjoy the scenery, rather than constantly paying attention to the controls of the car.

In the context of a narrative environment such as a museum or gallery space, this contrast between transparency and opacity can be created by different degrees of familiarity. Learning one's way around a space might be achieved quite quickly, thus allowing the focus to shift to learning about the objects and events described in an exhibition. Even if museum narratives also include text and graphics, these things will always be experienced within a spatial setting whose layout and configuration is likely to be unfamiliar to first time visitors. As suggested by Merleau-Ponty's idea of motor cognition based on a bodily repertoire of skills and habits, the balance of familiarity and novelty may actually be crucial to achieving emotional and intellectual impact. The fact that the bodily senses soon become habituated to a constant or repeated stimulus suggests that too much familiarity can also lead to boredom. And if consciousness begins as a response to changes happening in the environment around us, it reminds us of the importance of bodily movement in providing a constantly shifting sensory landscape.

Conclusion

If, as suggested above, narrative is such a vital tool for both cognition and communication – if we can't help seeing the world in terms of 'micro-narratives' of belief, desire and action – it is important to consider what the medium of three-dimensional space can offer to the storytelling process that text alone cannot provide. In order to understand what is unique about the experience of narrative within a spatial and, therefore, a bodily framework, this chapter has attempted to set out some of the key elements of the 'paradigm of embodiment' – suggesting that both narrative and bodily experience tell us something fundamental about the making of the human self.

For the museum visitor confronted with an arrangement of objects and artefacts, it seems there is a natural motivation to begin to piece together a human story. As Merleau-Ponty himself has memorably suggested:

> In the cultural object I feel the close presence of others beneath a veil of anonymity. *Someone* uses the pipe for smoking, the spoon for eating, the bell for summoning, and it is through the perception of a human act and another person that the perception of a cultural world could be verified.[36]

Notes

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PLATE 10.1 The Eric Morecambe memorial area with life-size sculpture: 'Tea Ern?' A collaboration between sculptors Gordon Young, Graham Ibbeson, Ann Kelly and Shona Kinloch, Why Not Associates and Russell Coleman, who implemented the project.

PLATE 12.1 *Tea cup for teahouse design*, by Dani Pauley. Completed as part of the Architectural Design Studio 271, Department of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, North Dakota State University.

PLATE 12.2 *Stretching bar for dance studio*, by Peder Lysne. Completed as part of the "Artefact Atelier", Department of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, North Dakota State University.

PLATE 14.1 Reconstruction of the Tower Curing Works, Great Yarmouth, in the 1950s. © Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service.

PLATE 14.2 Burnt out curing houses, Tower Curing Works, Great Yarmouth. © Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service.

PLATE 15.1 *Memories Passed*, Kiek in de Kök Museum, Tallinn, Estonia. Photo: Candice Hiu-Lam Lau.

PLATE 16.1 Stepping stones, Heian Shrine, Kyoto, Japan. © James Furse-Roberts.

PLATE 16.2 View of the Temple of Ancient Virtue, Stowe Landscape Gardens, Buckinghamshire, England. © James Furse-Roberts.
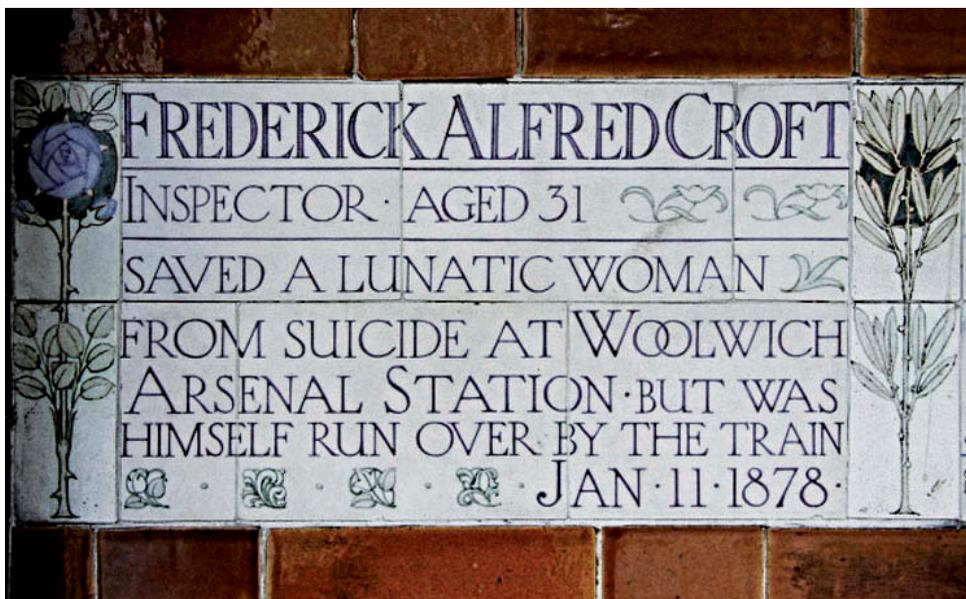
PLATE 20.1 A plaque in George Watts' *Memorial of Heroic Self-Sacrifice* in Postman's Park, London. Photo: Annabel Fraser.

PLATE 20.2 A plaque in George Watts' *Memorial of Heroic Self-Sacrifice* in Postman's Park, London. Photo: Annabel Fraser.

PLATE 22.1 Exhibition image from Fred Wilson: *The Museum: Mixed Metaphors* (1993), Anne Gerber Biennial, Courtesy of the Seattle Art Museum.

PLATE 22.2 Maryland Historical Society, *Furniture in Maryland Life* exhibition (2007). Photo: Claire Robins.

PLATE 22.3 Detail, Yinka Shonibare, MBE, *Colonel Tarleton and Mrs Oswald Shooting* (2007). Copyright the artist. Courtesy the artist, Stephen Friedman Gallery (London) and James Cohan Gallery (New York). gordonschachatcollection. Reproduced courtesy of The National Gallery, London.

PLATE 22.4 Detail, Yinka Shonibare, MBE, *Colonel Tarleton and Mrs Oswald Shooting* (2007). Copyright the artist. Courtesy the artist, Stephen Friedman Gallery (London) and James Cohan Gallery (New York). gordonschachatcollection. Reproduced courtesy of The National Gallery, London.

PLATE 22.5 Sophie Calle from *The Appointment* (1999) Freud Museum, London. Reproduced courtesy of James Putnam.
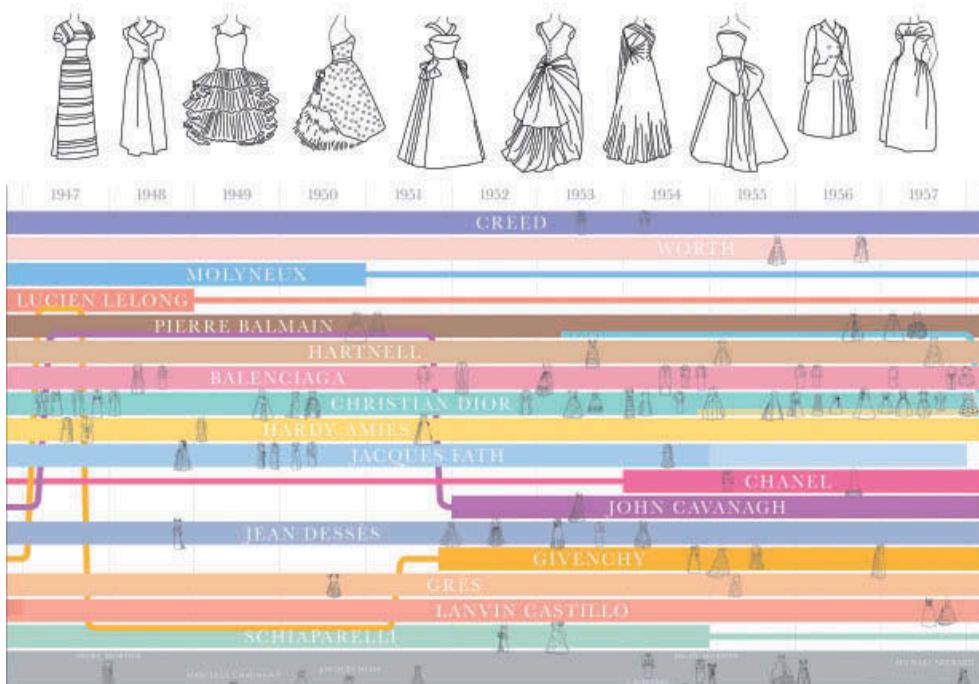
PLATE 23.1 *The Golden Age of Couture*, V&A (2007). Reproduced with kind permission of Nick Wood/Land Design Studio.
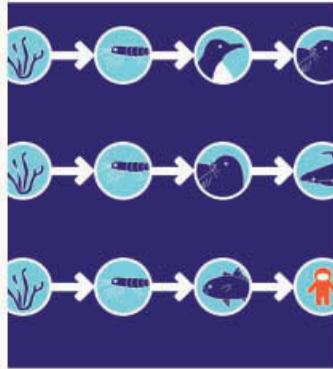
PLATE 23.2 *Ice Station Antarctica*, Natural History Museum, London (2007). Reproduced with kind permission of Will Amlot/Land Design Studio.

PLATE 23.3 *The British Music Experience*, London (2009). Reproduced with kind permission of Nick Wood/Land Design Studio.
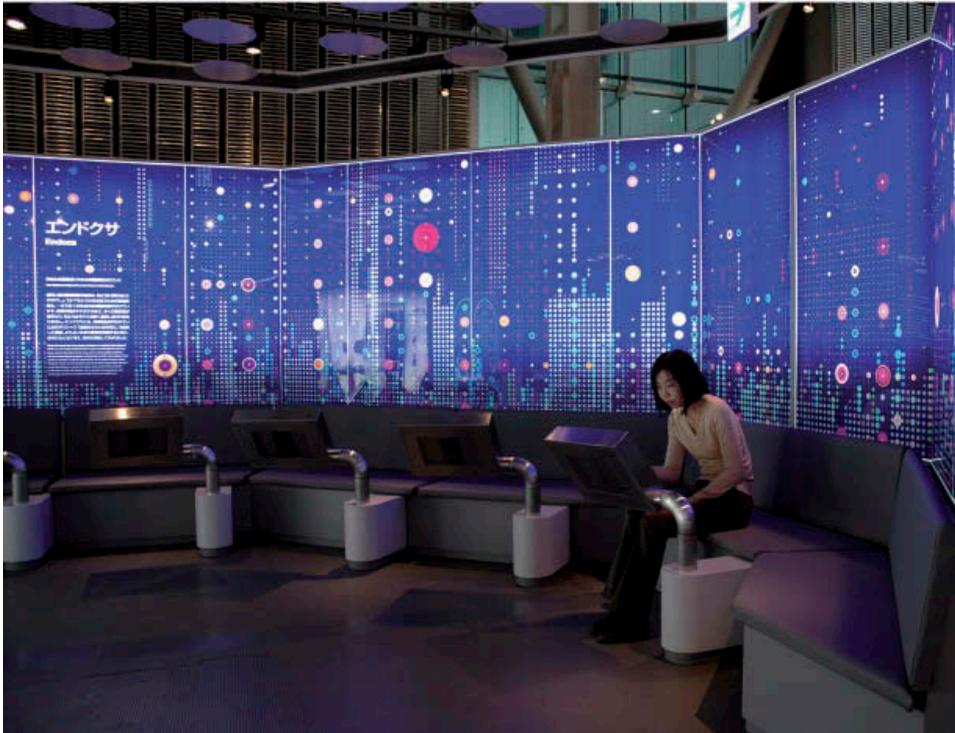
PLATE 23.4 *Medical Futures* at Miraikan – National Museum of Emerging Science and Innovation, Tokyo (2006). Reproduced with kind permission of Robin Clark/Land Design Studio and James King.

PLATE 25.1 *The Lives of Spaces*, Dara McGrath (2008). Photo: Dara McGrath. Reproduced with kind permission of the IAF, 2008.

PLATE 25.2 *The Lives of Spaces*, Simon Walker and Patrick Lynch (2008). Photo: Dara McGrath. Reproduced with kind permission of the IAF, 2008.

PLATE 26.1   Still from the film *Plansoll*, Duncan McCauley 2008, 10 min. Image copyright of Duncan McCauley.

PLATE 26.2   Zehdenick Brickworks, 'Talking Heads' installation. Image copyright of Duncan McCauley.

PLATE 26.3 Zehdenick Brickworks, 'The Trolley Shift'. The photograph shows the projected trolley and the real trolley. Image copyright of Duncan McCauley.

PLATE 26.4 Zehdenick Brickworks, circular kiln. The bricks change colour as the visitor proceeds through the firing tunnel. Reproduced with kind permission of Jan Bitter.

PART III

Narrative, media, mediation

Introduction

Part III continues to reveal narrative potential within the museum. It examines the ways in which stories are told, and explores established and contemporary media used in their telling: '[i]n post-structuralist terms, mediation is not only a valid part of the display, mediation is as valid as the artefact itself.'[1] The authorial voices you will hear are distinct – historical and contemporary, traditional and technological, theoretical and practical – yet they resonate together to expose common understandings.

Chapters 18 and 19 establish the field, respectively illuminating the role of narrative and the 'Productive Exhibition'. Paola Zellner investigates the metaphorical relevance of narrative, as well as its roles as muse, translator and guide. Through exploration of the exhibition, *The Book of Lies*, she calls for literal narrative to be transcended and replaced by more complex readings, thus enabling diverse and transformative experiences of space. In his chapter, Florian Kossak traces the historical development of the 'Productive Exhibition' – or museums as active places of research, experimentation and production of knowledge – arguing that such sites of *critical* production are vital for the future of architecture and exhibition making. The chapters strike up an interesting conversation, and together provide an historical and theoretical perspective for the discussions to come.

Chapters 20, 21 and 22 again begin with narrative, this time examining the inevitable and inherent gaps or fissures which occur in seemingly contiguous stories. In *Incomplete Stories*, Annabel Fraser and Hannah Coulson throw light upon the *spaces between* that abound in the museum: between artefact and label; between narrator and visitor; and between history and imagination. They critique the role of language and authorship in exhibition design, and argue that gaps within the museum are important sites of imaginative translation. Such uncertain interstitial ground is found to be rife with affective encounters and creative possibilities. In her walk through the museum's ruins in Chapter 21, Michaela Giebelhausen addresses the museum's complex relationship with time, highlighting temporal and material gaps. She explores time and history's destructive forces as wrought on the Neues Museum, Berlin (recently revealed and celebrated) and uncovers a poetics of ruination described by Diderot

as 'sweet melancholy'. She argues for a mature attitude to the past, and an aesthetic and intellectual compromise between memory and forgetting. Lastly in this section, Claire Robins and Miranda Baxter focus on disruptions to the hegemonic narratives of museums and galleries. They consider artists' interventions in display spaces, and their use of disruption, dissent and subversion to destabilize convention, challenge preconceptions and reconfigure learning. Disruption, parody and irony recur as favoured devices, and the problematic of authorship is again to the fore. Such interventions risk uncertainty, uncontrollability and undermining an audience's confidence, but promote productive frictions and can alter perceptions.

The final grouping of chapters, from 23 to 26, shifts the bias towards media, investigating the use of both traditional and contemporary interpretive technologies in the design of display spaces. Jona Piehl and Suzanne MacLeod return to the label, demonstrating the multifaceted and complex role of graphic design in twenty-first-century displays. They acknowledge that design is active in the production of meaning, and – with reference to recent case studies – locate the role of graphics on the axes: *presentation of content/interpretation through form*; and *translator/author*. Again issues of authorship are critical here, and it is argued that with the designer as collaborator, graphics can enable the location of visitors within the space and story; define the scope, context and atmosphere of that story; and create an intellectually and imaginatively engaging experience.

Next, Peter Ride moves into the realm of new technology, addressing the effect of New Media artwork in the museum. He considers what we can draw from specific examples regarding the context of technology, and asks if we need to rethink new technology as a narrative that alters the very context of the museum itself. Technological space is presented as 'transitional space', with a range of shifting conditions and complications which require its constant reconfiguration.

Chapters 25 and 26 have a strong architectural dimension, and continue the discussion of technologies of display, and in particular, film. Samantha L. Martin-McAuliffe and Nathalie Weadick use the display, *The Lives of Spaces*, to question how architectural exhibitions can convey the essence of buildings that are distant, both geographically and temporally. The chapter focuses on film as a means to access architecture and experience its spaces, and explores the idea of the 'thick present'; a concept to enable the appreciation of buildings as objects layered with memory and emotions, in an 'architectonics of recollection'.[2]

In the final chapter, Tom Duncan and Noel McCauley reveal the stories embedded in a found space – the Brickworks Factory Museum at Zehdenick, Brandenburg, Germany. Here the layered social and political history of the site is unearthed, as visitors experience an augmented reality in which new technologies help evoke former times and occupants, and allow the existing fabric to *speak*. Reality is augmented by the use of overlaid filmic and audio interventions, in an interface between imagination, experience and movement.

Despite the diversity of content and variety of approaches contained in Part III, clear commonalities exist. Threads weave through the discussion; of authorship and narrative voice, gaps and disruptions, critical production and creativity, and technology and film, and all the chapters allow us to understand more about the complex relationships between narrative, media and mediation in the space of the museum.

Notes

1   S. Greenberg, 'The Vital Museum', Paper for *Creative Space* Conference, University of Leicester, 2004, p. 1.
2   G. Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, New York: Verso, 2002, chapter 7.

18

NARRATIVE SPACE

The Book of Lies

Paola Zellner

> We seem to fear that unless we keep talking and calling upon the world to talk, we will be overcome by the dread muteness of objects and by the heedlessness of nature, that we might awaken to our 'true' condition as 'strangers in a strange land'.[1]

It is in the nature of all human beings to search for the meaning and understanding of life, to discover the reasons for our own existence, and to develop an understanding of our surroundings in order to feel connected to a system bigger than one's own self. Neil Leach writes in the Introduction to *Camouflage*, that '[h]uman beings are dominated by a compulsion to return to the familiar, or, when there is nothing familiar to be found, to familiarize ourselves with the unfamiliar'.[2] Becoming familiar with our context helps us increase our understanding of ourselves via the relationships that we establish within it, and can be achieved through the interpretation of narratives present in that context, or by developing narratives that render it meaningful.

Forms and types in design

The quest for meaning permeates design and sponsors the use of narratives, which take part in the development of the design process as well as in the experience of the design. Some of the most commonly used *forms* in architecture and design are narratives and analogies or metaphors, usually embodied by *types* that range between a clear diagram or unambiguous linear story, and an intuitive sense of order.

Narratives, understood as sequences of images or events flowing in time, can provide a referential background or context to draw design relationships from. They can also organize information in order to guide or direct a path of navigation for the experiencing of a context or a design, and they can establish an introduction or segue into design.

Metaphors, or condensed narratives, are defined by Adrian Forty as 'experiments with the possible likenesses of unlike things'.[3] The experimentation involves transposing one or a few characteristics from an origin or reference to a destination or proposal, in order to help

better understand the proposed by virtue of its newly acquired meaning. It should also be noted that in a metaphor's ability to connect 'unlike things', the origin as well as the destination benefit from the deeper understanding gained by their established relationship. At the time of transposition portions of the original meaning are fortunately and necessarily lost, otherwise the proposal would turn into the reference, rendering the whole operation redundant and unimaginative. This loss is, therefore, essential, for it opens up the space for differentiation and transformation, in other words, for design.

Roles of narratives: the muse, the translator, and the guide

During the process of designing, narratives and metaphors aid the designer in the search for inspiration, for systems of order to refer to, and for the overall organization of the design. Yet it is a blurry boundary that establishes *if* and *when* the presence of the narrative is overpowering to the extent of limiting the possibilities of the design. There is no set rule for the use of these devices, but when the design unfolds so that it primarily supports the narrative, and seems invested in maintaining the integrity and meaning of it, the process finds itself out of balance and with misplaced purpose. If kept in balance and held lightly, employed more as a challenging conceptual device than an idea to be *represented*, the narrative can enable and empower novel design.

When conveying a proposal or ideas to others, such as clients or peers, the narrative can become an effective communication tool. Relying on its ability to bridge, the metaphor stands as shorthand for content, while the narrative, as a progression of events threaded in time, provides an organized context where ideas can be integrated and understood in reference to the narrative.

When experiencing the designed spaces the narrative facilitates the assimilation of information by the visitor, either by making it more easily accessed or by predetermining ways in which it is to be accessed. The nature of the experience of the visitor, and how the visitor assimilates the information, differs depending on what form and what type of narrative the designer privileges. Be it a script to navigate the space, or a suggestive environment within which the visitor interacts, the multiple ways in which the design can be accessed span from an *intellectual* understanding of the space, to a *sensorial* understanding of the space; from a *literal* experience to an *intuitive* one.

Space and the third condition

Bernard Tschumi, in *The Architectural Paradox*, addresses this range in the form of a contrast between the *Pyramid*, representing the 'conceived space' through reason, and the *Labyrinth*, representing the 'perceived space' through the senses; the Pyramid states the 'nature' of the space and the Labyrinth becomes the 'experience' of it. The paradox lies in the fact that even though both are interrelated, one can never become the other. 'We cannot both experience and think that we experience. "The concept of dog does not bark"; "the concept of space is not in space".'[4] Yet this separation, more than a disconnection, is an acknowledgement of the presence of both and their entanglement that sustains the paradox. 'The top of the Pyramid is an imaginary place . . . [t]he nature of the Labyrinth is such that it entertains dreams that include the dream of the Pyramid.'[5] He then concludes that the solution to the paradox lies within the 'imaginary blending of the architecture rule and the experience of pleasure'.[6] 'For

it is only by recognizing the architectural rule that the subject of space will reach the depth of experience and its sensuality'.[7] Narratives, as devices or processes, can enable this 'imaginary blending' between conceived space and perceived space by *strategizing* the oscillation between them, by offering opportunities for swaying between the sensual experience and the conscious awareness or understanding of it. This undulating act of borrowing from both states yields a *third condition*, a more complete and transformative experience.

Following a similar path, Steven Holl, in *Questions of Perception*, visits the notion of 'perceived space' and locates the contrast within it. He references Franz Brentano's distinction between 'outer perception' engaged by physical phenomena through the senses, and 'inner perception' engaged by mental phenomena, and encourages design to embrace the simultaneity of both:

> Empirically we might be satisfied with a structure as a purely physical–spatial entity but, intellectually and spiritually, we need to understand the motivations behind it. This duality of intention and phenomena is like the interplay between objective and subjective or, more simply, thought and feeling. The challenge for architecture is to stimulate both inner and outer perception; to heighten phenomenal experience while simultaneously expressing meaning.[8]

While both Tschumi and Holl call for a greater depth of experience in architecture, they neither mention nor endorse, explicitly, the use of narratives to explore and achieve this. Yet, in separate texts, they both introduce the idea of *time*. Tschumi, in *Event Architecture*, introduces it in the form of *event*, 'where our experience becomes the experience of events organized and *strategized* through architecture',[9] and Holl introduces it as *duration*; 'Time and perception in architecture intertwine with light and space of architecture within a certain duration',[10] both implying the presence of a narrative, if ever so subtle, abstract or intuitive.

Duckness

Architecture has the power to affect and move us with its tectonics, its forms, its scales, its gravity, its connections to the cosmos, and the multiple dialogues it establishes at different levels with our bodies and our context. In spite of its innate power, much of architecture is reliant on, or a product of, the use of narratives in their multiple variations. This occurs, most likely, due to the fact that architecture *is* our environment; architecture is a part of the context we search to familiarize ourselves with, and extract meaning from.

Looking more closely at narrative types, when a work of architecture is not *about* the content of a narrative, when it is neither the 'duck' nor the 'decorated shed',[11] *how* does it use or borrow from a narrative to affect our experience of architecture? Architecture needs to be, above all, architecture, and perform as such. If a work of architecture resembles, through the use of a narrative, that which it references, even when it does not and cannot perform like it, how do we engage with it? Do we gravitate towards the enjoyment of the bodily experience of the space, drawn by its effects, to gain understanding of its meanings? Or do we gravitate towards the intellectual recognition of it? When a story or script is explicitly present, does the body in its instinctual quest for meaning tend to bypass sensorial experiences to connect intellectually to the narrative, a device that is more familiar and requires fewer stages of translation than the bodily experience?

Maybe a different question needs to be asked. Rather than '*how* does architecture borrow from narratives?', the question to ask could be 'how does architecture *appropriate* that which is first borrowed?', to have it become an integrated aspect of design. It is through the appropriation that alternatives to 'the duck and the decorated shed' could arise and offer more transformative experiences.

Neil Leach helps shed light on the question of appropriation with the term 'becoming', explaining that, '[i]t is not a question of imitating some entity, so much as entering into its logic. It is a matter not of representation, but of affect'.[12] Focusing on architecture, David Leatherbarrow, in *Breathing Walls*, also suggests ways of recognizing when a narrative is employed successfully:

> [A] building's performances are the means by which it simultaneously accomplishes practical purposes and gives them legible articulation. Put differently, the appearance and meaning of an architectural work are essentially tied to the operations performed by its several elements. Representational content is not something *added* to the shaping of settings in response to life's 'bare necessities,' as suggested by arguments within the functionalist tradition, but is something intrinsic to the response of those necessities.[13]

In other words, a narrative successfully informs design when the appropriated content becomes an intrinsic aspect of the architecture's *performance*; and in doing so, transcends the literal for a more complete experience of the space.

The space of the imagination

It seems worth stating at this point how permanence and mode of inhabitation of spaces can suggest the type of narrative to use. Exhibits, because of their impermanence and short inhabitation, can sustain, or sometimes may even require, a more scripted narrative; one that is informative and aids in the assimilation of the content of the exhibit. Buildings, because of their lifespan and intensive use, may benefit more from the use of abstract, subtle or camouflaged narratives.

The literal use of narratives in the design of spaces typically translates experientially into singular readings, whilst narratives that are an intrinsic part of the design, thus engaged by the visitor more intuitively, have the capability of producing spaces that allow for multiple readings or diverse perceptual experiences. As a result they can succeed in promoting recurring engagement of the space by the visitor.

Narratives in literature, manifest through language, activate in the reader the infinite space of the imagination. Roland Barthes, in *From Work to Text*, speaks of the role of text in gathering the work 'up as play, activity, production, practice', and inviting the reader in.[14] He goes on to write, 'the Text requires that one try to abolish the distance between writing and reading, in no way by intensifying the projection of the reader into the work but by joining them in a single signifying practice'.[15] '[The Text] asks of the reader a practical collaboration', an essential participation, not only in the act of reading, but more so in the creative process of imagining required to 'set it going'.[16]

In design, narratives have similar potential. Spaces designed with more intuitive narratives, instead of presenting distinct clear answers, provide a *sense* of the existence of underlying intentions or orders, generally in the form of diverse, ambiguous, and sometimes even

conflicting perceptions. The qualities of these perceptions stimulate the imagination. Driven by curiosity, the visitor, desiring to become familiar with the environment and understand its meaning, participates more actively in the making of the experience. The visitor's space of imagination is thus engaged in the creative process. This seems to be key in enabling the third condition; the transformative experience of space.

An example of a narrative space, with emphasis on an intuitive, sensorial experience, is the space for the exhibit of *The Book of Lies*, designed and installed in a span of three weeks for the Californian conceptual artist, Eugenia Butler, in Los Angeles. With an extremely restricted budget of US$ 400, covering materials, installation and removal of the show, the exhibit was to present the three volumes of the collection, as well as provide a space to explore the ideas and reactions provoked by the work.

The frame of reference

The word, both spoken and written, has been an important component of the conceptual art of Eugenia Butler (1947–2008). In 1991 Butler started the project, *The Book of Lies*, originally intended to be a four-volume portfolio series containing original works by over 100 international artists on the nature of *truth* and *lies*. Two years later Butler invited several renowned artists to participate in *The Kitchen Table* project, a series of dinners to discuss art and its role in life. 'The [real] kitchen table was where most of life's really important conversations took place', Butler once said.[17] 'It's where a lot of great ideas were born.'[18] Providing a familiar place, transposed from the collective memory, the kitchen table was a safe context that could induce the flow of dialogue originating from the more vulnerable place of the self. A new iteration of *The Kitchen Table* project emerged in 2005. In collaboration with designers Maria del Pilar Mendez and Paola Zellner, and artist Madam X, Butler invited over 200 thinkers to participate in a new round of discussions around the dinner table. The dialogues were centred on the questions: 'Can we envision the future?'; 'What do we envision it to be?' This was based on the notion that if there is a critical mass of minds collectively envisioning a future it can consciously direct the outcome. The project brought awareness of individual and collective roles in shaping the future, and underlined the responsibility to participate in its making.

The Book of Lies

In 2006 Eugenia Butler was invited to exhibit the three volumes of *The Book of Lies* at the 18th Street Arts Center in Santa Monica, California. The volumes had developed, at different times and in different contexts, around a vision that spanned over 12 years. Functioning more as portfolios or cases, with the individual pieces of work in loose sheets, the volumes were filled with original works of the artists who responded to Butler's challenge of using 'the lie to explore our relationship with truth'.[19]

The artwork returned in the form of collage, drawing, painting, image, poetry, text, recorded sound, music, and video pieces, all addressing a wide variety of contemporary issues as seen through the lens of *lies* (Figure 18.1). In addition to the volumes, the exhibit would include live performances, open conversations, three formal dinners, and individual, voluntary confessions responding to new questions introduced by Butler for the exhibit: 'What is the truth that most feeds your life?' and 'What is the lie with which you are the most complicit?'
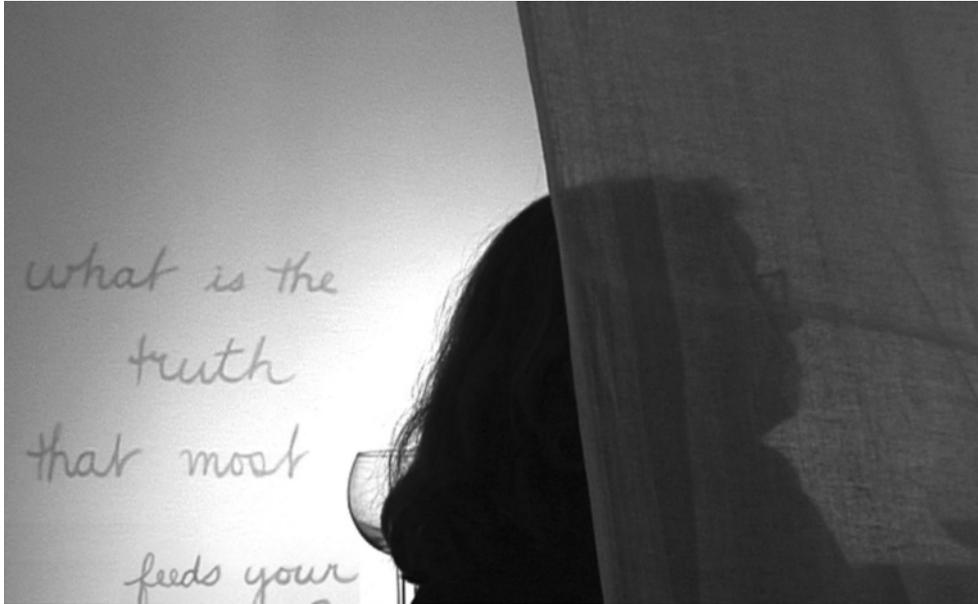
FIGURE 18.1   Eugenia Butler in *The Book of Lies*. Video still: Madam X. Reproduced with kind permission of Madam X.

Butler's work, both her abstract art and her word art, always challenged her and others to explore the unknown and delve into questions of being, consciousness and the perception of reality. The design for the exhibit needed to reflect this, and perform in a similar manner. Therefore, more than scripting the experience, it was designed to offer the conditions and opportunities for interaction, introspection, inquiry, and a multiplicity of readings and experiences.

Typographer Beatrice Warde, in her 1932 essay *The Crystal Goblet or Printing Should be Invisible*, underlined the fact that printing is primarily at the service of ideas and is used to convey them coherently. In order to allow the content to flow clearly and unobstructed, the typography employed needs to be 'transparent'. 'Type well used is invisible as type, just as the perfect talking voice is the unnoticed vehicle for the transmission of words, ideas.'[20] While typography effaces itself, language remains as the underlying structure that organizes the ideas. Similarly in the exhibit, the narrative supplied a structure for the design to emerge, but it was intended to remain invisible to the visitor. The visitor did not encounter the original narrative, but a diversity of intuitive sensorial moments that, through their creative participation, could transform into moments of interrogation, reflection, and moments of recognition.

The narrative

The retrospective of the work addressed the idea of *part-to-whole* present in the work. Each art piece in all three volumes was individual and original, but its place in the project was one voice in a collective dynamic. In similar fashion, the design was structured through a number of elements: the *constellations*, the *audio reflection spaces*, the *lantern*, and the *confession booth*, constituting the 'parts' that completed the 'whole' of the exhibition.

The parts

The volumes became constellations of individual ideas flowing into a bigger mind (Figure 18.2). Manifesting the idea of 'part-to-whole', the art was mounted on the walls and suspended away from them, floating in space. The proximity between the pieces was such as to bring attention to each individual piece while maintaining the presence and integrity of the group. The positioning of the pieces changed the relationship between the viewer and the object. The objects became animated, embodying the artist, and by being hung at *face* level, involving the senses and the mind, the objects engaged the visitors in virtual dialogues with the artists. The placement in space at different distances from the walls created a range of shadows that were projected on the walls and on the pieces of art, yielding more abstract versions of themselves, and affording presence to the space in between the art; the space of the constellation.

Three audio reflection spaces incorporated the audio pieces of each volume, and acted as the intermission and the visual palate cleanser between the constellations. Light-green-coloured folded planes, connecting wall and floor, configured the three virtual spaces to be inhabited by the visitor. Each of these spaces held two chairs facing the painted wall, where a CD player would sit on a transparent shelf. By facing away from the gallery space, while wearing the headphones, the visitor would be less exposed to visual stimulation and distraction, thus creating the conditions for the auditory sense to come to the foreground. The colour field could become a projection screen for the imagination stimulated by sound. The spaces

FIGURE 18.2 *Book Constellation 3*. Photo: Zellner + Bassett (Travis Williams).

were designed to hold two visitors at once, though depending on the visitor's body language and appropriation of space, at times they were inhabited only by one. Visitors would sit or stand facing the wall or the space depending on the level of introspection they were willing to engage in.

Ideas, spaced by moments of audio reflection, gathered around the glowing lantern. Once again the idea of 'part-to-whole' was explored, but with the use of fabric panels. Hung independently, like the art pieces in the constellations, their placement and proximity configured something bigger than themselves; the space of open dialogue. Inside the lantern, impromptu conversations, formal dinners, and scheduled live performances were held around the *dinner table*: the generator and locus of ideas and exchange.

While the lantern showed no specific point of entry, the arrangement of the panels gave the boundary a permeable, 'inviting' appearance, yet their closeness obstructed all direct views into the interior, challenging that invitation (Figure 18.3). The fabric, as a material plane existing in space, delineated the private space, but its diaphanous quality allowed visitors to discern figures and overhear the activities inside the lantern. The spatial ambiguity confronted the body with itself, its desires and doubts, inciting the visitor to trespass, meander through, inhabit the intimate boundary, or remain as a voyeur in the peripheral penumbrae.

Experienced from the inside, the intimate space was gently defined by the porous boundary, but still the 'outside' space could be sensed, and the moving figures perceived behind the panels. The surrounding art became present in the space as a ghosted, silent audience. The independence of the panels allowed for the reconfiguration of the lantern. These could be rolled up to adjust for different scales and uses of the space, like the live performances and the video-recording of the formal dinner events. When there were no activities scheduled in the

FIGURE 18.3 *The Lantern*. Video still: Madam X. Reproduced with kind permission of Madam X.

lantern, audio recordings of previous conversations would 'murmur' in that space, keeping the lantern active.

The confession booth, an individual space enclosed on two of its sides by fabric panels, was located by the entrance to the gallery, and hidden behind the lantern. Emerging from under one of the panels was a light-green-coloured path that drew the curious in by suggesting that something was being concealed behind the fabric. Once in the booth the visitor would be confronted with two questions handwritten by Butler on the wall and, if inclined to do so, would offer a response, to be captured by a fixed camera. The intimacy of the space aimed at fostering introspection and courage to express what in public would not likely be admitted. The lightness of fabric once again challenged the perception of the intimate boundary, never establishing certainty to the visitor of the level of privacy of the space. The confessions were to be streamed to a screen monitor in the gallery, adjacent to the booth, opening multiple experiences for the confessing, and for the visitors watching the mediated confessions.

The partial truth

The narrative that developed in conversation with Butler while designing the exhibit did not become a literal narrative for the visitor, nor did it define a singular path of experience. Though the exhibit was set in a rather small and straightforward space, the design attempted to provide a variety of experiences, views and exploratory paths for the visitor. Experimenting with tactics of hiding, insinuating, concealing and revealing, different opportunities for bodily engagement and reflection were created in the space. The layout of the exhibit could not be seen in its entirety from any point in the gallery. The fabric panels and the lantern concealed parts of the space while revealing partial views, inviting the visitor to move through the space, to stroll or meander; it was *only* by moving through the space that the visitor could perceive and experience the whole (Figure 18.4).

Le Corbusier, in his lecture *A Man = A Dwelling; Dwellings = A City*, introduces the 'Theorem of the Meander'. 'I say theorem, because the meander resulting from erosion is a phenomenon of cyclical development absolutely similar to creative thinking, to human invention.'[21] The theorem or law of the meander is the narrative that Le Corbusier chooses to explain the development of ideas in the creative process. The initial intention that sets the process in motion is represented by the straight river that later becomes affected, and shifts, and curves as it encounters 'incidents' along the way. 'The straight line has become sinuous; the idea has acquired incidents.'[22] When the curves become extreme they touch and the river

FIGURE 18.4   *The Book of Lies*. Photo: Zellner + Bassett (Travis Williams).

runs straight again. 'Thus a pure idea has burst forth, a solution has appeared. A new stage begins.'[23] And the cycle repeats itself.

As a narrative it seems an appropriate one to describe the third condition, from the visitor's perspective, explored in this project. The exhibit invited the visitors to participate in the creative process of defining their individual experiences. The process oscillated from 'acquiring incidents' that shaped the experience, to moments of introspection and understanding fostered by those experiences, gaining depth in every cycle. Though the process described by the 'Theorem of the Meander' is cyclical in nature, it is not implicitly repetitive. Like the river, the third condition delivers answers, many of them in the form of new questions, as it continues to carve fresh paths in its flow through time.

Notes

1 M. Benedikt, *For an Architecture of Reality*, New York: Lumen Books, 1987, p. 10.
2 N. Leach, *Camouflage*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006, p. 5.
3 A. Forty, *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture*, New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000, p. 101.
4 B. Tschumi, *Architecture and Disjunction*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994, p. 48.
5 Ibid., p. 49.
6 Ibid., p. 51.
7 Ibid., p. 50.
8 S. Holl, J. Pallasmaa and A. Pérez Gómez, *Questions of Perception: Phenomenology of Architecture*, San Francisco, CA: William Stout, 2006, p. 42.
9 P. Noever and R. Haslinger, *Architecture in Transition: Between Deconstruction and New Modernism*, Munich: Prestel, 1991, p. 130.
10 S. Holl, *Intertwining: Selected Projects 1989–1995*, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998, p. 13.
11 R. Venturi, D. Scott Brown and S. Izenour, *Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1977, p. 87. The authors define two main groups in architecture according to how symbols are conveyed to communicate meaning:

   1. Where the architectural systems of space, structure, and program are submerged and distorted by an overall symbolic form. This kind of building-becoming-sculpture we call the *duck* in honor of the duck-shaped drive-in, 'The Long Island Duckling,' illustrated in God's Own Junkyard by Peter Blake.
   2. Where systems of space and structure are directly at the service of program, and ornament is applied independently of them. This we call the *decorated shed*.

12 Leach, *Camouflage*, p. 85.
13 D. Leatherbarrow, *Architecture Oriented Otherwise*, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2009, p. 26.
14 R. Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. S. Heath, New York: Hill and Wang, 1977, p. 162.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid., p. 163.
17 V. Nelson, *Her Conceptual Art Explored Perceptions*, Los Angeles Times Online, 8 April 2008. Online. Available at: www.articles.latimes.com/2008/apr/08/local/me-butler8/2. Accessed 4 April 2010.
18 Ibid.
19 E. Butler, *The Book of Lies: Volume III*, 2004.
20 B. Warde, *The Crystal Goblet: Sixteen Essays on Typography*, Cleveland and New York: World Publishing Co., 1956, npn.
21 Le Corbusier, *Precisions on the Present State of Architecture and City Planning: with an American prologue, a Brazilian corollary followed by the temperature of Paris and the atmosphere of Moscow*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991, pp. 4–5.
22 Ibid., p. 142.
23 Ibid., p. 143.

19

PRODUCTIVE EXHIBITIONS

Looking backwards to go forward

Florian Kossak

This chapter will argue that the incorporation of an experimental – one might also say critical – production of architecture within and through exhibitions is paramount if not vital for the future relevance not only of exhibition making and the exhibitionary complex, but for the future of architecture as an intellectual, artistic and social discipline itself. These exhibitions are coined here as *Productive Exhibitions* and the chapter will first explain how these exhibitions have to be defined and what impact they could have on the future of exhibition making and the praxis of architecture.[1] This chapter will further argue that in order to find ways in which such an experimental production can actually take place within and through exhibitions, one should look at some of the earliest *formal expressions*, *spatial arrangements* and socio-economic *operations* of the 'museum', and the exhibitions that they contained.

The argument that is put forward here is that between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries – that is, prior to the establishment of what Bennett has coined the 'exhibitionary complex' – the use of the term 'museum' or '*mouseion*', and consequently its material expression, was still ambiguous and multi-layered.[2] It signified the collections of artefacts as well as the buildings in which these artefacts and collections were kept; museums could only be an immaterial concept rather than any specific formal building typology. Most importantly, these museums could be active places of research, experimentation and production of knowledge. It is herein that early museums, as well as their 'relatives' such as the princely and scholarly *studiolo*, the *Wunder-* and *Kunstkammer*, and the *cabinet des curiosités*, had the potential for an experimental and critical production of knowledge. It is a potential that arises from a number of different, partly related aspects, including: contrasting notions of, or even lack of, scientific classifications and order; the absence of historical time and therefore different understandings of linear narratives; the state prior to the discovery and creation of an exhibition audience as distinct from the exhibition's producers; newly emerging and yet untested forms of display techniques; the lack of professionally defined disciplines and their delineation to other fields, so consequently the valuation of amateurism; differing forms of ownership and operations; the often short-lived or temporal existence of exhibition spaces and/or institutions; their modest size, in comparison to today's mass spectacle museums; or their locality – non-centralized, often random, and situated in mixed-use, residential and commercial areas.

Productive exhibitions

There are today, and probably always have been, groups and individuals who have, consciously or unconsciously, applied, interpreted and/or appropriated some of the above mentioned aspects of early museums and the experimental production of architecture in their exhibitions; and this text will refer to some such examples. However, these are usually moments at the periphery of both the architectural discipline and practice or the exhibitionary complex.

Since the early Renaissance, architects have used public exhibitions of architecture to experiment with new spatial, technological, or programmatic propositions. Peter Smithson argued that Renaissance architects tested the 'Real before the Real' through ephemeral stage architecture for courtly masques and temporary festivals, to exhibit and experiment with the new style.[3] In fact, the architectural exhibition has been, and still is, the locale to test new forms of the production of architecture itself. In that respect, the architectural exhibition has to be regarded as an experimental praxis that has a transformative and progressive role in the development of architecture, and one can argue that it is a praxis that is not only situated 'before the real', but is in fact a concurrent part of the production of architecture. These forms of architectural exhibitions are called here *Productive Exhibitions*[4] which can be defined as follows.

The *Productive Exhibition* would:

- provide a testing ground in which architecture is produced; it is a locale in which architectural research is conducted;
- be concerned with the investigation, development and experimentation of hitherto unimagined, untested, unestablished architectural propositions;
- acknowledge and deliberately incorporate elements of uncertainty and critique regarding its implementation, perception and result;
- deal with an understanding of architecture in its widest sense, encompassing architecture as a material reality, an intellectual construct, and/or a societal process;
- be a continuation and integral part of the architectural praxis and is predominantly driven and generated by architects or producers of architecture;
- have no predefined coherent formal expression in terms of its size, space, institution, media, temporality or locality;
- aim to expand the architectural field, both in relation to the actual artistic and cultural discipline as well as in relation to its executed praxis, ultimately shifting and/or extending the scope of the profession and the role that it plays within the production of the built environment;
- in most cases be characterized through the incorporation of experimental, extra-disciplinary approaches, including methodologies, techniques and/or formal expressions from neighbouring art disciplines, as well as from social, political or natural sciences.[5]

Inherently, *Productive Exhibitions* would pose the question: 'What is architecture?' They do this through experimentation with new spatial and social propositions of architecture, new forms of production, and new modes of the perception of architecture. They are thus an indispensable part of the architectural praxis in which and through which architecture can be progressively transformed. *Productive Exhibitions* would aim to challenge the prevailing politics of architecture and suggest new/alternative forms of perception and production of architecture. Consequently, *Productive Exhibitions* are, in their essence, political experiments.

The main incentive for the *Productive Exhibition* comes from architects as the primary producers of architecture.[6] Yet as in any progressive architecture, the so-called audience of a *Productive Exhibition* plays a similarly crucial role in the experimental set-up of the exhibition or indeed in the production of the exhibition itself; and the *Productive Exhibition* engages here with an audience that goes beyond a purely professional audience but encompasses as wide and diverse a public as possible. In relation to this audience involvement, one would have to make a crucial distinction between 'interaction' and 'participation' in and with the exhibition. Only the latter gives the audience a truly productive role, while the former usually only invites the audience to take part in a predefined structural set-up with clearly defined limits of engagement.[7] And it could be argued that herein resides a crucial deficiency of most museum exhibitions that somehow engage the audience with a given narrative through any form of interaction, but do not allow for a (continuous) participation and consequently production of this narrative by the audience.

The *mouseion*

In antiquity, the *mouseion*, the ultimate precursor to our modern museum, would first of all signify a sacred place or sanctuary of the muses in which the gods and the patron saints of poets, artists and scholars were worshipped. But the *mouseia* were also places in which scriptures, dedicated to the muses, were kept. In that respect the *mouseion* also relates to our modern libraries. The *mouseia* were often located within or in relation to schools or clubs of poets and philosophers, and consequently became the assembly places of artists and scholars. They would thus act as places of study and deliberation, of the creation and exchange, and not only the storage, of knowledge.

This original meaning of the 'museum' as signifying an association of scholars was picked up again in the fourteenth century by Italian Humanists. The term 'museum' would often be used for all sorts of different places, institutions, or even publications associated with the purpose of studying. To allow for this study function, the museums already contained collections of artefacts and natural objects, as well as scriptures. Yet these collections were still not openly presented – neither to the limited audience of the scholars, nor to any other public. They were mostly hidden away in cabinets and would only be brought to the fore in order to be temporarily examined and studied, as in the case of the early, secluded *studioli*. The important aspect here with regard to the *Productive Exhibition* is the *mouseion*'s function as a place of deliberation and study that was predominantly conceived and maintained by the actual producers of art and science, or knowledge in general.

There is also an interesting notion of reversal of the visible and hidden. Whereas we have today a situation where the actual producers of the exhibition are mostly hidden at the 'back of house', in the *mouseion* these producers of knowledge were both subjects and objects; they were visible, accountable, in open production. It is this possibility of directly engaging with the producers of an exhibition, becoming part of the actual process, and product, of the exhibition, that is of relevance for us here and resonates with the earlier discussions about participation.

The *studiolo*

The Renaissance *studiolo*, historically linked to the emerging academies but very different in its spatial set-up and operation, is usually seen as the first dedicated space of modernity in which

objects were kept not only because of their spiritual or monetary value, but also for them to be studied and displayed.[8] It should be stressed here that the term is often used for two slightly different forms or concepts of the *studiolo*. These different forms were related to the different users or owners of the *studioli*. On the one hand, one can find those that were established by scholars and mainly used to study and experiment. Here the *studiolo* often took on the character of a proper laboratory or workshop; they were production places as much as places to study. In effect they were places of study through experimental work. These *studioli* were less elaborate in their interiors and less directed towards the presentation of the collected objects and the experiments that were conducted within them. This is partly due to a lack of financial means, but also came about because there had not been the necessity of societal representation, both reasons accounting for the fact that we do not have a lot of material evidence that remains of them.

On the other hand, one can find *studioli* that were owned by Renaissance princes and princesses that had strong Humanist interest and aspirations. As above, the *studioli* were here places of study, but they were also, as Giuseppe Olmi argues, 'an attempt to re-appropriate and reassemble all reality in miniature, to constitute a place from the centre of which the prince could symbolically reclaim dominion over the entire natural and artificial world'.[9] In that respect they were not only a place of knowledge, but also a place of symbolical power.[10] However, one has to bear in mind that they were yet publicly accessible display places; they remained in essence private spaces that contained collections and 'hidden' displays.

It is, in fact, this latter aspect of the 'hidden' displays that was peculiar to the *studiolo*, where 'the doors of the cupboards containing the [collection's] objects were closed', as Dora Thornton explains.[11] This seems to contradict our contemporary notion of the exhibition in which objects are openly displayed for inspection. In the *studiolo*, however, this inspection happened only temporarily when objects were taken out of their respective cupboards or cabinets and were positioned on a, usually central, examination table. In that respect a 'temporary exhibition' was constantly rearranged and objects were presented and examined in varying contexts. A new context was produced through the selection of objects at any one moment. The contextual arrangement of objects in combination with the agenda under which they were studied thus altered the perception of each individual object, every time creating a new narrative.[12]

The *Wunder-* or *Kunstkammer*

During the late fifteenth century the *studiolo* was gradually transformed from its original function as a reclusive place of study to a semi-public, expressive space. This transformation from the hidden collection to the displayed collection, from solitary study to social exchange, would finally lead to the so-called *Kunst-* and *Wunderkammer* of the sixteenth century. It is here that, for the first time in modern architectural history, a building typology is conceived and built whose sole purpose it is to house and publicly show a collection. Similarly, the term 'museum' that had been partly used for the *studiolo* and would now also signify some *Kunst-* or *Wunderkammer*, underwent a change as the concept of the 'museum' extended towards the active mediation of its collection.[13] In that sense the display function of these collection spaces moves to the fore, while the study function moves to the background.

Regarding the programme of the *Kunst-* and *Wunderkammer*, there existed still a great congruence with the former *studiolo*. Like the *studiolo*, the *Kunst-* and *Wunderkammer* are

'based on the idea that the entire cosmos could be recreated and controlled within the walls of a private space', as James Putnam writes.[14] Or, to quote Hooper-Greenhill, these collections had the purpose 'to recreate the world in miniature around the central figure of the prince who thus claimed dominion over the world symbolically as he did in reality'.[15] However, in contrast to the Humanist and purely scholarly character of the *studiolo*, the *Kunst-* and *Wunderkammer* had also a crucial function in providing aesthetic pleasure. In order to do this, they had to transform the collection's principle of the hidden object into one that was based on the most effective display of objects. And while the *Kunst-* and *Wunderkammer* were still private places, both in terms of actual ownership and in terms of the very subjective personal 'environments' they displayed, they created a new relation between the collector, the collected and the invited visitor.

In relation to the *Productive Exhibition* one can also refer to Pomian's argument, when he writes that the *Kunst-* and *Wunderkammer* constructed

> a universe . . . where every question could legitimately be posed. . . . it was a universe to which corresponded a curiosity no longer controlled by theology and not yet controlled by science, . . . Given free rein during its brief interregnum, curiosity spontaneously fixed on all that was most rare and most inaccessible, most astonishing and most enigmatic.[16]

This alludes to the notion of experimentation, of chartering into new territories, of producing and testing new narratives and meanings.

The *cabinet des curiosités*

The *Kunst* - and *Wunderkammer* of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries gave collectors the opportunity to create and present their own interpretation of the macro-cosmos in a choreographed micro-cosmos. These microcosms had a quasi-religious connotation inasmuch as the collector would act as a creator of the world. In the *cabinet des curiosités* that would emerge in the eighteenth century, this connotation had partly vanished. The focus now was not on the recreation of the macro-cosmos, but on the materialization of an aesthetic idea in the presence of a perceiving public. The *cabinet des curiosités* is characterized on the one hand through the multi-layered form of display – from the architectural container or building, to the interior decoration, the display furniture, and finally to the presented objects. On the other hand it is characterized through the new social practice that took place in these spaces, namely the creation of an individual and common (increasingly bourgeois) self-consciousness through the act of engaging with a cultural institution.

The social importance of these new exhibition places is (somewhat) signified through the fact that in Paris alone there existed more than 450 private *cabinets des curiosités*.[17] They were predominantly created and frequented by members of the aristocracy, as well as a growing number of wealthy financiers, merchants and clergy. These groups were engaged in a social practice that followed specific rules or 'rituals', as Katie Scott puts it. These rituals 'consisted in part of an exchange of recognition and respect. Individuals visited each other in order to be present at the splendid rituals through which status was partly expressed.'[18] With regards to the *Productive Exhibition*, we are here less concerned with the class-based notion of social rituals. What is relevant here, however, is the sheer number of these exhibitions, the polycentric, dispersed form of exhibition spaces, and their integration into residential settings.

Of particular interest here, with regard to the *Productive Exhibition*, are the few examples of *cabinets des curiosités* by artists. The cabinets of the aristocracy had been 'a distinctive prestige-generating practice' in which the aristocracy 'presented themselves to and for their equals in an elaborate performance of style within the framework of a competitive social spectacle'.[19] They were a means to evoke aesthetic pleasure that could be experienced and shared with other visitors from the same or similar social group. The artists' cabinets have followed a different incentive. Here the combination of collected artefacts with works of art from their own production, presented in a carefully devised spatial and decorative setting, would allude towards the concept of a *Gesamtkunstwerk*.[20] In accordance with eighteenth-century aesthetic theory – on the establishment of a universal definition of beauty, for instance – the collections and display spaces of *cabinets des curiosités* by artists followed principles in which objects were arranged following aesthetic criteria and in order to produce spectacular and decorative ensembles. The harmonious arrangement of the individual parts to achieve a coherent aesthetic architectural entity was of equal significance to the actual objects.

While the attempt to create a harmonious *Gesamtkunstwerk* is prevalent for many *cabinets des curiosités*, it is of particular interest here that this exhibition type gives the primary producers of art and architecture, for the first time, the opportunity not only to display their works, but to actually make the exhibition a 'work of art' in its own right. Just as much as the actual collected objects, it was the stage-like setting of the exhibition spaces that was put on display. The combination of carefully designed interiors and display furniture with collected and purpose-produced works of art in the eighteenth-century *cabinet des curiosités* is a development that should become of similar importance to the twentieth-century avant-garde. Artists/architects such as El Lissitzky, who created the *Kabinett der Abstrakten* in 1928 at the Sprengel Museum in Hanover as an experimental exhibition room, would devise similar techniques. In that respect, one can argue that the *cabinets des curiosités*, like their twentieth-century descendants, act as much as archives of objects as they do intellectual and aesthetic laboratories; they are *Productive Exhibitions*.

Early architecture museums

Although Phyllis Lambert, founding director of the Canadian Centre for Architecture, once stated that architectural collections 'have only been recognized as the basis of a new entity, the architecture museum, since 1979 when some fifteen recently formed institutions met in Helsinki to form the International Confederation of Architectural Museums (ICAM)', they are by no means an entirely 'new entity', as museums that have been solely dedicated to architecture were already introduced at the end of the eighteenth century.[21] Many of them were still not museums in our contemporary understanding of the term, as they were in private hands or existed only for a limited period of time.[22] Confusion also still exists between the terms and concepts of the 'museum' and the 'gallery'. However, there are many experimental predecessors of our contemporary architecture museums that were conceived in the early nineteenth century, although many of them were only short-lived.[23]

A very familiar example is the museum of Sir John Soane in Lincoln's Inn Fields in London. What differentiates the Sir John Soane Museum from other late eighteenth-/early nineteenth-century architecture museums is its hybrid nature in which the transition between a private home and public museum is constantly present. It has been described as an amalgam of a 'picturesque and enigmatic home, office, collector's trove, and personal showplace'.[24]

The museum was officially opened to the public after Soane's death in 1837, but its origins as collection and even as exhibition place date further back. Soane had, from 1792 to 1824, consecutively built and rebuilt three adjacent houses in Lincoln's Inn Fields. These houses, with their constantly changing spatial arrangements to enhance the 'poetic effect', contained not only Soane's private home and office, but an increasingly large portion of them was used to store and display Soane's growing collection. Some of the collected artefacts, casts, antique and medieval building parts were not only exhibited, but also became part of the houses themselves.[25] In this respect his collection and the museum are still embedded in the pre-nineteenth-century integral perception of architecture and the arts. It is also closer to the *cabinets des curiosités* with their aim to create a sensual and 'curious' overall environment, rather than a purely academic or scientific arrangement presented in a more or less 'neutral' space. Building, exhibition and social activity are inseparable in Soane's museum.

Soane's museum is also interesting in its aspect of being decisively an educational place aimed for the benefit of architectural students. When Soane became Professor of Architecture at the Royal Academy in 1806, he 'began to arrange his books, casts and models in order that the students might have easy access to them'.[26] Students were invited to visit the museum on the day before and after Soane's lectures at the Royal Academy. In reaction to this multi-layered function, John Britton, who had published the first description of the museum in 1827, coined Lincoln's Inn Fields an 'Academy of Architecture'.[27] Soane's museum had thus an affinity with the *mouseion* or the early Renaissance academies. It is here where one can find the museum's strongest relevance for the *Productive Exhibition*.[28]

Outlook on the further development of the *Productive Exhibition*

The above exploration of early exhibition forms and operations indicates that the *Productive Exhibition* is indeed a trans-historical praxis that can have relevance for contemporary exhibition praxis.

Looking at the historical development of *Productive Exhibitions* in architecture, one can establish a shift from those that favoured the presentation and testing of form or style to those that included experimentation with space and programme. Examples of the former category would be the masques and festivals or theatre installations of Renaissance and Baroque architects who used them 'as opportunities for the realisation of the new style', as Peter Smithson explains.[29] Examples for the latter are the exhibitions of the 1920s avant-garde architects that combined, for instance, the exhibitions of (social) housing projects in the display of new spatial arrangements with new social programmes.[30] And while the experimentation with new formal and spatial approaches to architecture will remain, to a certain extent, relevant to the contemporary *Productive Exhibition*, it can be argued that exhibitions that want to support a progressive transformation of architecture have to go beyond that. This progressive transformation is, rather, to be found in the experimentation with the actual production, mediation and perception of architecture in combination with progressive social, political and economic concepts and programmes of usage. It is here where architecture as an artistic, cultural and social discipline, as an intellectual discourse as well as a profession, has the most potential for experimenting with its future. It is here where exhibitions can develop a 'spatial agency', to use a term and concept as defined by Schneider and Till.[31]

The shift towards processes and questions of 'how' and 'by whom' architecture is produced consequently leads to a transformation of architecture itself. In order to accommodate or

react to this changing nature of architecture, the *Productive Exhibition* itself changes. Not only does the *Productive Exhibition* have to find new locales, include new actors, and develop new forms of productive experimentation, but ultimately it will also question the very distinction between exhibitions and other forms of architectural manifestations. The new production processes that such a progressive experimental praxis will engage with include: collective and collaborative production processes that question normative and hierarchical structures; processes of user participation and interaction that ultimately transform the role of the producer or include further actors into the production of architecture; and trans-disciplinary productions that go beyond the obvious neighbouring disciplines, but may include social and economic sciences, to name just two examples.

This praxis will further engage with a broadened range of social, spatial and economic situations in which architecture can contribute to positively transform our society and the built environment we are living and working in. These situations may have to happen outside the canonized realm of our cultural institutions, including our architectural museums and galleries – that is, if these institutions do not radically change to accommodate this new production of architecture. Architectural experimentation and the *Productive Exhibition* have to leave their zones of comfort in order to maintain their social and political relevance. By engaging with the 'unknown', architecture and architects will have to learn new languages, forms of expression and modes of communication.

The *Productive Exhibition*, as an experimental architectural praxis, has historically been flexible enough to adapt to different spatial, social and ideological situations. It allowed for a broad range in size, form, and nature of its locale. It was produced by a range of different actors who took various roles in the architectural experimentation and production of architecture through the exhibition. All these aspects of its inherent transformable qualities strongly indicate that the *Productive Exhibition* is also prepared to accommodate, in the future, the transformations as outlined above. It will be through these continuous transformations that the *Productive Exhibition* will regain its role in the progressive and experimental development of architecture.

Notes

1 The prefix 'Productive' suggests that there are also exhibitions that are 'un-productive'. All exhibitions will, of course, 'produce new meaning' – in Karl Marx's terms, the audience will finish the production of the object – the exhibition – through its consumption. See here also the first chapter of Karl Marx's, *Grundrisse*, for the concept of productive consumption and consumptive production.

2 T. Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, London: Routledge, 1995.

3 P. Smithson, 'The Masque and the Exhibition: Stages toward the Real', in G. Di Carlo (ed.) *Language of Architecture: Lectures, Seminars, and Projects. International Laboratory of Architecture and Urban Design, Urbino, 1981*, Florence: Sansoni, 1982, pp. 62–67.

4 The author has previously coined these exhibitions 'Laboratory Exhibitions'. See here: F. Kossak, *'The Real before the Real': The Laboratory Exhibition and the Experimental Production of Architecture*, PhD Thesis, Edinburgh College of Art/Heriot-Watt University, 2008; F. Kossak, 'Exhibiting Architecture: The Installation as a Laboratory for Emerging Architecture', in S. Chaplin and A. Stara (eds) *Curating Architecture and the City*, London: Routledge, 2009, pp. 117–128.

5 One can distinguish hereby between those exhibitions that purely appropriate these methodologies, techniques and formal expressions into the exhibition, and those exhibitions that present a veritable trans-disciplinary exchange and include producers from these other disciplines within the production of the exhibition and its experimentation.

6 Commonly one would equate the producers of architecture with 'architects'. However, here the term 'architect' is used to describe someone who is engaged in the intellectual and material production of architecture including the 'user' or consumer of architecture.

7 See: P. Blundell-Jones, D. Petrescu and J. Till, *Architecture and Participation*, Oxford: Spon Press, 2005.

8 Prior to the collections kept in the *studioli*, one would have to mention here treasure chests or the collections of religious relics.

9 G. Olmi, 'Science-Honour-Metaphor: Italian Cabinets of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', in O. Impey and A. MacGregor (eds) *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Europe*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985, p. 5.

10 D. Thornton, *The Scholar in his Study: Ownership and Experience in Renaissance Italy*, New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1997. Particularly Chapter 5, 'The Collector's Study', pp. 99–125.

11 Ibid., p. 36.

12 The nature of the 'hidden' within the *studiolo* changes at the end of the sixteenth century when more and more *studioli* are opened to selected visitors and specifically designed display furniture becomes an essential part of the *studiolo*.

13 Examples include: *Museum Wormianum* in Copenhagen, housing the collection of Ole Worm (1588–1654); *Museum Kirchnerianum* in Rome, named after its first curator, the Jesuit priest Athanasius Kirchner (1602–1680), displaying anything from Egyptian obelisks to animal skeletons; and *Museum of Manfredo Settala* (1600–1680) in Milan, with a combination of display rooms and adjacent spaces for workshops (or *laboratorio* in Italian). These 'museums' are still very private places that would only be seen by the collector and invited visitors.

14 J. Putnam, *Art and Artifact: The Museum as Medium*, London: Thames and Hudson, 2001, p. 10.

15 E. Hooper-Greenhill, 'The Museum in the Disciplinary Society', in S. Pearce (ed.) *Museum Studies in Material Culture*, Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1989, p. 64.

16 K. Pomian, *Collectors and Curiosities: Paris and Venice, 1500–1800*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990, pp. 77–78.

17 B. Dietz and T. Nutz, 'Collections Curieuses: The Aesthetics of Curiosity and Elite Lifestyle in Eighteenth-Century Paris', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2005, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, p. 44.

18 K. Scott, *The Rococo Interior: Decoration and Social Spaces in Early Eighteenth-Century Paris*, New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1995, p. 84.

19 Dietz and Nutz, 'Collections Curieuses', p. 46.

20 The concept *Gesamtkunstwerk* has been particularly used in German philosophy and art theory of the nineteenth century and is often associated with Wagner's attempts to create his operas as a 'total work of art'. The term is, however, also used to describe Baroque and Rococo architecture which had a particular interest in achieving their spatial and visual intentions through a combination of architecture, craft and art.

21 P. Lambert, 'The Architectural Museum: A Founder's Perspective', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, vol. 58, no. 3, Sept. 1999, p. 308. Among those founding museums were the *Deutsches Architektur Museum* in Frankfurt, the *Institut Français d'Architecture* in Paris, and the *Arkitekturmuseet* in Stockholm.

22 According to Pomian, this would not qualify them to be called a museum. 'The fact that [the] public museums are open to everybody also distinguishes them from private collections.' See: Pomian, *Collectors and Curiosities*, p. 42.

23 Examples include: Alexandre Lenoir's *Musée des Antiquités et Monuments Français* in the former Convent of the Petits Augustins in Paris, founded in 1795; Le Grand and Molinos' *Musée de l'Ordre Dorique* in 6 Rue Saint Florentin in Paris which opened in 1800 and closed in 1802, but acted as a 'promotion tool' for the Doric Style; and the Royal Architecture Museum in London which was initiated and created in 1851 by a group of architects of the so-called Gothic Revival, including Gilbert Scott.

24 Canadian Centre for Architecture, *John Soane 1753–1837: The Legendary John Soane Outside the Confines of his Eccentric London Museum*, press text for exhibition at the CCA, Montréal, 16 May to 3 September 2001.

25 For a full inventory of Soane's extensive collection see: Trustees of the Sir John Soane Museum (eds) *A New Description of Sir John Soane's Museum*, London: Sir John Soane Museum, first published in 1955.

26 H. Dorey, 'Sir John Soane's Museum, London', *ICAM Newsletter*, July–December 2002, p. 7.

27 Quoted in ibid.

28 Whether this relevance indeed continued after Soane's death and the public opening of the museum is questionable. Its preservation in the precise state of 1837, froze (once and for all?) the ongoing spatial, curatorial and educational laboratory that the houses and the 'museum' had previously been.

29 P. Smithson, 'The Masque and the Exhibition' *in Language of Architecture*, p. 62.

30 One could name here Le Corbusier's *Pavilion de l'Esprit Nouveau* at the 1925 *Expositions des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels* in Pairs, or the *Weißenhofsiedlung*, a building exhibition organized in 1927 by the German *Werkbund* in Stuttgart. See: Le Corbusier, *Almanach d'Architecture Moderne. L'Esprit Nouveau*, Paris: Cres, 1925; B. Colomina, 'The Media House', *Assemblage*, no. 27, August 1995, pp. 55–66. K. Kirsch, *Die Weißenhofsiedlung*, Stuttgart: DVA, 1987.

31 N. Awan, T. Schneider and J. Till, *Spatial Agency: Other Ways of Doing Architecture*, London: Routledge, 2011.

20

INCOMPLETE STORIES

Annabel Fraser and Hannah Coulson

> If every event which occurred could be given a name, there would be no need for stories . . . life outstrips our vocabulary. A word is missing and so the story has to be told.[1]

In the museum, there is a space between an image or object and its label, between a narrator and their audience, and between history and our imagination. Though we cannot see it, this space is a key player in the way we construct museum narratives. This space, ripe with possibility, often contains the essence of what we are looking at and can be where the most exciting things are happening.

In the museum at its most intimate, in the space between artefact and label, there is an imaginative translation taking place in each viewer's mind. The interaction is incomplete until we each come to it. Our presence in the encounter brings together what we read, see, understand and feel to make a story. It gives life and significance to what is before us. Moving up a scale, there are missing pieces in the countless choices made by museum professionals in deciding which story their exhibition eventually tells. How can incomplete or contradictory material be acknowledged or reconciled? And looming above all this, if history is formed from multiple viewpoints, how can museums reflect the debate, uncertainty and even confusion in the imaginative space between the stories they tell and the grander narratives of history?

When we visit or work in museums, we both feel that imaginative, affective encounters expand our ideas, and uncertain, open-ended experiences can be productive. At a time when the Internet's endless web of information and opinion may be changing the way we think, open-ended stories are becoming more familiar. Most of us now regularly operate in a place where stories unfold before us in real time, may have no neat ending, and can be disputed or interrupted at any point. It is a place where the importance of authorship may be celebrated, blurred or contested. These digital challenges are one aspect of an age in which little can be relied upon to last and many feel they are living under 'conditions of endemic uncertainty'.[2] In such a climate, and as museums seek ever greater engagement with their visitors, how can incomplete stories be used to enrich each person's experience?

In this chapter we focus on the role language and authorship can play in amplifying or provoking our responses to a story, rather than on the part played by design of space, lighting

and sound. We do so by looking to museums, but also by examining what can be learned from communication in contexts we feel adjoin museum narratives, such as memorial, theatre, art and poetry.

The imaginative space

For as long as there have been stories, philosophers, theorists and raconteurs have looked to them for patterns and anomalies that might help us to make sense of ourselves and others. Their efforts have shown that all over the world the most overwhelming preoccupations of being human – growing up, a change in fortune, the certainties and surprises of the world around us – are distilled and shared when they become a story. It is a method of passing on information and values, of remembering,[3] and some would also argue that telling a story is the best way to assimilate change. Story patterns give us tools to meet the unknown, their familiar frameworks offering ways to mitigate surprise or peculiarity.[4] They help us incorporate new events into our pre-existing expectations and offer tools to adapt expectations when those new events do not seem to fit.

It therefore seems clear why stories should play a crucial role in the museum, a place where we seek to understand the context and value of unfamiliar objects or ideas, and make sense of disparate fragments that make up an exhibition. Stories in museums perform at least two discrete functions; they offer a way to organize and comprehend events that may stretch far beyond the limits of our lives or experience, and also provide an affective human-scale introduction to those events. Penny Ritchie Calder describes how narrative is employed in both ways at the Imperial War Museum: 'we are trying to tell a story . . . a way in through a human story.'[5]

Museums house objects and ideas from a time or a place where we are not. Our imagination is often the only space where we can explore why these things are significant to other people and to ourselves. We may imagine how something was made, the beliefs it represents, and why it has been considered rare or beautiful, baffling or monstrous. Those intangible aspects of an object's life are often among its most engaging traits and so the space between a collection and our imaginations is where storytelling within museums becomes possible and powerful. As Umberto Eco says: 'in a story there is always a reader, and this reader is a fundamental ingredient not only in the process of storytelling but also in the tale itself.'[6] While museums strive to tell great stories, they cannot do this successfully alone.

As both readers and museum visitors we are invited to navigate through words, images and design elements in order to construct our understanding. Just as the words and pictures in illustrated books work in concert to narrate their story, the texts and objects or images in an exhibition also work together to move the story on. When it works, this relationship is dynamic and has, as Maurice Sendak puts it, a 'muscular rhythm'.[7] In the museum context Mieke Bal notes that an exhibition 'consists neither of words nor images alone, nor of the frame nor frame-up of the installation, but of the productive tension between images, captions . . . and installation'.[8] As our attention flits back and forth between those elements, we occupy an imaginative space in which our own interpretation may emerge.

There are myriad associations at work within such a moment and the museum will never know exactly what conclusions we each draw from them.[9] However carefully constructed the rhythm of the exhibition, as visitors make room for the imaginative response that is required to quicken what they see, there is also space for misunderstandings, embellishments and

tangents. Despite that possibility, in museums' quest to engage every person who walks through their doors, this imaginative response is one of the most powerful forces at their disposal.

The effects of a rich, individual interaction can be found at every scale in the museum, beginning with the intimate meeting around a single exhibit. In this space between an object, its label and us, language plays a central role in sparking a personal interpretation. Label writing can be a complex, arduous process; more than ever it is the focus of extensive guidelines and evaluation. As museums have increasingly prioritized accessibility, there has been a significant effort to expand on the impenetrable 'tombstone' labels of old, when only a skeleton of titles, dates and provenance were given. Those labels seem to fall into the 'transmission model' of museum communication described by Eilean Hooper-Greenhill as, 'transmitting ideas across space from a knowledgeable information source to a passive receiver'.[10] Writing in 1994, she argued that education and communication theory were moving from that model towards a 'cultural model' that acknowledged 'people as active in making sense of their social environments . . . [and] that plural views exist and that they are all legitimate'.[11] In the years since, that shift has led to an even greater consideration of the diverse knowledge and outlook of museum audiences, and this is undoubtedly important. Yet we wonder how often self-conscious label writing irons out the very attributes of a direct connection between a storyteller and their audience that stimulate active, imaginative engagement: the feeling that someone is speaking straight to us, that we are in the safe hands of a storyteller, and that it is important that we, the audience, are present.

The relationship between an author and their readers is, of course, the focus of extensive study and discussion. While Roland Barthes favours the death of the author so that their identity cannot impose limits on our reading, Michel Foucault argues that the absence of authorial context is not always that liberating. In museum narratives we agree with Seymour Chatman that, at some level, 'interpretation implies a narrator'.[12] We feel that the presence of a narrator or author in museums, both anonymous and named, affects our engagement. Most museum texts and labels are unsigned, yet we know that someone *has* written them. Such labels can be an interesting mix of the trustworthy voice of a public institution and the emphatic language of an individual. When the anonymous voice of the label is replaced by a named author, we must then consider what they bring to the story and why they have been invited to take a part in its telling. We begin with two examples of storytelling that flourish within anonymous label structures. We go on to consider eponymous interpretation by looking at invited guests in the museum and a poet's contribution.

Postman's Park is the site of George Watts' *Memorial of Heroic Self-Sacrifice*. Watts, a celebrated painter, established the memorial in 1900 to commemorate ordinary people who died making extraordinary efforts to save others (Plates 20.1 and 20.2). The memorial contains over 50 plaques: the wording of each is composed like a label outlining names, dates and locations, with no more than 30 words to tell the story and no author credit. Each brave act can be universally appreciated, yet it also gives an insight into some very particular perils of Victorian life, including exploding boilers, startled horses and quicksand.

This remarkable collection of very short stories[13] is crafted with language at once precise and emotive. Perhaps their author shared some intentions with one master of the short story, Ernest Hemingway, who learned how to 'get the most from the least, how to prune language . . . how to multiply intensities, and how to tell nothing but the truth in a way that allowed for telling more than the truth'.[14] Despite the repetitive format, each commemoration feels real

and compelling because of rich, poignant details. Though no author is acknowledged, their lexical choices, saying 'perished' or 'succumbed' rather than 'died', for example, indicate that *someone* took note and had a feeling about how to tell the most affective story.[15] In turn, that feeling has a little more impact on us too.

At the American Folk Art Museum in New York one label begins, '[a] life of poverty, illness and crushing sorrow could not prevent Chester Cornett from establishing a reputation as a highly inventive chair maker'. As captivating as the opening lines of great novels, the labels in this museum are written with lightness, imagination and enough knowledge to suggest contexts to engage many different audiences. Like the memorials of Postman's Park, they arouse curiosity and keep us reading. Yet they also suggest untidy lives and intriguing, unanswered questions. We find this a rare example of interpretation that reflects the incomplete stories and inconsistent motivations of which life is full.

Both these examples are the work of gifted storytellers with an assured and lively delivery that holds our attention and expands our horizons. Though we may not know their names, we feel a direct connection; someone *must* tell us something and we are compelled to listen. You can hear that compulsion in the director of the British Museum, Neil MacGregor's, voice as he describes the great marvels of his museum in the BBC Radio 4 series, *A History of the World in 100 Objects*. This urgency and enthusiasm draws us closer to the story and away from the neutrality of so many museum labels. Whether written or spoken, we believe such distinctive voices can have a great impact on the way we respond to a story.

One way to include distinctive voices in museums is to invite alternative labels by familiar names so that their take on the story can inform or challenge our own responses and those of the museum itself. Such invitations usually extend to those with expertise in the subject at hand. For Tate Britain's exhibition *Rude Britannia: British Comic Art*, Steve Bell, Harry Hill, Gerald Scarfe and *Viz* magazine were invited to contribute labels or interventions to complement those of the curator.[16] Bell told the story of George Cruikshank's *The Worship of Bacchus*, encouraging a closer look at the piece and the chance to see the world through the eyes of both notable caricaturists. The guests' additions circled around the Tate's own interpretation, reflecting a key theme of the exhibition: satirists' playful, barbed digs at the establishment. Similarly, the texts accompanying the Museum of Everything's *Exhibition #1* included the voices of well-known artists and curators such as Peter Blake, Ed Rucha and Hans Ulrich Obrist, with the voice of the museum's own curator as a foil.[17] Looking from so many viewpoints offered visitors a compelling opportunity to orientate their own interpretation amongst myriad possibilities.

Looking beyond interpretation written specifically for exhibitions, encountering museum collections through fiction or poetry can, as Susan Pearce describes, get to the heart of our 'human social past',[18] and show us ways to explore our uncertainties. Seamus Heaney's poem, *The Tollund Man*, draws the reader in close to the circumstances that may have brought this Iron Age man to his peaty grave.[19] Heaney wrote an extract of the poem in the guest book of Silkeborg Museum in 1973; now a Danish translation has become part of the website interpretation of the museum where the Tollund Man lies.[20] This poem is an example of skilful writing that can both expand and magnify what we find in the museum. Dianne Meredith describes the value of this; 'Fictive works of the imagination are not just the products of perception but are perception. In this way, imagination itself is a source of knowledge of the environment and is, in that sense, "true".'[21]

While museum interpretation, particularly in historical contexts, includes journalists', novelists' or poets' work as primary source material, we wonder how often present-day writers are routinely included in the museum interpretation process because of the *way* in which they can tell a story. Canadian writer, Jennifer Ellison, has described the impact a journalist had on a museum's process of interpretation, but instances like this appear to be rare.[22] Though we appreciate the specialist skills of those working in interpretation, we wonder how novelists such as Orhan Pamuk or Annie Proulx, or journalists like Fergal Keane, might tell an exhibition's tale. With the potential to provoke or captivate, a discrete narrator's voice could highlight that one way of telling a story is never the only way, show how language can amplify and distort meaning, and encourage us to consider who tells our stories and why.

Revealing the process

For in silence, in gaps, there is presence.[23]

It is striking that the museum professionals who tell the stories of exhibitions are rarely acknowledged in the way authors or editors in other narrative contexts are recognized. In books we often have some sense of an author, their background or interests, and how one book might connect to the next. Whether this peripheral information slants how we read the work or not, it gives us a critical context. In exhibitions, by contrast, beyond a list of credits by the exit, that context is often much harder for visitors to find. We believe that hearing more from the people who have told the story of an exhibition could mean visitors feel more at ease with their own efforts to make sense of what they see.

The process of tracing a story and drawing conclusions can involve contested or fractured ideas, and absent information. When the museum shines light through the missing pieces in the puzzle, it allows space for discussion about what could go in that place. So showing stories in museums to be incomplete is an opportunity to construct understanding through dialogue: with ourselves, with those we came to the museum with, and with the curators, historians and the people in the story. Without this acknowledgement of uncertainty or mystery, we feel that the 'museum voice' may seem unassailable. When a veneer of certainty could appear to be a way of keeping other opinions at bay or perpetuating accepted versions of events, stereotypes or misunderstandings, we feel that acknowledging incomplete stories gives visitors critical tools to both appreciate and question the museum's role.

The artefacts in museums are 'cultural witnesses'.[24] For as long as museums have housed those artefacts, they have also contained the choices of the people who first crafted an object, as well as those who have preserved, interpreted or simply gazed at it. Museums are, as Julian Spalding says, 'riddled with past thoughts'.[25] In this way museums are where we, and other people, separated by time and space, can meet. Those who work in museums make these meetings possible and in so doing add their own voice to the mix. It is possible to see evidence of these layers all around the museum, from the extent and scope of a collection, to the remnants of old architectural and display strategies, and yellowing labels yet to be updated. As displays are modernized, earlier efforts are lost, and between phases of renovation, interpretations overlap or jar and gaps are filled in. Those layers must surely have influenced contemporary interpretation, so becoming aware of uncertainties or disagreements could greatly inform our own sense of a story.

Yet discord and vacillation seem to be rare in exhibition interpretation or design. Is this, perhaps, because the museum might risk losing the confidence of its visitors? We would suggest that where it is addressed thoughtfully, such uncertainty could in fact boost visitors' confidence in the museum and their appreciation of the work museum professionals are undertaking. For example, when visiting the Ashmolean recently, we noticed that the gallery dedicated to conservation was inspiring more animated conversations amongst visitors than any other part of the museum. The displays, illustrating a conservator's dilemmas and skills, showcased examples of attempts at conservation that now seem inept and even destructive. In the Indian city of Agra a label at the Ghaznin Gate deftly addresses the push and pull of history. There are strong emotions associated with the object, and its label is honest about the state in which we find it today.[26] Both examples show how museums and their collections have changed in meaning, exposing the instability, the missing pieces, the fissures in the story. It is a strategy that sparks questions. It is a way of turning the audience into detectives within and beyond the museum's walls, giving them a sense of critical agency in the experience.

When museums highlight something they do not understand and the methods they are using to learn more, we are drawn into the story. Visitors may not solve the mystery either, but we believe it could be very compelling to watch the museum's work evolving. The infectious excitement of not knowing is perfectly demonstrated on the Tenement Museum of New York's blog.

> Back in November, we found a letter in the basement fireplace of 97 Orchard Street. It had fallen behind a wall and had sat there, untouched, perhaps as far back as 1933, when it was mailed . . . Everyone was abuzz about what could be inside. Friends on Twitter wondered if it was a love letter, hidden where it wouldn't be found.[27]

Everyone waited for the brittle envelope to acclimatize and become supple enough to open. In the end, it was . . . an invoice.

Curiosity is sparked in uncertainties like this, offering an experience that strongly reflects life, where few ideas are watertight or stay static for long. But we must also ask: if we invite visitors to draw their own conclusion, how comfortable are we about leaving room for them to get it 'wrong' or become disappointed when there is no clear conclusion to the story?

Unfolding connections

> Confusion is the state of promise, the fertile void where surprise is possible again.[28]

We began by talking about the central part stories play in our lives. At school we are taught to write them with a beginning, middle and end, clipping experiences into a comprehensive package so that we might seek out some meaning. These 'negotiations with reality'[29] are a way of keeping bewildering chaos at bay. As Joan Didion says,

> [w]e tell ourselves stories in order to live. We look for the sermon in the suicide, for the social or moral lesson in the murder of five. We interpret what we see, select the most workable of the multiple choices. We live entirely . . . by the imposition of a narrative line upon disparate images, by the ideas with which we have learnt to freeze the shifting phantasmagoria which is our actual experience.[30]

But are we too quick to latch onto neat, comprehensible story patterns when we find ourselves in museums surrounded by unfamiliar artefacts? As the deconstructionist Eugenio Donato has argued, it may be misguided to believe that 'displacement of fragment for totality, object to label, series of objects to series of labels, can still produce a representational understanding of the world'.[31] B. S. Johnson takes that argument even further: 'Life does not tell stories. Life is chaotic, fluid, random; it leaves myriads of ends untidied, untidily. Writers can extract a story from life only by strict, close selection, and this must mean falsification. Telling stories is really telling lies.'[32]

Though Johnson's argument may seem somewhat bleak, it should be acknowledged that a key part of the postmodern canon is that the past *is* a fiction or, as Jerome Bruner puts it: 'History never simply happens: it is constructed by historians.'[33] We wonder why this is so rarely explicit in museums. We recognize that relinquishing sole authorship or a neat storyline presents difficult questions for the museum; if there is space for other opinions or new contributions to an accepted version of events, will the museum's role become compromised, its expertise undermined? Here we outline three examples of storytelling outside the museum that make uncertainties manifest and leave threads open-ended without diminishing the strength of the original voice. Each example enriches experience and engenders social interaction in ways that could also apply to museum narratives.

The Missing Voice: Case Study B,[34] an audio walk by Janet Cardiff, elegantly demonstrates this dance of control between the narrator's voice and the listener's imagination. The walk begins in Whitechapel Library in East London. The listener is directed to a crime novel: a literary form that is usually engineered so that it ends in neat resolution. This is comprehensible narrative territory. However, the listener is then led out onto the street to find that people in Cardiff's constructed narratives are missing, and different people, in reality, replace them. Recorded sounds collide with contemporary ones and a single, neat story becomes impossible. Every step is full of potential as the listener becomes very conscious that each person they pass is experiencing this same space in countless different ways.

During the walk the listener is in the vulnerable position of following someone else's lead. As a result they pay attention, looking at their immediate environment with a sense of hyperacuity. As they move through the streets, reading significance into a glance or the brush of shoulders, events become intriguing and questions arise. This uncertainty breeds a sense of excitement tinged with apprehension. Yet it is kept in check by an underlying confidence: for the piece to succeed, the listener must trust that Cardiff is not leading them into places that could compromise their safety.

Trust is a fundamental ingredient to any approach that allows mystery, uncertainty and active discovery to disrupt comfort. Though we do not want to dismiss the anxiety that may occur when visitors feel they do not understand what they find in a museum, we should not forget that they visit to enjoy some measure of that sensation too. Robert Storr argues that visitors:

> like the estrangement that art precipitates so long as they are not needlessly caught off guard. The exhibition-maker's job is to arrange this encounter between people and what puzzles them in such a fashion that they will derive the maximum benefit and pleasure from it [. . .].[35]

Though he is referring to art galleries, we believe his comment applies to museums too. If unstable narratives are used in an exhibition, the visitor must believe that they are not being

wilfully placed in perilous confusion. This trust, as Dinah Casson has stated, is the 'museum's contract'.[36]

However, trust is not all we need. To engage with an open-ended experience we must have some confidence in forming our own opinions, or indeed, be comfortable in uncertainty. When *Missing Voice* ends, Cardiff hands over the reins in 'a particularly brave and open resolution'.[37] The listener must find their way back alone, weaving Cardiff's narrative and theirs together. As the storyteller relinquishes control, the audience becomes responsible for the unfolding narrative. When stories call on our own individual input, they can be so mobile that different 'truths' will keep emerging. As Michael Jackson says, '[i]t is a truism that all stories get subtly reshaped and reconstrued every time they are told'.[38] And so while few may wish to see stories as the 'lies' Johnson suggests, most of us would agree that what we each experience is never the whole story.

The work of the theatre group, Punchdrunk, illuminates what happens when more people are drawn into the dialogue. The company takes over whole buildings to stage their immersive promenade performances. The action takes place in different rooms simultaneously. Masked for anonymity, visitors are given the freedom to roam and follow any plot line or performer they choose. It is impossible to see it all. It may feel unsettling, but does inspire great engagement. During the performance audience members are encouraged to retire to a bar to talk. As Colin Nightingale, Punchdrunk's producer, explains:

> The more they talk, the more they get out of the whole experience because they start to understand what other people have seen and they piece it all together. Suddenly the whole experience is not just about what we've presented, it's not just about what they've seen, it's all about the other, different connections that they've made.[39]

Each individual's uncertain experience becomes a social experience as they share ideas and construct conclusions. When so much activity in museums centres around informal conversations within family groups, perhaps this sort of uncertainty could increase participation and support a socially constructed approach to learning.

In the HBO television series *The Wire*, the creator, David Simon, employs a mode of storytelling described as 'productive confusion'.[40] The fictional series puts the city of Baltimore under its lens, examining socio-political themes from the illegal drug trade to the schooling system. The viewer is sucked into a complex network of characters. While commercial television has traditionally demanded repetition and clarity, to allow for new or erratic viewers, the writers of *The Wire* believe we should have to work to understand the complexities of their vision of the city. They do not offer additional dialogue to explain procedures or motivations; instead, they allow viewers to feel disoriented and confused, so that they pay attention and, crucially, can enjoy the accompanying satisfaction when the clarity in the story eventually emerges.[41]

A key to the success of experiences like these is that the creators have a detailed sense of the individual stories that make up the whole and have established a structure in which the audience has space to make their own connections. In a museum this approach would need to be planned with even greater precision than a single-story exhibition, yet would, conversely, relinquish more control. It is a tricky balancing act but one that we believe is worth trying. Complex, open-ended stories invite us to lean in and pay attention; we can feel a great sense of achievement when we have got to grips with something we could not comprehend at first.

To conclude, we believe that uncertain experiences are critically important in museums. In a world where access to information and opinion is accelerating, our curiosity, the questions we ask, how we edit and evaluate, will become paramount. Museums are the places in which we can hone those skills of navigation and discernment, places where we should expect to feel and even enjoy unfamiliar emotions. Even the busiest museum can foster quiet space in our minds where we may safely view the world from conflicting stances and explore ideas we are unsure of without feeling tested or on show.[42] We all have questions that may never be answered; perhaps we may find some consolation in encountering that which we do not understand or cannot comprehend in museums.

The multitude of viewpoints that are moulding the online world make it clear to see that history is, as Raphael Samuel says, 'a social form of knowledge; the work, in any given instance, of a thousand different hands'.[43] The grand narratives of history may owe much to personal interpretation; memory splinters a chronology, yet history is constructed from those splinters. When museums uncover the gaps, choices, uncertainties and embellishments in authorship and individual interpretation, we all gain in critical skills and empathy. Exercising this very human kind of knowledge, we are moved when we see the world through another's eyes and we look at ourselves more carefully too.

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21

IN THE MUSEUM'S RUINS

Staging the passage of time

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The museum has always had a special and controversial relationship with time and history. Avant-garde artists have derided it as a cemetery where art and culture go to die, and Theodor W. Adorno has drawn attention to the stale and deathly emanations of the adjective 'museal'.[1] By contrast, historians and curators have argued it is in the museum, removed from life's vicissitudes, that works and artefacts live on to tell their stories of past civilizations as well as reflecting on our own. The museum's vast collections are often ordered according to time's arrow, roughly following a linear chronology. Yet, when described in such contrasting metaphors as charnel house of the arts, timeless pantheon of culture or history's dusty storeroom, the museum itself seems exempt from our everyday notion of time. It promises an environment in which temporality is suspended, whether in death or eternal life, that runs counter to our own experience of life's flux and constant change. As we shall see at various points throughout this chapter, the museum's complex relationship with time is most thought-provokingly articulated in various forms of pictorial representation rather than in its concrete architectural manifestations.

From the museum's inception, artists have been reflecting on its relationship with time. In 1796, while working on proposals to improve the galleries at the newly created Muséum central des Arts at the Louvre, the French artist Hubert Robert presented two contrasting visions of the Grande Galerie.[2] The first shows the gallery much improved with evenly spaced display bays and skylights where citizens and artists view, study or copy the works; the second depicts it in ruins. Whether its sad state is the result of natural catastrophe, of time or war, remains unclear. In the rubble life goes on. Some people seem to be cooking on an open fire, others scramble about in the debris like tourists in Rome or Pompeii. In the midst of the mayhem squats an artist. He is sketching the Apollo Belvedere at whose feet perches a bust of Raphael while the torso of one of Michelangelo's slaves slants not far off to the right. His copies will serve as inspiration for new art and ensure the continuation of culture. In the museum, past, present and future remain intimately connected, even if among the ruins aspirations of cultural rebirth may seem almost utopian. Robert's vision of the Grande Galerie's futures, one in planning and the other distant but seemingly inevitable, inscribes the museum in the cycle of culture's rise and fall which Denis Diderot described so eloquently when discussing Robert's works at the 1767 salon exhibition:

The effect of these compositions, good and bad, is to leave you in a state of sweet mel-ancholy. Our glance lingers over the debris of a triumphal arch, a portico, a pyramid, a temple, a palace, and we retreat into ourselves; we contemplate the ravages of time, and in our imagination we scatter the rubble of the very buildings in which we live over the ground, in that moment solitude and silence prevail around us, we are the sole survivors of an entire nation that is no more. Such is the first tenet of the poetics of ruins.[3]

The staccato listing of architectural fragments triggers the conflation of past and present, and fantasies of a future in which a debris-strewn landscape heralds complete destruction and cul-tural deracination. But all is not as bad as it seems because Diderot's poetics of ruins leaves us in 'a state of sweet melancholy' rather than dark despair. Suddenly we are time travellers and the sole survivors of our own culture as he invites us to contemplate the passage of time and the inevitable passing of civilizations.

In what follows I offer an exploration of the museum's relationship with time and history, which has been clearly articulated in terms of pictorial representation ever since the museum's beginnings. Yet the architecture of the museum has remained a strangely timeless place which has denied its own participation in temporal processes. I have chosen the city of Berlin as our place of exploration, the setting for an archaeological promenade that will eventually lead us to the Neues Museum.

Berlin re-membered

The subtle and compelling echoes and absences evoked and explored in the work of Bettina Pousttchi and Candida Höfer offer further reflections on memory, history and representation. In 2009 the two artists converged on Berlin. Höfer photographed the empty spaces of the newly rebuilt Neues Museum (I shall return to these later in this chapter), and Pousttchi was commissioned to produce work for the Temporäre Kunsthalle. On the walls of the art box the artist conjured a mirage of the recently destroyed Palast der Republik. The GDR's signature building – parliament, people's palace and entertainment centre in one – had been defunct since the reunification of Germany in 1990.[4] For over a decade its future was hotly debated and its demolition, when it finally occurred between 2006 and 2008, protracted and contro-versial. The Palast der Republik had been erected in the precise location of the Hohenzollern Stadtschloss. Like so much of Berlin's urban fabric, the Schloss had been heavily damaged in the air raids of the Second World War. But unlike the museums on nearby Museumsin-sel which were gradually rebuilt and restored, the palace found no favour with the socialist agenda of the GDR. Regarded as an unwanted relic of the oppressive monarchist regimes of the past it was blown up in 1950 and replaced by a different kind of palace, that of the repub-lic, eventually built between 1973 and 1976. The Schlossplatz at the heart of Berlin has been a focal point of the city's continuous and contentious building and rebuilding. The latest in this sequence of symbolic destructions and constructions is the projected reconstruction of the Stadtschloss as part of the new Humboldt-Forum. More, perhaps, than in any other major city, in Berlin history is literally written and rewritten in stone as places become palimpsests of urban archaeology where just a little digging reveals layer upon layer of long-lost or deliber-ately discarded historical monuments and memories.

In her work *Echo* Bettina Pousttchi covered the outside of the Temporäre Kunsthalle with 970 sheets of photographic wallpaper which together offered a black-and-white *trompe l'oeil* of

the Palast der Republik. Not only was it blatantly wrong in scale, the artist also added imaginary touches of her own such as a clock on two opposite sides of the art box frozen at different times, exactly an hour apart. She had based her 'reconstruction' on media images and inserted the tell-tale greyscale stripe that mars transmitted images when re-photographed. She challenged her audience's ability to remember the palace as it had been, forcing us to realize that it is mostly the media image we encounter in newspapers or flickering on our television screens that shapes our collective memory. The act of remembering, literally a piecing together of the past, becomes a sifting of the visual record, and a manipulation of it. What remains is a faint echo of the Palast der Republik, a conjured hallucination of a recent past only half-remembered. Pousttchi's work also referenced the persuasive power of the image which has repeatedly been deployed on the Schlossplatz and nearby. In 1993 a full-scale mock-up of the Stadtschloss was erected; it was intended to return the Schloss to public consciousness in the hope of generating wide support for its proposed reconstruction. To this day the tarpaulins of another mock-up continue to flap in the wind and invite donations for the reconstruction of Schinkel's famous Bauakademie.

The heart of historical Berlin has seen a series of urban facts and fictions go up and come down. Despite its illustrious lineage as a building for the arts, the status of the Temporäre Kunsthalle was, as its name implies, temporary. It has played its own irreverent and self-reflexive role in the swift succession of cultural artefacts on the Schlossplatz where it resided for two years, from 2008 to 2010. Like no other work shown by the Temporäre Kunsthalle, *Echo* alluded to the constant changes to the urban fabric which have turned Schlossplatz into a simulacrum and a hallucinatory space where time seems to oscillate. The work reflected the site's contested and conflicting ideologies which continue to compete for attention and validation. It commented ironically on the quicksand rewriting of Berlin's past, present and future. According to the novelist Peter Schneider, in Berlin 'there are always new cracks in the asphalt, and out of them the past grows luxuriantly'.[5] The unknowing tourist explores a city 'where, since yesterday, a thousand years have passed'.[6] Let us pretend to be such unknowing tourists visiting the city and its museums.

From a twenty-first-century perspective, Diderot's fantasy of total destruction no longer just generates a mildly pleasurable frisson but takes on far grimmer connotations. Rarely, of course, has the cultural deracination and loss of national identity been as pronounced as in post-war Germany where the poignant term 'zero hour' simultaneously marked the end of history and a new beginning. Some sixty-five years after the end of the Second World War, and over twenty years on from the fall of the Berlin Wall, a unified Germany still struggles to confront its past, perhaps more searchingly than ever. Berlin, Germany's old and new capital, has been the focal point of this constant rewriting of history. Reunification has brought in its wake an anxious rethinking of German identity which has been embodied most iconically in Norman Foster's work on the Reichstag. The shell of the pompous late nineteenth-century government building which housed the parliament of the German Reich, has been trans-formed into the seat of democracy. The new debating chamber constitutes its late modernist heart and the transparent dome proclaims a new-found openness of political practices. The roof terrace offers panoramic views of the unified city. No amount of eagle-eyed scrutiny will reveal the traces of the Wall's zigzag that kept Schneider's narrator in thrall. We look out over a seamless whole; and on each of the four stocky corner turrets Germany's flag proudly flies. Svetlana Boym has called the Reichstag 'a perfect monument to normalization' which she described as 'a way of compromise, beyond the opposition of memory and forgetting, towards a "grown-up" attitude about the past'.[7]

Time and the museum

In 1800, the young Karl Friedrich Schinkel sketched an ideal museum. His vision was predicated on the past. It comprised a classical building with columned portico set in a vaguely classical landscape where monuments had an antique look and maidens wore graceful tunics. Schinkel's design inhabited an imagined space, possibly located in Arcadia and closer to a fictional past than any near future. This oscillating sense of time was to carry over into the museum Schinkel finally built in Berlin between 1815 and 1830. At the heart of the Altes Museum lies the impressive rotunda which housed the collection's masterpieces of Greco-Roman sculpture. The architect had conceived it as treasure house and liminal space designed to smooth the visitor's abrupt passage from the world outside to that of art. The rotunda served as a decompression chamber which prepared the visitor for the contemplation of art. Its magnificent architecture recalls antiquity and invokes the Pantheon in Rome. Here the notion of time shuttles back and forth between the present and the past. The museum's core celebrates the classical artistic ideal while the galleries, which surround the rotunda, spanned the history of Greco-Roman antiquity and of western painting from the Middle Ages to the mid-eighteenth century.[8] Two concepts of history were at work in Schinkel's Altes Museum. Whilst the chronologically arranged galleries enacted a Hegelian 'march through the history of man's striving for Absolute Spirit',[9] the museum's still core, the monumental rotunda, celebrated a timeless artistic ideal, a past that is to be emulated in the present. One feels it is here that Hubert Robert's artist, whom we have encountered in the imaginary ruins of the Grande Galerie, may choose to draw inspiration and hope for the continuation of artistic production.

The Hegelian march of progress was to fully unfold in the Neues Museum, which was conceived as an extension to Schinkel's Altes Museum, in fact rendering it 'alt' (old) in name, and built between 1843 and 1859.[10] The new museum's remit far exceeded that of the old, which rested on the traditional twin pillars of nineteenth-century artistic identity – classical antiquity and High Renaissance painting. The Neues Museum encompassed an exceptional collection of Egyptian antiquities, Germanic pre-historical objects, ethnographical artefacts, a survey of European sculpture in casts, and prints and drawings. It can be regarded as the first ever museum of cultural history. Two strategies attempted to bind the disparate displays into a coherent whole. The galleries offered a lavishly decorated context for the collections. The architecture of the Egyptian court was modelled on ancient precedents. Its frescoed walls presented iconic monuments in their native landscapes (Figure 21.1). Thus the individual galleries helped frame the works on display and invited the visitor to drift past the painted architectures of ancient Rome and Egypt, or to contemplate the intricate mythologies of the Germanic sagas. In the interplay between the objects on display and the carefully researched room settings the museum offered a sequence of immersive and didactic interiors reminiscent of dioramas. The historical fragment, survivor of time and destruction, was brought home into a scenography of display that aimed to evoke a full sense of the culture it had once belonged to.

At the heart of the Neues Museum was a hall of epic dimensions. It contained a soaring staircase which provided access to the museum's three floors. Its walls were decorated with a six-part cycle of frescoes which depicted seminal stages in the history of mankind, executed between 1847 and 1866. In Wilhelm von Kaulbach's monumental murals history's progress is brutal and bloody. It begins with destruction: the tower of Babel is toppled; then Jerusalem is

FIGURE 21.1   The Egyptian Courtyard, Neues Museum, Berlin. Reproduced with kind permission of Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz. Photo: M. Giebelhausen.

destroyed by the Romans. Violent rifts are part of history's relentless progress; cultures rise and fall and meet forceful deaths at the hands of higher manifestations of culture. History is presented as a progression of dramatic shifts culminating in the Reformation, which was to serve as the Protestant foundations of a future Prussia. Hegel's teleological concept of history has here been mobilized to validate the grand aspirations towards a unified Germany as an epoch-shaping nation state. That dream was shortly to be fulfilled. In 1871 the German Empire was proclaimed. This is a history without backward glances, meditation or melancholy. It ascends in a steep straight line, just like the museum's monumental staircase. In climbing the stairs the visitor experienced history's upward surge. Unlike Schinkel's rotunda in the Altes Museum which mediated between 'real time' and 'museum time', between the mundane and the ideal, time in the Neues Museum made visible and was one with a Hegelian concept of history: forever onward and upward. In the course of the twentieth century its brutal aspirations would be fully played out as Europe and large parts of the world were plunged into two devastating wars. The museum's partial destruction was itself a result of allied bombing in February 1945.

'The extraordinary ruin': the Neues Museum now

In October 2009 – after sixty years of neglect, partial use and heavy-handed attempts to stabilize the structure – the Neues Museum finally opened its doors once more to an expectant

public. David Chipperfield, its architect, has described the vision for the museum's rebuilding as one that aimed to avoid creating 'a memorial to destruction' or 'a historical reproduction'. Instead, so he argued, the work took its cue from 'the extraordinary ruin'. The aim was 'to protect and make sense of' those remains: 'where all parts of the building attempt to inflect to a singular idea: an idea not of what is lost, but what is saved'.[11] Chipperfield and his collaborator Julian Harrap have trodden a delicate path strewn with debris and salvaged fragments. They have pieced together from the shards, to which Chipperfield has added a cool modern classicism of his own, a structure whose volume is that of the Neues Museum. The elegant bleakness of the central hall immediately makes clear that no attempt has been made to let the Neues Museum rise phoenix-like from its ashes. The museum's contextual and didactic displays and the grandly overarching Hegelian notion of history that fuelled its decoration scheme have not been restored to their former extravagant glory. In a post-reunification Germany such dreams of nationhood remain forever tainted by nightmare visions.

Candida Höfer's striking photographs confront the Neues Museum head on. Their strict symmetry endows the interiors with a sense of *gravitas*.[12] The spaces are flooded with natural light which plays on the surfaces as if caressing them. Long exposures linger on the building's bruised textures. The lens pays close attention to what is saved. It treats old fragments and new structures with equal care. Monumentality and vulnerability are thus combined. Höfer's pictures document a fleeting moment in the building's history. They show the galleries before and during the re-installation of the permanent collection. The museum has not yet quite awoken from its long slumber. The empty interiors feel deserted yet expectant. Time seems suspended. The indeterminacy bleeds into the images themselves. While some speak unequivocally of a here and now, in others the colours are muted and bleached, making them forgetful witnesses. The photographs seem laden with the building's age, to belong to its past rather than documenting its present. In a paradoxical way their temporal ambivalence seems to make them a truer record. It is as if they capture not just an instant but the museum's entire history.

A similar rupture of our notion of time occurs in the galleries themselves. On the top floor, amongst all kinds of historical artefacts, I chanced upon some colourful crystalline forms which caught my attention. The label read: Durch Brandbomben zerschmolzene Glasperlen 1945 (glass beads destroyed by fire bombs, 1945) (Figure 21.2). It told nothing of the beads' original context, provenance or maker but focused exclusively on the nature and time of their destruction. This striking absence of basic information rendered them almost pre-historical, without a knowable past. The label seemed handwritten, in black ink and an old-fashioned manner, and the cream-coloured card faded. It was deceptively posing as a historical object in its own right which seemed to pre-date the gallery's installation in the autumn of 2009. Such posing is of course deliberate. This gallery, which had originally housed the collections of the royal *Kunstkammer*, attempts to evoke nineteenth-century display practices reminiscent of the time of the museum's inauguration. The objects are crammed together and heaped in historic vitrines. The labels are minimal and quaint and often tied to the artefacts with a piece of string, or absent altogether. Despite this hot-house historicizing of the former *Kunstkammer*, the gallery exudes an almost pathetic state of neglect, of life having leached out of it. We contemplate a relic of past times. But in this surreptitiously theatrical installation we are also cast as time travellers in the Palace of Porcelain when, suddenly, we come across the label and its date – 1945 – which seems shockingly recent and reads like a premonition of the museum's destruction.

FIGURE 21.2 Glass beads destroyed by fire bombs, displayed in Gallery 311 of the Neues Museum, Berlin. Reproduced with kind permission of Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz. Photo: M. Giebelhausen.

The Neues Museum is no stranger to the history of destruction. High up on the walls of the Greek courtyard runs Hermann Schievelbein's monumental Pompeii frieze (Figure 21.3). Crane your neck and bring binoculars, and you will discover an animated jumble of figures fleeing the legendary eruption of Vesuvius in AD 79. The scenes are loosely based on Edward Bulwer-Lytton's blockbuster novel, *The Last Days of Pompeii*, published in 1834. The city's inhabitants rush along Schievelbein's frieze in the hope of rescue. The ones on the East wall seek salvation in the open sea as well as in their Christian faith. The sculptor depicts himself and his family amongst those early Christians praying by the Bay of Naples. The fugitives on the West wall find shelter with distant neighbours to whom they offer their salvaged artefacts. They are greeted by Friedrich August Stüler, the museum's architect, and Ignaz Maria von Olfers, the first director general of the royal museums. In his lengthy and learned introduction to Bulwer-Lytton's novel, Friedrich Förster, who was working at the royal *Kunstkammer* and involved with the setting up of the Neues Museum as well as a co-editor of Hegel's writings, praised Pompeii's fate because instantaneous destruction had brought about the paradox of permanent preservation.[13] Volcanic ash and lava had buried the city, preserving it for the future attention of archaeologists like an insect in amber. In the Pompeii frieze, fact and fiction blur. Across time and space a fantasy is here played out of the museum as safe haven for cultural artefacts. In such thinking the museum stands apart from the march of time and history's destructive forces. Instead it welcomes orphaned objects into its collections, offering them the promise of resurrection and eternal life.

FIGURE 21.3   The Greek Courtyard, Neues Museum, Berlin. Reproduced with kind permission of Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz. Photo: M. Giebelhausen.

Little is left of the certainty of Hegel's teleology when ascending the monumental staircase of the Neues Museum today. Instead the building's battered structure reminded David Chipperfield of the etchings by the eighteenth-century architect and engraver Giovanni Battista Piranesi.[14] This implied analogy with the decaying monuments of ancient Rome may be appropriate for a structure that has itself been called an archaeological monument of the nineteenth century.[15] Chipperfield's flashback places the Neues Museum in the continuum of history in which it, too, becomes an impressive fragment of the past. The archaeological metaphor at work in Chipperfield's comparison is further borne out in a resonant passage of Walter Benjamin's 'A Berlin chronicle', which draws a parallel between the workings of memory and archaeology mediated in the imagined galleries of the museum.[16] His concept of history is one founded on destruction. Benjamin also memorably claimed '[t]here has never been a document of culture, which is not simultaneously one of barbarism', defining cultural heritage as 'the spoils . . . carried along in the triumphal procession'.[17] This view of history culminated in the often quoted cryptic vision of the angel of history who 'sees one single catastrophe, which unceasingly piles rubble on top of rubble' while mere mortals still try to make sense of 'the appearance of a chain of events'.[18] Against teleological concepts of history Benjamin set a relentless catastrophic unfolding.

The shards and plunder of history are everywhere on display in the Neues Museum. Our walk through the collection of pre- and early history starts in Gallery 102, entitled 'Odin, Urns and Looted Art'. Originally part of the Neues Museum it became an independent museum

of pre- and early history in 1931 and was severely damaged in the Second World War. The remnants have now returned to the Neues Museum. In several text panels and vitrines demonstratively laden with broken artefacts, the collection's turbulent history is retold. An adjacent gallery is dedicated to Heinrich Schliemann's rediscovery of Troy. It shows, amongst original artefacts, facsimile reproductions of the legendary gold treasure that was carried off by the Soviet forces in the wake of the Second World War and still awaits return to the museum. Cultural heritage does continue its double life as spoils of war, which also calls into question the practices of archaeology and notions of original ownership. When scrutinizing Schliemann's magnificent Trojan finds we are invited to contemplate the objects' continued fate. Their current locations in Berlin and Moscow are, in fact, both flukes of history and thousands of miles from Hisarlik. Whilst in the 1850s Stüler and Olfers, the museum's architect and first director general, could still confidently offer artefacts a safe and seemingly eternal sanctuary, the current displays make clear to the twenty-first-century visitor that the museum, too, is not exempt from the vagaries of history. In our eyes the objects seem to perch precariously in their vitrines rather than to have found a truly permanent home.

History is in constant flux, its ebb and flow encompasses the museum itself. On the second floor a small room, the Fragmentarium, displays some of the museum's very own shards not included in the rebuilding such as the garish fragments from the Egyptian courtyard and other decorative detailing (Figure 21.4). The time of the Neues Museum, mid-nineteenth-century Berlin and its fabulous fantasies of other times and places so enthusiastically expressed in the

FIGURE 21.4   The Fragmentarium, Neues Museum, Berlin. Reproduced with kind permission of Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz. Photo: M. Giebelhausen.

museum's original decoration scheme has found its place in the museum. It has itself become an object of archaeology. The notion of history as archaeology that 'delve[s] to ever-deeper levels' is also applied to the most recent past.[19] Having walked through the galleries showing artefacts from the Bronze and Iron Ages we enter a display dedicated to the 'archaeology of Berlin'. Low-lying showcases contain objects that have been reclaimed from the soil of the city. The latest dig documented here is one that took place in the former death strip close to the Berlin Wall. It brought to light domestic porcelain shards, a broken record, an iron grave marker as well as the shells of flares fired by GDR border patrols and a piece of barbed wire. Together these small objects tell the story of a patch of Berlin soil before and during the time of the Wall which disrupted the mundane routine of living and dying. The Wall may have disappeared and its zigzag outline is now almost impossible to trace, but in the city's archaeology it remains forever present.

'Haunted by the burden of history'[20]

A visit to the Neues Museum offers a complex experience of time and history. The Hegelian teleology is broken, and no one is trying to fix it. From the ruins emerges a new museum that openly acknowledges the fragility of its fabric. The patchwork of paint and plaster, the broken columns, the frescoed visions of ancient worlds faded and water-stained, all speak eloquently of the passage of time and the ravages of war. Perhaps history's residue is best felt in the central hall, now stripped of its iconographical programme. The walls are bare. Just a few vestiges of coloured plaster cling to the bricks. Fragments from the friezes of four Greek monuments – among them the Parthenon and the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus – offer a distant echo of the museum's rich collection of plaster casts, long since lost.

The stairs have been rebuilt in concrete mixed with marble chips, a material both uncompromisingly modern and sumptuous. Chipperfield's decision to retrace their original upward surge bestows on the central hall a monumental grandeur and serenity without restoring the original Hegelian rationale of the museum ritual. A quick glance at the other design to have made the final shortlist may help characterize the particular nature of Chipperfield's treatment. The Californian architect Frank O. Gehry proposed to transform the central hall into almost an expressionist stage set which is dominated by a dizzyingly swirling roller coaster of a staircase. Such analogies drawn from the worlds of the theatre and cinema as well as from the fairground, chime with the contemporary role of the museum in the tourist and leisure industries. In contrast, Chipperfield offers a far more enigmatic experience. We are invited to contemplate a vast space whose exposed and partly rebuilt materiality is marked by destruction. The calcinated columns are still singed by the heat of the fire that tore through the central hall in February 1945. The scraps of original plaster together with the reintroduction of a few plaster reliefs heighten the poignant impression of absence. The central hall thus becomes a deliberately inflected void, a term associated with the ultimate monument to the tragic absences of Berlin. As one of his inspirations for the Jewish Museum, Daniel Libeskind cited *One Way Street*, which he called 'Benjamin's apocalypse of Berlin'.[21] It seems Walter Benjamin has also become the guiding spirit – if less openly acknowledged – behind the new displays of the Neues Museum.

The archaeological promenade that runs along the spine of the Museumsinsel connects four of the five museums on the island; it also helps to channel the ever-swelling stream of visitors, currently just over three million annually, and take them past some of the collections'

signature exhibits.[22] Artefacts along the route have been grouped according to overarching themes such as 'Time and History', 'Journey to the Netherworld' or 'World Order'. Each section brings together objects from different historical periods and geographical regions. Arcane periodizations meaningful only to the expert, so the argument goes, have been given up in order to appeal to the tourist visitor and to show the stunning breadth of the archaeological collections.[23] Such universalizing of cultures offers a contemplative experience rather than fostering specific knowledge or understanding. It echoes Diderot's description of the bricolage found in Robert's paintings of ruins. One suspects the eighteenth-century *philosophe* would have appreciated the shared affinities with the archaeological promenade on Museumsinsel.

The Neues Museum's wounded fabric, now lovingly preserved with its blemishes exposed and aestheticized in the name of authenticity, promotes a 'poetics of ruins' so long denied in post-war Germany, where the remnants of the Second World War had been energetically swept away to make space for a new age that had set its clocks to 'zero hour'. In their perceptive study, *The Inability to Mourn*, Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich have diagnosed a cultural sterility in post-war Germany that found expression in a transparent modernist architecture which knew no past and was widely used for official buildings and cultural institutions.[24] Rare, in contrast, were efforts to preserve the war's raw ruins as an integral part of the cityscape. The Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtnis-Kirche is an iconic example. Due to popular protests, Egon Eiermann was forced to incorporate the spire's ruined remains, originally scheduled for demolition, into his final design of 1958.[25] It is, in fact, the ruin that anchors the modernist buildings. Together they create an exceptional ensemble that combines splinters of memory with an emblem of uncompromising modernity. For the Mitscherlichs, post-war Germany's insistence on sweeping away the ruins and debris of war, and with them the memory of the Nazi regime and its atrocities, constituted an extreme act of collective denial which eschewed the *Trauerarbeit* (process of mourning) necessary 'to incorporate the disasters of the past into the stock of experience of German young people'.[26] Hence the Mitscherlichs, writing in 1967, argued that extreme denial had provided the survival mechanism which enabled the citizens of the young Federal Republic to keep at bay a state of deep and debilitating melancholy.[27]

If Diderot's 'sweet melancholy' is a sentiment evoked by the contemplation of ruins, post-war Germany has so far found little space for either. Some sixty years after the end of the Second World War, Chipperfield's handling of the Neues Museum acknowledges a sense of ruin among the iconic cultural institutions on Museumsinsel. In his brief notes on the architectural concept of the museum's rebuilding, the architect referenced Eiermann's design for the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtnis-Kirche as an 'articulate collage of ruin and modern intervention'.[28] His own work on the museum, however, was inspired by a visual source: Piranesi's etchings which so seductively capture the colossal remains of ancient Rome. The crumbling walls escape our everyday experience of the present. The themed displays further destabilize chronology's iron rule and underscore a universal approach to past cultures which recalls Diderot's breathless staccato of architectural fragments cited earlier in this chapter. Archaeology's gaze has made even our own yesterdays appear ancient. We seem forever to be walking among ruins, those of our own culture as much as of previous cultures and cultures yet to come. In the picturesque galleries of the Neues Museum, ravaged by time and destruction and themselves located somewhere 'between two eternities',[29] we are allowed the possibility of experiencing Diderot's 'sweet melancholy' even in relation to artefacts and events from Germany's recent past. More than a generation on from the Mitscherlichs' remarks on 'the inability to mourn', the state of denial that disabled the process of mourning for fear of being

paralysed by a deep melancholy seems finally overcome. For Boym, writing in the 1990s, the Reichstag constituted 'a perfect monument to "normalization"'. The pronounced contrast of nineteenth-century masonry architecture and Norman Foster's late modernist glass-and-steel insertion reconfigured the building in ways that harked back to the transparent structures of the 1950s so characteristic of the Federal Republic's immediate post-war architecture. The Neues Museum also bears witness to Germany's traumatic twentieth-century history, offering a very different 'way of compromise, beyond the opposition of memory and forgetting, towards a "grown-up" attitude about the past'.[30] The building's battered materiality is theatrically staged to reveal the traces of a brutal past. But it also enables a poetics of ruination which, in generalized and aestheticized terms, envisages the course of history as one of destruction and inevitable decay.

Notes

 1 T. W. Adorno, 'Valéry Proust Museum', in his *Prisms*, trans. S. and S. Weber, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981, p. 175.
 2 Hubert Robert's *Vue imaginaire de la Grande Galerie du Louvre en ruines*, ca. 1796, Musée du Louvre. Online. Available at: www.louvre.fr/llv/oeuvres/detail_notice.jsp?CONTENT%3C%3Ecnt_id= 10134198673396402&CURRENT_LLV_NOTICE%3C%3Ecnt_id=10134198673396402&FOL DER%3C%3Efolder_id=9852723696500815&baseIndex=25. Accessed 10 August 2011.
 3 D. Diderot, *Diderot on Art*, vol. 2, *The Salon of 1767*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995, pp. 196–97.
 4 The GDR government closed the Palast der Republik on 19 September 1990, only three weeks before reunification, because of asbestos contamination of the building.
 5 P. Schneider, *The Wall Jumper*, London: Penguin Books, 2005, p. 6.
 6 Ibid., p. 5.
 7 S. Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, New York: Basic Books, 2001, p. 216.
 8 G. F. Waagen, *Verzeichniss der Gemälde-Sammlung des Königlichen Museums zu Berlin*, Berlin: Druckerei der Königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1837.
 9 D. Crimp, 'The Postmodern Museum', in his, *On the Museum's Ruins*, Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1993, p. 302.
10 For a detailed chronology of the building process see www.neues-museum.de/geschichte.php. Accessed 29 July 2011.
11 D. Chipperfield, 'Introduction', in R. Nys and M. Reichert (eds) *Neues Museum Berlin*, Köln: König, 2009, p. 11.
12 For Höfer's photographs of the Neues Museum, see ibid.
13 E. Bulwer-Lytton, *Die letzten Tage von Pompeji*, Potsdam: Riegel, 1837, p. I.
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26 Mitscherlich and Mitscherlich, *The Inability to Mourn*, p. 13.

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22

MEANINGFUL ENCOUNTERS WITH DISRUPTED NARRATIVES

Artists' interventions as interpretive strategies

Claire Robins and Miranda Baxter

Nearly 20 years ago Fred Wilson's intervention *Mining the Museum*, at the Maryland Historical Society, made an impression not just on one museum, but on many delegates attending the American Association of Museums' conference in Baltimore. In common with many other influential museum interventions made by artists, Wilson's work reconfigured a museum narrative and helped to move artists' interventions steadily from marginal to mainstream in museum programming.

Acknowledging that artists' interventions take many forms, we focus on disruptions to the normative contours of museum and gallery discourse where interventions destabilize fixity of meaning and subvert hegemonic narrative. Interventionist processes have emerged from an historical trajectory of institutional critique and bring with them parodic, ironic and disruptive methods. We ask: In what ways do these components contribute to the production of new meanings in museums and galleries? In what ways do visitors learn through disruption? Are these methods ethical and what are the risks?

In this chapter we use the term *artists' intervention* to describe a specific genre of art, located as an interlocutor within permanent gallery and museum collections and temporary exhibitions. It is now increasingly common to encounter contemporary art interspersed in an historic collection, where it is intended to set in motion a dialogue with permanent exhibits, proposing alternative possibilities for meaning to be made. As Lisa Corrin remarks, the presence of such contemporary anomalies, 'often works to disturb the tidiness of a museum's taxonomy to reveal the disjunctive and disconnected realities that the museum has created'.[1] The artist's intervention is an interpretation technology that seeks to reconfigure learning by disrupting taxonomies and contiguous narrative threads in exchange for those that meander and challenge. Its success, or failure, is largely reliant on dialogism, where the pedagogic potential is located.

When discussing the pedagogic potential and affects of artists' disruptions to museums' narratives, it is important to acknowledge that narrating and making visible a sense of order for the world has been central to the educational role of the public museum since its inception in the Enlightenment period.[2] As significant institutions, linked with the establishment of the public sphere and nation-states, museums are also implicated in the constitutional right to dissent and so are fundamental to the Western concept of democracy.

Concomitantly, as Foucault highlights, 'the Enlightenment which discovered the liberties also discovered the disciplines'.[3] Eighteenth-century emancipatory principles also came with new impositions of control achieved by ordering, observation, classification and narration. Where such contradictions abound, it is unsurprising, despite the egalitarian principles of the Enlightenment, that emergent divisions relating to hierarchies of knowledge and the privileging of certain constructions of meaning and learning would also become part of the museum's inheritance.

Amongst notable others, artists such as Mark Dion, Andrea Fraser, Susan Hiller, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, and James Luna have provided museum audiences of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries with an invitation to question powerful and influential ordering systems and narratives. These artists' methods of engagement with museums' narratives differ greatly, but disruption, parody and irony recur as favoured tropes. For example, artist Fred Wilson's Seattle Art Museum intervention, *The Museum: Mixed Metaphors* (1993), highlights, by use of parody and irony, the inherent problems of 'displaying others'[4] (Plate 22.1).

By inserting an anomaly, the Western suit, into the museum's permanent display of African culture, the intervention acts to disturb the museum's interpretation of art and artefacts. It also disrupts the expectations of many museum-goers who are likely to be more familiar with the display typology for the continent of Africa than with the artefacts displayed, (often from different regions and countries), or the people represented.

Wilson's accompanying text label for the suit reads:

> Certain elements of dress were used to designate one's rank in Africa's status-conscious capitals. A grey suit with conservatively patterned tie denotes a businessman or member of government. Costumes such as this are designed and tailored in Africa and worn throughout the continent.

Parody is played out through the appropriation of a particular tone and use of language (distanced, objective, didactic) typically deployed in galleries and museums. For example, for a Western viewer the term 'costume', when applied to a Western suit, seems inappropriate because it is commonly used to refer to items worn by 'others'. Wilson's intervention reveals the extent to which the easing of an object into a specific narrative is aided by an explicative label. The text, which usually fixes down and holds a particular meaning or 'truth', in this instance proffers an alternative 'truth', one that is incommensurate with the discourse of 'Africa on display' in many Western museums. Wilson undermines or 'mines', as he might say, the museum's claims to authority and truth by destabilizing the fixity of meaning, thereby possibly opening up through parody and irony to more critical and dialogic possibilities.[5]

Through this example it is possible to see how forms of critical pedagogy can coexist with parody and disruption in artists' interventions. Far from treating audiences as passive receptors of spectacle, the intervention encourages a questioning approach. By asking visitors to question preconceived ideas and to deconstruct hegemonic discourse, knowledge is reconceived as evolving, in a state of flux, plural and negotiable, rather than as a fixed entity. A corollary of such destabilization is that the subversion of what was once understood as truthful, and therefore reliable, can also undermine an audience's confidence in the museum.

Interpretation involves making decisions about values and judgements, which is what ethics encourages us to do and what some artists' interventions aspire to, opening up and exposing institutional vulnerability, and the equivocal truths of the museum's authority. Furthermore, artists' interventions are both interpretive devices and works of art.

Ethics in museums concerns relationships and therefore resides within the political and social sphere. It is expressed in the ways that connections are made but is also inscribed in the integrity of those connections. While museum ethics pertain to a wide range of issues such as ethical collecting, museum management, and the promulgation of a set of beliefs, our focus here is to explore ethics from an educational perspective, what we will call ethical interpretation, in which museums or galleries ask audiences to engage with and challenge underlying discourses through critical pedagogy.[6] In an overview of constitutive museum ethics, Tristram Besterman emphasizes the importance of ethical practice to reflect and promote discursivity,[7] which is what interpretation can do. This includes the responsibility of managing relationships and interactions between people, as well as creating space for untold histories, which encourages accountability and transparency. Ethical interpretation enables the development and negotiation of ideas without compromising the space of difference, resounding with those democratic values that permit dissent. This endorses the mutual development of knowledge and the socio–political relationship between the museum and its audience, often challenging hegemonic narrative or fixity of conceptual systems with critique, or what Mouffe describes as a 'counter-hegemonic intervention'.[8] One claim for artists' interventions as a form of ethical interpretation practice is through disrupting or examining hegemonic practices, such as dominant narratives, to evoke intellectual and emotional responses that can result in a shift of perspectives. In the *Year of the White Bear: Undiscovered Amerindians Visit the West* (1992), artists Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gomez-Peña paraded as exotic Indians in a cage, parodying the colonial practice of literally putting culture on display. They performed 'native rituals', which included drinking Coca-Cola and watching TV, and for a small fee would pose for photographs. Some visitors understood the irony, but others took the performance much more literally. As Karp points out, interventions such as this challenge the assumptions we take to be true.[9]

Narrative is a diegetic structure that enables our ability to construct meaning. Challenging that structure promotes productive possibilities along the pedagogic spectrum, but also produces uncertainties and risk, which can create unease in the learner, and museum. Logically, when the institution deliberately employs deception, it compromises the trust of its audience. This is particularly applicable when enlisting the services of irony and parody, which can generate suspicion. Hutcheon discusses the duplicitous territories of irony that simultaneously expound and subvert discourse and subject positions by removing and challenging 'semantic security'[10]: it is 'the superimposition or rubbing together of these meanings (the said and plural unsaid) with a critical edge created by a difference of context that makes irony happen'.[11]

Although Lee Capel writes that 'an ironic work, even a satiric parody, need not in any way militate against its also being the vehicle for serious meaning and the repository for philosophic value',[12] irony occludes certainty. Its resistance to being tied to one particular meaning suggests an incompatibility with truth or fact, and leans instead towards ambiguity. Kierkegaard asks:

> If we wish to return the free play and open-endedness which are the hallmarks of irony, are we not then forced to abandon any possibility of serious meaning? The question therefore, is whether there is any way of holding onto irony, with all that this implies, without thereby having to succumb to a nihilistic relativism.[13]

This is an interesting proposition for artists' interventions that appear to act as interlocutors between collections and audiences, yet offer little in the way of definitive meaning.

Where Wilson's and Fusco and Gomez-Peña's interventions proffer a possible way of reconciling a divided past, some interventions take a different trajectory and confront not history, but the present. In such instances the intervention may risk more in its attempt to speak frankly against the grain of received wisdom. The idea of free speech recalls the concept of *parrhesia*, of speaking frankly, although self-consciously, in a manner that encourages interlocutors to encounter new perspectives and freely develop and personally shift their beliefs, and therefore actions. Foucault explained *parrhesia* as an exercise in discretionary and dutiful criticism.[14] Entailing 'both a technique and an ethics',[15] *parrhesia* is not concerned with what truth is, but rather with the process of speaking truthfully.[16] If we follow the *parrhesiastic* logic, that a *parrhesiaste* is a truth-teller, and gains that trust and authority to free speech by fearlessly fostering discussion around potentially hostile territories, then in order to fulfil its moral obligations and engender opportunities for ethical interpretation, a museum must speak freely but judiciously.

Jonah Albert, curator of *Scratch the Surface*, described how he wanted to introduce another voice into the collection by inviting Yinka Shonibare to install a work into The National Gallery. Likewise in an editorial entitled, 'Where are the black visitors in my gallery?', he remarked that 'it remains to be seen whether my take on The National Gallery's history and collection will persuade more black people to the visit'.[17] Effectively, the exhibition was part of a wider agenda to encourage visiting by a 'counter-public'.[18]

Shonibare's intervention is part of the museum's incentive to widen public engagement with the collection. Its temporary nature positions it in an insecure, illocutionary space connected to the museum but simultaneously distanced. Acting as a foil, the artist is permitted misdemeanours that might otherwise compromise the museum's integrity. As a *foil*, the artist performs three evocations of the word: first, as a fencer's foil which prods and probes the interstices of a narrative or a visitor's expectations; second, to sidetrack or to thwart someone's literal and figurative journey through the museum; and third, the metallic connotation, a contrast or mirroring effect in which the audience might reflect on identity, subject positions and alternative stories within the museum's collection.

Although ethical interpretation intimates that museums have a responsibility to publically disclose underlying discourses, the potential consequences can unsettle public perception of the museum's pedagogic role. Wilson's *Mining the Museum* (1992) at Maryland Historical Society mined the archive to put an alternative interpretation of Baltimore's history on display. His 'finds' included controversial artefacts from Baltimore's history of slavery, such as a whipping post and Ku Klux Klan hood. A frequently reproduced image from *Mining the Museum* is a pair of rusty slave manacles placed in a vitrine containing *repoussé* silverware; the label reads simply 'Metalwork 1793–1880' (Figure 22.1).

Museum educator, Danielle Rice, draws on personal experience of a visit to Wilson's installation to highlight the intervention's shortcomings and align it with unwanted ideological bias and questionable educational practice. She describes walking through the exhibition with a young African American friend:

> I was struck by how Wilson's installation was clearly addressed to art world insiders. My young friend was baffled that a museum would display something that seemed so obviously critical of its own practices. Like many novice viewers she came with the expectation that museums uphold standards of culturally defined 'truth' and 'beauty,' rather than choose to challenge them.[19]

FIGURE 22.1   *Mining the Museum*, No. 10: *Metalwork* by Fred Wilson, from *Mining the Museum: An Installation* by Fred Wilson, 1992–1993. Courtesy of the Maryland Historical Society.

Her friend's expectations had been questioned and from this Rice deduced that for a 'novice viewer' Wilson's intervention would be bewildering, and could not be made sense of without requisite training in contemporary art. Plate 22.2 is a photograph of Maryland Historical Society's permanent collection.

As a spectacle, this room may meet some visitors' expectations, but whether it can be deemed to 'uphold standards of culturally defined truth and beauty' is another matter,[20] and one which is freighted with social, cultural and aesthetic controversy. Hein writes:

> For any theory of museum education, epistemological positions, whether articulated or tacit, determine how a museum decides what it is that is contained within its walls, and how it should be displayed. Does the museum take the view that its mission is to impart truth, independently of the particular previous experiences, culture and disposition of its visitors? Does the museum take the position that knowledge is relative?[21]

Rice upholds a concept of a 'general public' who 'hold a transcendental view of artistic virtuosity and extol artworks as apolitical and universal',[22] and to Rice this is indicative of public conservatism. By contrast she insists on the 'progressive' approaches taken by museum professionals, whom she characterizes as 'an intellectual class', aware of progressive scholarship in art history that 'challenges the notion of individual genius and focuses instead on process, content and social/political contexts of works of art'.[23] Although Rice holds that museum audiences will have naive expectations that museums uphold 'standards' of culturally defined 'truth' and 'beauty', like many others, she ignores the logical inference that if this is the case

(and we are sceptical about this), then museums must be implicated in the public's acquisition of this idea.

To relate this back to Wilson's *Mining the Museum*, instead of simply finding ornate late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century furniture at Maryland Historical Society (Plate 22.2), Wilson invited visitors to contextualize the production and acquisition of these finely crafted artefacts. Where the original text panel stated: 'in 1822 a merchant and real estate developer James Bosley installed an eleven-piece suite of New York furniture in his new Fayette Street town house',[24] visitors were invited to reflect on significant others whose presence was notable only in their absence from the narratives available in Maryland Historical Society.

The failure of an interventionist artwork to communicate comprehensively with an inclusive audience is among the most commonly cited criticisms of such ventures. Nevertheless, the roles of the enunciator and interlocutor are not limited to the stereotypical binary relationship of insider and outsider/institution and audience; the institution can also be on the receiving end of free speech. The notion that interventions form part of an insider critique cannot be dismissed out of hand, but this may be significant in different ways than have been previously credited. For instance, in a work by Spanish artist Santiago Sierra, the target was precisely the privileged 'insider'. For the 2001 Venice Biennale, Sierra offered 60 Euros to Venice's ubiquitous illegal street vendors in exchange for having their hair dyed blonde. Sierra's one condition, 'that their hair should be naturally dark', was not difficult for this marginal group, of mainly Senegalese and Chinese illegal immigrants, to meet. The street vendors are not a social group who would be associated with attendance at the Biennale; nevertheless, those who entered into Sierra's 'contract' became implicated in a visible spectacle of furthering their difference throughout the city. Sierra also gave his exhibition space in the 'Arsenale' (a pay-to-access official site) over to the vendors to sell their fake Louis Vuitton and Gucci handbags, thereby forcing the visiting international public to encounter the vendors out of context. Bishop, who acknowledges Sierra's gesture as both a continuum with, and at a remove from, historical practices of institutional critique, discusses her encounter with the vendors in Sierra's exhibition space:

> Instead of aggressively hailing passers-by with their trade, as they did on the street, the vendors were subdued. This made my own encounter with them disarming in a way that only subsequently revealed to me my own anxieties about feeling 'included' in the Biennale. Surely these guys were actors? Had they crept in here for a joke? Foregrounding a moment of mutual nonidentification, Sierra's action disrupted the art audience's sense of identity, which is founded precisely on unspoken race and class exclusions, as well as being blatant commerce.[25]

The Venice Biennale is almost totally the territory of the 'insider art world' audience. Whilst this might confirm prevalent critiques of artists' interventions, it does not always follow that an 'elite' will be 'in on the joke', nor that its logic will confirm their own views. Moreover, shifting the thinking of those who are in a position to influence others, whether that be through criticism, teaching or through curatorial decision making, is more likely to lead to the sorts of philosophical and practical changes that will ultimately achieve institutional change.

When a museum intends to signal a shift in the way its collection and its identity as an institution are understood, then commissioning an artist to reconfigure a counter narrative can act to broker institutional reconfiguration. Hustvedt writes that 'narrative is a chain of

links . . . and I link furiously, merrily hurdling over holes, gaps and secrets. Nevertheless, I try to remind myself that the holes are there'.[26] It is through narrative reconfiguration that the museum's elisions, these holes, gaps and secrets, are brought to the surface. The narrative is modified physically and visually through disruption, as experienced in the exhibition *Scratch the Surface* (2007) in The National Gallery, London, which celebrated the bicentenary of the Transatlantic slave trade. Artist Yinka Shonibare replaced two eighteenth-century portraits of Mrs Oswald and Colonel Tarleton,[27] both of whom were linked to the slave trade, with life-size, headless mannequins shooting at a pheasant suspended from the atrium (Plates 22.3 and 22.4).

The mannequins were dressed in period costume fabricated from textiles manufactured in Manchester and Holland, but more commonly perceived to be African. In this intervention, the space, and therefore institutional narrative, is palpably disturbed. The other narrative modification is located as the audience's perspective shifts emotionally by experiencing the disruption through the active process of interpreting.

Pedagogy is traditionally an act of reproduction formed from the 'tradition of consciousness' in which a perception of irresponsibility resides in the provision of guidance to think, rather than to think 'that'.[28] Both the conscious and the critical tend towards belief and rightness, and similarly some critical artists' interventions prescribe a clear sense of rightness with which visitors might align themselves. For example, in *MetroMobilitan* (1985), there is little doubt how visitors were meant to understand Haacke's institutional critique of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Banners made by Haacke were intended to demystify corporate sponsorship practices in museums, targeted in this case at oil company Mobil's sponsorship of an exhibition of ancient Nigerian art at the museum. Haacke made visual an interrelationship between violence in Apartheid South Africa and Mobil's continuing supply of oil to the South African military and police. It would have been unlikely that visitors came away with any other perspective than that Mobil were the 'bad guys' and the museum was 'semi-bad' for accepting their 'blood' money.

In contrast, a more parodic/ironic methodology sets in motion a hermeneutic formulation, which as Smith suggests, can also be used to problematize the 'hegemony of a dominant culture in order to engage it transformatively'.[29] This is seen in Sophie Calle's intervention, *The Appointment* (1999), at the Freud Museum, London, which obfuscated the boundaries of fact and fiction in order to create works that on one level appear to be plausible Freudian case studies, but parody some of the clichés of Freudian analysis (Plate 22.5).

> I was six, I lived in a street named Rosa-Bonheur with my grandparents. A daily ritual obliged me every evening to undress completely in the elevator on my way up to the sixth floor where I arrived without a stitch on. Then I would dash down the corridor at lightning speed, and as soon as I reached the apartment I would jump into bed. Twenty years later I found myself repeating the same ceremony every night in public, on the stage of one of the strip joints that line the boulevard in Pigalle, wearing a blond wig in case my grandparents who lived in the neighbourhood should happen to pass by.[30]

Calle does not ask her viewers to make judgements, but she does prompt a number of questions. Visitors may have been unsure whether to take Calle's sexually suggestive autobiographical fragments seriously. The conjunction of text and context encourages a straightforward reading, but the introduction of 'ready-made' and sculptural objects destabilizes meaning

and allows for other possibilities. Through humour and absurdity a critique of some of Freud's more totalizing theories is suggested, but threads of certainty are undone.

Making a valuation does not necessarily mean deciding for or against something, but entertains the possibility of thinking differently, or dialogically, negotiating rather than negating an uncomfortable space. Therefore it is still pertinent to ask whether reliability can be sought in these reverberations. In discussing *parrhesia*, Foucault raises the problem between free speech and democracy, calling to mind the relationship between knowledge and power in which both concepts are mutually defining:

> [T]he crisis regarding *parrhesia* is a problem of truth: for the problem is one of recognizing who is capable of speaking the truth within the limits of an institutional system where everyone is equally entitled to give his own opinion. Democracy by itself is not able to determine who has the specific qualities which enable him to speak the truth (and thus should possess the right to tell the truth). And *parrhesia*, as a verbal activity, as pure frankness in speaking, is also not sufficient to disclose truth since negative *parrhesia*, ignorant outspokenness, can also result.[31]

Parrhesia invokes the problematics of authorship, intentionality and reliability, proffering the productive frictions of discursive critique. Possibilities, but also risks and uncontrollability, lie within the parameters of these frictions, giving agency to institutions and audiences to seek new possibilities of meaning.

Museums, confronted with the problem of the conceptual systems of reason upon which their ordering systems are based, 'fall short of perfect adequacy to the world'.[32] As with *parrhesia*, many artists' interventions destabilize conceptual systems and therefore critique discourse by actively asking us to use meta-cognition; to think about how we think, how we know and how we figure things out.[33] In other words, challenging projects of logic and reason to question what is understood as truthful and authoritative necessitates relinquishing control over knowledge and the empowering of audiences: '[w]hen we challenge an idea we suggest that there is room for imagining another way of thinking.'[34]

Artists' interventions offer a platform for accessing ideas in a democratic arena: 'collections are the intellectual and spiritual capital of the museum.'[35] The ethical museum is plurivocal and encourages different ways of experiencing the world. Likewise, ethical interpretation is about making connections between what we think and what we do, in other words, exploring the beliefs that underpin the museum and developing good practice grounded on free speech.

If museums are spaces of trustworthiness, where trust is gained through accountability and transparency, then necessarily, difficult discussions must be had. Artists' interventions often attempt to draw out those stories and initiate discussion around sensitive or contentious subject matter, asserting museums as 'places of creative interaction in which traditional values and orthodoxies can and should be challenged. An ethical museum should be free to surprise and to do the unexpected.'[36]

Where artists' interventions have emerged against a backdrop of dominant regulatory and divisionary discourse, their disruptive and parodic strategies contribute to the museum as an ethical discursive forum. Mouffe has argued that the public sphere needs to build in opportunities for 'agonism' if democracy is to survive.[37] She states that

a well functioning democracy calls for a vibrant clash of democratic political positions. If this is missing there is always the danger that this democratic confrontation will be replaced by a confrontation between non-negotiable moral values or essentialist forms of identifications.[38]

According to such a view the aim of a public institution is not to establish a rational consensus in the public sphere, but to defuse the potential hostility that exists in human societies by providing the possibility for antagonism to be transformed into agonism.[39] Artists' interventions can be seen to carry on the constitutional right to propose dissent; they often occupy museums for such purposes, not in the way that might have been envisaged in the eighteenth century, nor as forms of rational logical argumentation, but as disruptions, interruptions, questions and subversions. They both act as fissures in the dominant discourses of galleries and museums and stand as part of a continuum of radical discursive possibilities intended for the public sphere.

Notes

 1 L. Corrin (ed.) *Give and Take*, London: Serpentine Gallery and Victoria & Albert Museum, 2001, p. 7.
 2 See: D. Preziosi, *Brain of the Earth's Body: Art, Museums and the Phantasms of Modernity*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003; A. McClellan (ed.) *Art and its Publics: Museum Studies at the Millennium*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2003; T. Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, London: Routledge, 1995.
 3 M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, London: Penguin, 1975, 1991 edition, p. 222.
 4 Wilson's intervention reinforces Anthony Shelton's observations that colonial practices, particularly those seen in the ethnographic museum, have become open to critique 'by members of the disjunctive populations they once tried to represent'. Shelton in T. Bennett, 'Exhibition, Difference, and the Logic of Culture', in I. Karp, C. Kratz, L. Szwaja and T. Ybarra-Frausto (eds) *Museum Frictions*, Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2006.
 5 Wilson's (1993) exhibition, *Mining the Museum*, took its title from the act of mining, as in archaeology, but also from the analogy of laying land mines and thereby causing explosions.
 6 C. Meszaros, 'Modelling Ethical Thinking: Toward New Interpretive Practices in the Art Museum', *Curator: The Museum Journal*, 51 (2), 2008, 157–170.
 7 T. Besterman, 'Museum Ethics', in S. Macdonald (ed.) *A Companion to Museum Studies*, Malden and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006, pp. 431–441, (pp. 435–437).
 8 C. Mouffe, 'Critique as Counter-Hegemonic Intervention', 2008. Online. Available at: www.eipcp.net/transversal/0808/mouffe/en. Accessed 19 April 2010.
 9 I. Karp and F. Wilson, 'Constructing the Spectacle of Culture in Museums', in R. Greenberg, B. Ferguson and S. Nairne (eds) *Thinking about Exhibitions*, London: Routledge, 1996, pp. 251–268.
10 L. Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony*, London and New York: Routledge, 1995, pp. 13–14.
11 Ibid., p. 19.
12 L. M. Capel, 'Historical Introduction', in S. Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, London: Collins, 1841, 1966 edition, p. 36.
13 Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, p. 290.
14 'Discourse and Truth: The Problematization of Parrhesia' was a series of six lectures given by Foucault at the University of California at Berkeley, October to November 1983. See J. Pearson (ed.) *Michel Foucault: Fearless Speech*, New York: Semiotext(e) Foreign Agents, 2001.
15 F. Gros (ed.) *Michel Foucault: Hermeneutics of the Subject, Lectures at the College de France 1981–1982*, trans. G. Burchell, New York: Picador, 2005, p. 368.
16 Pearson, *Michel Foucault: Fearless Speech*, p. 73.
17 J. Albert, 'Where are the black visitors in my gallery?', 2007. Online. Available at: www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2007/jan/07/arts.visualarts. Accessed 19 April 2010.
18 S. Sheikh, 'Representation, Contestation and Power: The Artist as Public Intellectual'. Online. Available at: www.republicart.net/disc/aap/sheikh02_en.htm. Accessed 19 April 2010.

19 D. Rice, 'Theory, Practice and Illusion', in A. McClellan (ed.) *Art and its Publics*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2003, p. 82.
20 Ibid., p. 85.
21 G. Hein, *Learning in the Museum*, Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 1998, p. 190.
22 Rice, 'Theory, Practice and Illusion', p. 86.
23 Ibid.
24 Maryland Historical Society's interpretation panel, 2007.
25 C. Bishop, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', *October*, 110 (Fall 2004), 51–79, (p. 73).
26 S. Hustvedt, *A Plea for Eros*, London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd, 2006, p. 20.
27 Mrs. Oswald (by Johann Zoffany, 1763–4) and Colonel Tarleton (by Sir Joshua Reynolds, 1782).
28 See: P. Bourdieu and J. C. Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, London: Sage, 1990; and B. Bernstein, *Pedagogy, Symbolic Control and Identity*, London: Taylor & Francis, 1996.
29 D. G. Smith, *Pedagon: Interdisciplinary Essays in the Human Sciences, Pedagogy and Culture*, New York: Lang Publishing, 1999, p. 35.
30 Text panel in Plate 22.5.
31 Pearson, *Michel Foucault: Fearless Speech*, p. 73.
32 B. Lord, 'Foucault's Museum: Difference, Representation and Genealogy', *Museum and Society*, 4 (1), 1–14, 2006, p. 6.
33 Meszaros, 'Modelling Ethical Thinking', *Curator: The Museum Journal*, 157–170.
34 I. Rogoff, 'Turnings', 2008, p. 7. Online. Available at: www.e-flux.com/journal/view/18. Accessed 9 March 2010.
35 Besterman, 'Museum Ethics', pp. 431–441, (p. 438).
36 Ibid.
37 Agonists advocate that there should be optimal opportunities for people to express their disagreements. They also acknowledge that conflict has a non-rational or emotional component. These two positions mean that they are opposed to aspects of theories of democracy which want to mute conflict through elite consensus or give a rationalist picture of the aspirations of democracy.
38 C. Mouffe, 'Critique as Counter-Hegemonic Intervention'. Online. Available at: http://eipcp.net/transversal/0808/mouffe/en. Accessed 19 April 2010.
39 Mouffe in S. Sheikh, 'The Trouble with Art Institutions, or, Art and its Publics', in N. Möntmann (ed.) *Art and its Institutions: Current Conflicts, Critique and Collaborations*, London: Black Dog Publishing, 2006, pp. 142–149, (p. 149).

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WHERE DO YOU WANT THE LABEL?

The roles and possibilities of exhibition graphics

Jona Piehl and Suzanne MacLeod

Today, the graphic elements in a museum or gallery exhibition might take various forms: an arrow on a wall pointing to the next section of the exhibit, a headline, a quotation, a large image applied to a wall or the side of a display case, a small object label that contains information about the nature of the object or the lender, or a text panel delivering contextual information. Often these graphic elements are the expression of content: the actual carrier of the written storyline, not only providing basic information in support of an object or a larger thesis, but actively embodying the narrative through their visual forms. As a result, these exhibition elements have interpretive significance and can be read on the same primary level as the other components that make up the exhibition, including the objects themselves.

Successful exhibition graphics help the visitor to navigate both space and story; they define the context and the atmosphere of the story; they create an experience and through this they can enhance the visitor's intellectual engagement as well as appeal to their senses and imagination. For some, this acknowledgement of the power and potential of design might be considered antithetical to the very idea of the museum as a site for learning about and through objects and collections. But museums have always used a range of media to add an interpretive layer, that is, to add content, to their displays. The difference now, perhaps, is that design itself is being consciously recognized as active in the production of meaning and this raises a whole series of questions about the role of the designer and the nature of exhibition making. Despite (or possibly as a result of) this broader recognition, the role of graphics in museums and galleries continues to be overlooked and under-researched. Ironically, just as graphic designers are summoning the confidence to speak and write about their work and talk about its significance, they find themselves stifled by notions of the death of the author, and their role reinvented through notions of 'total media' and collaborative creative production. Through both of these lenses, the focus on the role of the graphic designer and the possibilities for graphic design within museums is somewhat obscured.

Issues of authorship in relation to graphic design continue to provoke discussion.[1] In the museum, the very specific and unique nature of exhibition means that the focus on collaborative ways of working is already well established. Graphics for exhibitions have to respond to the needs and specifics of a larger project; they are driven by the content and their development

must mesh with the design and production of a whole range of other media towards the production of 'an exhibition'. They explicitly need to cater to the narrative, to the prospective audience, to the space. They need to be clear, inclusive and accessible; the story needs to be legible and received wisdom still states that neither content nor objects must be upstaged by the design.[2] As a result, exhibition graphics are often only noticed when they fail.

An increasing number of exhibitions in museums and galleries offer up a full and productive view of the potential of design and particularly graphic design. From simple, single-object displays, to full blown immersive exhibition environments, museum design is, rightly, attracting attention from a broad range of design disciplines. With all this in mind, this chapter asks three questions. How might the conscious exploration of the scope of possible 'graphic roles' lead to a more confident visual language in museums and galleries? What impact might this more assertive visual language have on the way stories are told in museums and galleries? And, finally, what might result if curators and designers set up a process of collaborative content making with a view to co-authoring stories that are appropriate and cohesive on both a visual *and* a textual level. This final question demands a subtle but significant shift in our understanding of the role of design and of the designer.

In order to begin to identify a range of possible graphic roles, the chapter uses a series of case studies and discusses them against a simple matrix which plots levels of authorship as well as degrees of interpretive potential. It argues that in the modern museum, graphics are operating in a rich variety of ways and that a conscious elaboration of the roles and possibilities of graphic design might prove productive in the drive to further develop exhibition design practice and energetic design solutions. In the conclusion we return to our second and third questions and set forward some thoughts about visual communication in the museum and gallery as well as processes of collaborative museum design.

Graphic design in the museum

The field of graphic design has become the subject of detailed research and analysis in recent years. In the modern museum, the history is perhaps more contained and discussion has tended more towards the practical than the theoretical or philosophical.[3] Design in the modern museum has a reasonably long and complex history; graphic elements have formed part of the language of display since the birth of the modern museum, with small object labels becoming a staple component of nineteenth-century museums and galleries along with printed museum guides.[4] These inclusions were driven by a vision of the museum as a site of knowledge and a vision of the museum experience as self-improvement through exposure to knowledge. Far from 'designed' in the contemporary sense of the word, by the 1950s and 60s when exhibition design did begin to be acknowledged as a separate museum function requiring specific expertise, graphic elements were already firmly established as core exhibition components.

Depending on which of the handful of books on museum design one picks up, different histories of museum design and diverging views on influential museum and gallery exhibitions are presented. For example, in 1988, Giles Velarde cited James Gardner's 1946 *Britain Can Make It* exhibition at the V&A as a milestone in exhibition design and Margaret Hall's *Tutankhamun Exhibition* at the British Museum in 1972 as establishing museums as places of fun in the minds of a wider public.[5] Only a few years earlier Roger Miles, in his *The Design of Educational Exhibits*, identified the beginnings of 'designed' exhibitions in the work of Walter Gropius in the 1930s and in the less well known but influential use of graphic images by Otto

Neurath in Vienna in the 1920s; with Gropius, innovations included 'the use of bold lettering, photography, charts and the latest graphic techniques'.[6] Michelle Henning has also looked at innovations in the 1920s and 30s in the avant-garde exhibitions of Herbert Bayer, El Lissitzky, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy and Frederick Kiesler, acknowledging the lack of professionalization of museum design at this time as an opportunity for artists, designers and architects to take hold of the medium and experiment, often explicitly positioning the viewer within the exhibit. El Lissitzky's Soviet Pavilion at Pressa in 1928 was a collaboration with 38 other designers, most of them graphic designers.[7] Henning's description of the exhibition sounds familiar today: 'The space of the exhibition became theatrical or even cinematic, using blown-up photographs and typography and centred around a huge "photofresco" which juxtaposed images in a way reminiscent of Soviet film montage techniques.'[8] Common to all of these initiatives was an interest in exhibition making which prioritized the viewer and began to blur the boundaries between authentic object and exhibition environment;[9] a blurring in which graphics played an important role.

The application of these varied graphic techniques in mainstream museums came later, along with the building of specialist design teams.[10] By the 1970s the use of plans, text panels, back-lit graphic panels and murals was reasonably well established as exhibition designers sought to develop actively educational exhibitions, though by the 1970s and 80s the innovations and diversity of exhibition design techniques witnessed in the mid decades of the twentieth century had all but disappeared as the museum profession began to standardize its practice.[11] Very quickly the role of the in-house design departments would be challenged as design was increasingly outsourced, resulting in the growth of a range of specialist design companies, the immediate forerunners of the current group of museum design companies who dominate the international marketplace today. These companies, along with many of the remaining in-house design departments, now subscribe to a somewhat different understanding of education as learning, placing the focus firmly on the needs, experiences and interests of a highly differentiated audience. As conceptions of the visitor and their experience have become more complex and central to exhibition making, so the roles of graphics, now aided by new digital technologies and software, have become more varied. In the remaining parts of this chapter we look at four exhibitions to begin to explore this diversity.

Between content and form/translation and authorship

Exhibition graphics are ubiquitous. Old technology in exhibition terms, they are often taken for granted and it can be all too easy to reach for tried and tested graphic tropes. Appearances can be deceptive, however, and conceptually and functionally graphics cover a wide range of roles from decoration to atmospheric treatment, from branding to information design. In each case, a different purpose is fulfilled within the narrative environment. Figure 23.1 provides a matrix intended as a simple device for identifying and analysing the possible roles of graphic design within museum and gallery exhibitions. The matrix proposes and prioritizes two axes; *translator/author* and *content/form*.

The axis of *translator/author* suggests the varying roles of the graphic designer from facilitating the graphic display of a story in space to the active telling of a story through design. At the translation end, the graphic designer is a translator of someone else's story and their task is to lay out and format the textual/photographic/visual content; the graphic system translates the content to a format that both engages with the spatial layout and makes the content accessible
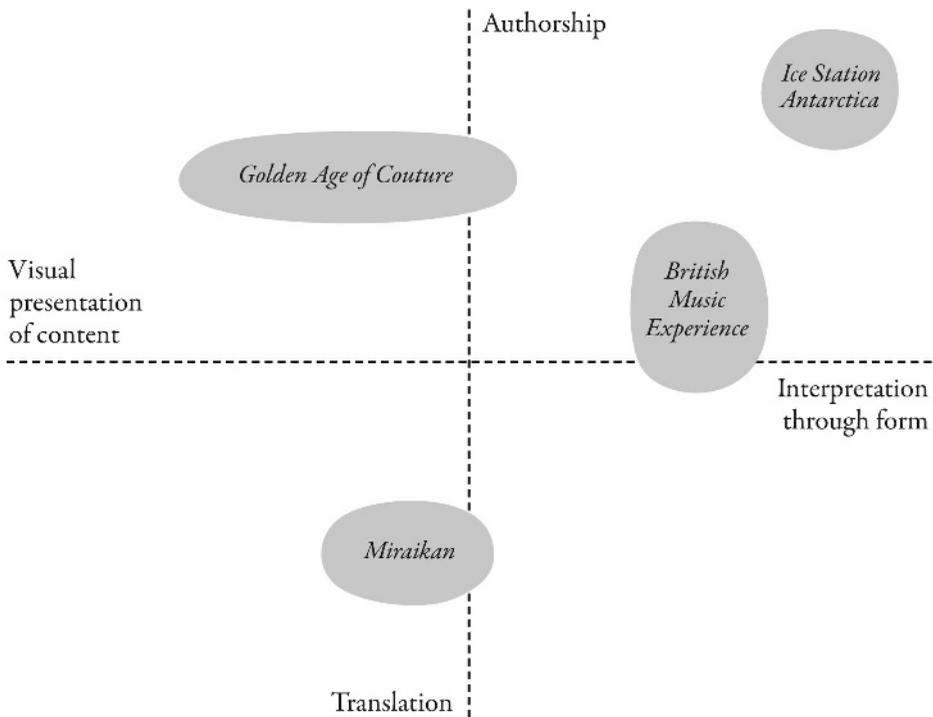
FIGURE 23.1   A matrix which plots the graphic roles of four exhibitions.

to an exhibition audience. For the graphic design to mostly fulfil this role as translation of the narrative, it is likely that the production of the narrative, the writing and curating of the story, has been completed before the graphic concept is created. At the other end of the scale, the designer is actively involved in the process of not just designing the exhibition, but co-author-ing content. Here, the production of content will happen simultaneously to the development of the visual language. Such an approach necessitates the handing of some level of control to the designer and a re-articulation of the role of design itself as an interpretive process.[12]

The axis of *visual presentation of content/interpretation through form* assumes the simple structur-ing and presentation of content at one end and the more expressive and assertive use of form as an interpretive device at the other. It describes the level to which the graphics actively engage with the content to the point of an intermeshing of content and its visual expression, contrast-ing a predominantly content-focused presentation with a highly visual presentation of the exhibition narrative that includes a rich, more experiential (and experimental) use of imagery and other graphic elements. The *visual presentation of content* includes the overall structure, the breaking up of information into appropriate chunks and the development of the sequence(s) of presentation. This might include the spatial arrangement of the content in thematic clus-ters/chapters or alongside the artefacts, the typographic design of an object label or a headline, or the use of simple text panels to carry meaning with the insertion of images as historical texts or as illustrations of content. At the opposite end of the axis, the graphic devices are used not only as tools to format information, but are part of the exhibition narrative itself. This can

happen either by directly narrating part of the exhibition content through its visual representation (through imagery, illustrations, typographic treatment of text, colours), through telling a story that runs complementary to but independently from the exhibition's textual narratives, or through the addition of new content, consciously generated to enrich the narrative.

Together, these two axes suggest varying roles for the graphic designer and varying possibilities, all equally viable and useful, for graphic elements in museum and gallery exhibitions. The following case studies begin to explore these possibilities in a little more detail.

Four exhibitions: four approaches to exhibition graphics

For each of the four exhibitions we have used the matrix to help us identify the most poignant element within the graphic concept. The aim is to highlight and stress the differences between the projects in order to facilitate discussion of graphic roles and design processes, rather than to offer an exhaustive analysis of each exhibition.

The Golden Age of Couture: Paris and London 1947–57

The Golden Age of Couture at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, was a temporary exhibition showcasing Christian Dior's most influential collection of 1947, 'The New Look', and its lasting impact on the fashion industry in Paris and London. More than 100 couture dresses and a large number of associated objects were on show, set up by theme rather than chronologically. The first section served as an introduction to the various aspects of couture production (such as ancillary trades, the atelier structure, clients, dissemination) as well as fashion photography, and the following sections were organized in succession from day wear to evening gowns, ending in a space dedicated to the legacy of Dior in contemporary haute couture. With a few exceptions of objects that were on display to support a particular storyline or illustrate a production detail, all objects were in themselves pieces of design. Their value was not only that of the historical artefact, but also of a refined, highly visual, stunning beauty. Even though this was not an art exhibition as such, it was important that the exhibition graphics did not interfere with or visually overpower the objects. Rather, the graphics needed to create a visual framework that would provide a perfect stage for the objects to shine.

This visual framework fulfilled two purposes: setting the scene, that is, establishing time and place; and providing a system of information organization sympathetic to the style of the objects, and in reference to visual elements of the period but not competing with the pieces on display, in other words serving the objects and enabling the navigation through space and content. In the first room, introducing the visitors to the different elements that constitute haute couture fashion, large-scale black and white imagery, photographed in contemporary Paris, London and New York specifically for the exhibition, was used as environmental/contextual backdrop. Through drawing attention to the iconic and well-known details of the cities' exterior and interior architecture, and shown in combination with period film footage, music and evocative lighting, they created the atmosphere of post-war streetscapes, shop interiors and workplaces (Plate 23.1).

A range of illustrations created to identify each individual dress on its object label eliminated the need for object numbers on the mannequins and at the same time established a visual hierarchy between key objects and supporting objects such as sketch books and fabric samples. Despite densely dressed showcases, visitors were able to quickly match the objects to their

respective descriptions. These illustrations were also used on the gallery guide that unfolded to a poster depicting a timeline of the exhibition period to give an overview of the most prominently featured designers and their relation to each other, as well as the chronological order of the dresses on display. Finally, in the last room, this timeline was revealed to be just a small section of the large-scale, 16-metre-long, wall-mounted timeline spanning 300 years of couture production. The timeline located the exhibition narrative within the much wider historical context of haute couture houses and fashion designers whilst supporting the story of the main display, the legacy of Christian Dior in contemporary fashion. This huge timeline positioned at the very end of the exhibition, swept around in a giant arc providing a frame for three iconic dresses by John Galliano for Dior.

While the setting of the scene is achieved primarily through a layer of atmospheric images that add to the interpretive content of the exhibition, the main role of the graphic system is the clear presentation and communication of this content through graphic devices such as diagrams and illustrations. The development of these and the timeline in particular are the results of a close collaboration with the curatorial team; an iterative process focused on finding the right shape for the content. This process was aided by the fact that almost all of the objects were drawn from the museum's own collection. The in-depth and personal knowledge of the pieces and their stories on the part of the curatorial team, and the opportunity to view the objects in their suggested combinations, impacted on the design research and development process, ensuring that the design proposals were closely linked to the objects themselves.

Ice Station Antarctica

Ice Station Antarctica is a touring exhibition developed for the Natural History Museum, London, with a target audience of 7–11-year-old children. The aim of the exhibition is to inform visitors about living and working in Antarctica, engage them with this remote and special place and, through this, ultimately raise an awareness of the threats it is facing. Instead of attempting to simulate the experience of being in Antarctica through the creation of an immersive environment (which would be difficult to tour), the concept developed with the museum's curatorial team was to set up the exhibition as a pretend boot-camp that would introduce the children to the challenges of Antarctica led by the question, *Do you have what it takes to survive in Antarctica?* After the briefing from the base commander and a visit to the walk-in 'cold room', the 'ice-cadets' start their journey in the preparation area, which is followed by a series of inflatable pods, each dedicated to a particular theme (for example, working with animals, deep sea diving, geology, and daily life). At the end of the exhibition, the visitor finds out how well they did in the various interactive installations and subsequently what kind of job they would be particularly suited to do in Antarctica (ranging from base station dentist to penguin scientist or meteorologist).

Treating the exhibition not as an exhibition as such (that would require the design of traditional graphic panels and object labels) but as a training camp (that would be heavily branded), the graphics quite naturally assumed the role of a visual identity for the experience. There were, of course, object labels and text panels as in other exhibitions, but the starting point for the graphic concept was the overall branding of the experience: the development of a logo, a strong colour palette as well as nearly 100 pictograms, from icebergs to sea cucumbers to vomiting penguins. These illustrative, playful pictograms were used throughout the exhibition on maps and diagrams such as food chains, on the instructions for interactive installations,

and on collateral material as well as on the website, which was set up to seamlessly continue the museum visit at home with additional information and online games. On a practical level, the extensive graphics system provided the visual glue integrating objects with the various elements of media, and also functioned as a graphic toolkit, keeping the identity of the exhibition intact throughout various iterations of venues and language versions. Even more importantly, considering the age range of the audience, the pictograms and illustrations established a layer of non-verbal storytelling, providing access/engagement with the exhibition narratives for non-readers (Plate 23.2).

Aside from providing the structure for the delivery of the factual content, the exhibition graphics functioned as an interpretive device within the world of the story. They became a vital part of the 'make-believe', and in this sense, of the storytelling itself.

The British Music Experience

The British Music Experience is a permanent exhibition at the O2, the former Millennium Dome in London, that tells the sprawling story of British popular music since 1945 both through chronological sections and focusing on key themes in music (such as music videos or DJs). The exhibition uses a wide variety of means of communication, from linear media (video, sound) to interactive installations (hands-on guitar tutorials, digital timelines, and showcases augmented with sound and video) to large-scale immersive environments. After a short video that serves as an introduction to the main principles of the experience, the visitors move through the exhibition at their own speed and guided by their own preferences (experiencing the eras chronologically or only selecting the periods that they are interested in), before joining an immersive finale show celebrating iconic live performances.

The starting point of this project was the architectural situation and a rough content structure of a chronological journey through 60 years of music history. While there was a competent team of advisers from the music industry on board from the start, design began without any objects confirmed and with only an outline of potential storylines and thematic components. Consequently, rather than focusing on the framing of individual stories, characters or artefacts, the graphic concept set out to create a 'contextual atmosphere', establishing the mood and a sense of time for each of the chapters of the exhibition narrative. Since music is so closely linked to graphic design, and, to an extent, telling the history of popular music will also mean telling the history of graphic design, there was an abundance of visual material to draw from.

Using the analogy of record sleeves, with their usually evocative, era- and genre-defining looks on the front contrasting with the more generic design of the back or the insides, the museum was divided into 'general areas' and 'themed areas'; 'themed' referring to the spaces dedicated to specific periods in time. The results were distinct environments that suggest each period's socio-cultural context through extensive, visually prominent wall-graphics, including the use of specific colour palettes and custom typefaces, using both period photographs or contemporary illustrations and photography, to reference an era's predominant visual style. Across the decades the environmental graphics are linked in terms of visual content to the changing and evolving 'location of music consumption'; in other words they all show the different habits and places that music is listened to, from the domestic realm to festivals, clubs, and to digital space (Plate 23.3).

The graphic treatment in *The British Music Experience* can be read as a sub-story in itself as it retains a deliberate degree of independence from the details of the main exhibition narratives.

Closely linked to the content, they are not a direct expression of content, neither do they rely on a constant correlation to the textual content or the objects, rather, they provide a visual canvas, an atmospheric backdrop for the stories being told. Through their experiential rather than documentary use of imagery and the creation of complementary custom typefaces, the graphics range towards interpretation through form.

Medical Futures

Medical Futures is a redeveloped permanent gallery space at the Miraikan, National Museum of Emerging Science and Innovation, Tokyo, dedicated to the developments in analyses and diagnoses (and subsequently treatments) in medicine through technological advancement (for example, DNA sequencing, personalized medicine and virtual surgery). The exhibition content is aimed at an adult audience in its tone of voice and scientifically complex narrative; it prompts the visitors to consider and comment on the ethical implications of genetic medicine. The gallery space is situated on an open floor, amongst other, existing exhibits, and can be accessed from several points. It needed to present itself as a distinct chapter of the overall museum narrative both spatially and visually.

Given the topic and the objectives of the exhibition, it was important that the visual framework would enable the visitors to focus wholly on the subject matter. It was important that the exhibition content would not be simplified or confused through the visualization process. The recurring visual embodiment of the topic, the grid of DNA microarrays, as used by scientists to examine and compare genetic data, with their dots aligned perfectly in differing sizes, intensity and colours, became the central visual metaphor and all graphic elements were developed from here. The exhibition surfaces were turned into graphic surfaces ruled by a tight grid, thus establishing the underlying structure to all content as well as the physical construction of the exhibition. The grid determined not only the shape and format of diagrams and illustrations, the placement of headlines and text panels, as well as the treatment of imagery, but also the cut lines of panels, positions of screws and apertures for screens and interfaces. Formally mirroring the exhibition narrative's progression from research and analysis to understanding and 'making sense', from chaos to order, the graphic layer of shapes, colours, letters and illustrations holds the themes together, creates visual links between sections and chapters, and becomes the 'organizing principle' (and through this guides the visitor through the content, making it more accessible with as little interference with the storylines as possible) (Plate 23.4).

In this project, rather than providing an additional interpretive layer, the focus is on framing the context and using graphic elements to translate the scientific content into a spatial setting, making it accessible without losing its complexity. With its luminous presence in the gallery space, its function is also decorative, an 'attractor' which also fulfils the role of defining the space as a separate, stand–alone exhibition.

Conclusion

The four exhibitions considered here are selective, offering only a partial view of the diversity of exhibition graphics. They do, however, begin to expose some of the various project characteristics and processes through which graphic solutions emerge and within which graphics function in very different ways. The variety of these roles and possibilities is to be celebrated in a field where creative processes are often closed down by overly hierarchical and

structured exhibition development practices. In reality, no two projects will be the same and the nature of the process and collaboration within the team will have great impact on the format of the outcome. Stories, audiences and delivery methods will vary greatly, and it is perfectly possible that a sophisticated narrative with subplots generated to actively draw in the visitor might be developed by a curatorial team and then set out in space with minimal detailing by the designer, while other projects will pose an open invitation to the graphics to take a more active part in the storytelling.

But how might such a conscious exploration of the scope of possible graphic roles lead to a more assertive visual language in museum and gallery exhibitions? Clearly, the greater the awareness of the range of possible positions and contributions of a graphic language, the more confidently these can be played out, which in turn will make the interpretive use of graphics stronger and more focused. Addressing factors such as the strength of the visual 'voice', its tone and its visibility, seem crucial. Indeed, awareness of the spectrum of choice of graphic roles might well lead to the conscious decision to let the graphics take a step back in order not to dilute (or speak over) an expert (curatorial and other) narrative. In instances of a strong, independent visual 'voice' actively seeking to contribute to the content, it becomes important to ask a series of additional questions. Are the strands of the story (textual and visual) repetitions in different formats? Are they complementing one another, or only 'in loose conversation' with one another? And how important is it for the visitor to tell them apart? Similarly, narratives co-authored with designers will probably show a more layered delivery of content. Arguably, this will in turn make the content more accessible to a wider range of people. However, if the storytelling is too complex or too spread out across a range of media, might this hinder the navigation through the content? These questions can only be solved on a project-by-project basis and through a thorough exploration of the relationship between the content and the design. Unlike many other types of projects, exhibition design projects do often have the advantage of long periods of research and development as well as the extensive collaboration with the other disciplines involved such as interior design, media, lighting and sound, an opportunity that can be used to set up an iterative process from the start, working towards a compelling, co-authored narrative; a visual language that will engage the visitors on a level that goes beyond the purely verbal or textual communication of the narratives and that will support and enhance the visitor experience.

The suggestion that the designer can and does co-author content is not to suggest that they have suddenly become a subject specialist. Rather, graphic design is a language just as text is a language, and it can be harnessed to tell a story, to generate content. Enabling the graphic designer as author will offer up the possibility of an exhibition where the visual language operates at the same level and is equally as convincing and compelling as any text-based communication. At times it will be appropriate and right to simply present a body of information in a visual format; this in itself is a complex process of structuring and communication. However, as *Ice Station Antarctica* illustrates, visual, non-textual communication can be highly interpretive, beyond the textual and the verbal, and reach out to a wide audience. Museums and galleries are continuing to acknowledge the great potential of design to generate new content and enhance the interpretive scope of exhibitions. As public spaces, museums and galleries have the chance to offer up interesting and stimulating experiences to a range of visitors; subtle, context- and content-driven displays and interpretive environments that are informative as well as uplifting and emotive. And for this the graphic designer needs to be a collaborator, an author as well as a translator.

Notes

1 See, for example, E. Lupton, 'The Designer as Producer', in S. Heller (ed.) *The Education of a Graphic Designer*, New York: Allworth Press, 2005, pp. 214–219; and M. Rock, 'Graphic Authorship', in S. Heller (ed.) *The Education of a Graphic Designer*, New York: Allworth Press, 2005, pp. 200–209.

2 See, for example, G. Velarde, *Designing Exhibitions*, London: The Design Council, 1988, p. 9.

3 Some limited discussion of graphics can be found in Velarde, *Designing Exhibitions*; R. Miles, *The Design of Educational Exhibits* (2nd edition), London: Routledge, 2001; and D. Dean, *Museum Exhibition: Theory and Practice*, London: Routledge, 1994. For a more interesting engagement with museum design, including graphic design, see M. A. Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art*, New York: MIT Press, 2001.

4 A detailed history of museum exhibitions is yet to be written. However, see M. Henning, *Museums, Media and Cultural Theory*, Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2006. Although the focus here isn't on providing a history, Henning does offer a good amount of historical detail.

5 Velarde, *Designing Exhibitions*, p. 28.

6 Miles, *The Design of Educational Exhibits*, pp. 7–8.

7 Henning, *Museums, Media and Cultural Theory*, p. 65.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 In the UK, Liverpool Museums were the first regional museum service to establish a design department in the 1950s and the British Museum (Natural History) appointed their first designer in 1965. Miles, *The Design of Educational Exhibits*, p. 7.

11 On this see Staniszewski, *The Power of Display*.

12 Joachim Sauter of Art+Com, Berlin, used the differentiation *translator/author* in his talk at the *Translations* Conference, Mainz, 2009, when discussing the creative development of their projects.

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THE NARRATIVE OF TECHNOLOGY

Understanding the effect of New Media artwork in the museum

Peter Ride

In a provocative text that argued for the place of visual culture in the twenty-first century, Nicholas Mirzoeff held that increasingly 'modern life takes place onscreen'. Mirzoeff's contention was that there has been a crucial shift in the way that images are viewed and consumed, driven by technology, becoming more available and being encountered in new and different ways. But the greatest shift could be seen in the way the marriage of image and technology had become deeply embedded in social expectations: 'It is not just a part of everyday life, it is everyday life.'[1] The technological experience has seamlessly become part of our social context.

The importance of the social context to museums is now well established, placing emphasis on the visitor's personal experience, social norms and cultural conventions.[2] And increasingly, museum studies theorists argue that in current museum practice we can identify an emphasis on experiential learning, moving the focus from the object to the subject.[3] This concerns not only the way in which the museum environment is constructed, but includes the institution's perceptions of the importance of the visitor's response. These shifts are sometimes overt, but at other times implicit, going beyond conventional learning to a broader sense of experience and empowerment, dealing with the ambiguities of reflection and affective engagement.

This essay addresses how the quality of the space and the visitor experience is affected when the museum presents artistic installations that use new technology. Reflecting upon my own curatorial investigations and that of other museum and arts curators, it considers how we can learn from specific examples about the context of technology, and it asks if we need to think of new technology as a narrative that changes the social context in the museum.

Artworks in the museum have a well defined place as interventions, creative articulations of complex ideas, and strategies to engage the public imagination. Artworks can offer an extraordinary range of possibilities that help redefine spaces, challenge the discourse of collections and add alternative voices and tonal qualities to the institutional language. Such projects have disabused the myth or presumption that museums are closed, whereas art-practice is open-ended; that museums are concerned with factual knowledge, and artists with the imagination. Yet embracing creative art practices in the museum is not without complications. Hannah Redler, Head of Arts Projects at the Science Museum in London, pinpoints this as

a tension between narratives: the narrative of art and the curatorial narrative of a gallery, and argues that it is important to ensure that neither overrides the other.[4]

While we often speak of the narrative space in terms of the layout design and flow of the museum environment, we can also think of it in terms of the space of technology. In the museum, the role of new technology has a complicated status. Digital media makes a considerable impact upon discussion about the shifting functions of the museum through its potential to create simulations and virtual representations of objects and artefacts, its ability to create avenues to archived information, and through its capacity to enable links between collections and exterior networks.[5] However, as Nicholas Mirzoeff hints, not only does technology present itself in many forms, but it also creates new conditions that affect how it can be received. These conditions not only apply to the institution as a space where the work is housed, but also impact on the conceptual frameworks of the recipient, user or viewer.

Borrowing from contemporary anthropologists, we can understand how a space, at an intimate and social level, is given meaning by the layering of perception, experience and memory, and that technologized space carries with it particular inflections that affect the way we inhabit it.[6] Consequently we need to understand that new technology is not just a tool that can be used by the museum to deliver content according to previously prescribed methods. Instead, new technology is one of the forces that conditions how people act, think and behave in museum spaces.

As a curator working with contemporary arts, I am interested in the way that the gallery – or any other space that contains creative work – uses narrative and other structural devices to evoke a powerful cognitive and emotional response. Many museums have explored stimulating ways to use contemporary creative artworks within and alongside traditional spaces, to demonstrate how the museum experience can be challenging, transformative and aesthetic.[7] However, a curator can aspire to create intense situations but they cannot prescribe the response. Understanding how or why a viewer responds to a complex visual experience is extraordinarily complicated, as they are not only responding to the work itself, but they are experiencing it within the conceptual framework of a number of narratives: institutional, personal and social. And if the work is itself a work of new technology, the narratives of technology will become part of the conditions of the piece. In the museum, a triangulation occurs as the space of the museum is brought together with the creative artwork and with new media technology. In this situation, Hannah Redler's concern about the tensions that exist between art and the gallery content is complicated further: a balance needs to be struck between the narratives of the gallery, the artwork and technology.

Art made with new technology, or to use the more frequent term, 'New Media art', is often concerned with innovation. The works themselves may experiment with new forms of software or hardware, or tease out changes in the way we can represent information, culture or our experience. As such, the experimentation deals with an element of risk, not just technical, but also of newness and a sense of advancing practices. Such work often creates challenges for arts organizations and curators, as well as audiences, and over the last decade a substantial discourse has arisen around the challenges faced by traditional arts venues when showing New Media art.[8]

The development of interactive artwork, as a particular aspect of new media, has focused on the importance of the relationship between the viewer and the work itself. In this context the emphasis shifts from the notion of the audience as passive receiver to that of the audience as active participant, user or co-creator. The fundamental point is that if an artwork is defined

by, responds to, or is directly linked to the audience the content cannot be analysed as if it were static or pre–determined, but needs to be seen as dynamic and emergent.

Yet despite some of the extreme complexities of the discussion and analysis of various artists' work, there is not a strong base of audience studies in new media. The need for a detailed understanding of audience behaviour may seem obvious in the context of museum design or in the fields of human computer design and games design, but it does not have the same standing in fine arts. Possibly this is because it is not a convention in visual arts to analyse the way a viewer responds to an artwork, and consequently curators and art historians often take a theoretical position or speak in generalities about the way viewers will feel when encountering a work. However, it begs the question on what suppositions is this knowledge based?

My response as a curator has been to use simple and straightforward methods to monitor audience response and the effect of New Media art in museums and galleries. My primary impetus was that, through curating a series of exhibitions, I became intensely aware of the way that the engagement with the technology could overwhelmingly become the focus of the audience's attention, dominating the subject of the work and overriding other concepts. A secondary reason was that if exhibitions were to be documented, understanding how and why people had responded to the work should be included. Otherwise it was impossible properly to create an historical record of what had constituted creative innovation.[9]

I used the opportunity of curating an exhibition of the Canadian New Media artist David Rokeby in the UK and Canada in 2007 and 2008, *Carbon Remembers Silicon*, to investigate the possibilities of qualitative research (Figure 24.1).[10] Rokeby has been an important figure

FIGURE 24.1 David Rokeby, *n-Cha(n)t* (2001), exhibited in *Carbon Remembers Silicon* at the Foundation for Art and Technology (FACT), Liverpool, 2007.

in New Media art with major exhibitions in leading international venues and has won many distinctions and international awards since the early 1990s. The curatorial strategy of the exhibition was to present a retrospective and to construct a narrative that could encompass the artist's thematic evolution and technical methods. It is a difficult task to construct a 'pure' retrospective in New Media art, as one might do with other media. Work designed for outmoded computers and platforms may have to be reconfigured to run on newer systems that may give a false representation of what the work was like. However, an aspect of even greater complexity is that audiences are so attuned to the turnover of technology, and so aware of the constant modification of software and hardware, that older artwork may be perceived as being crude and technologically unsophisticated, just as a cutting-edge mobile phone from the mid-1990s would seem clunky in comparison to today's touch sensitive and multifunctional devices. Therefore, the research question was framed to discover how the audience perceived the works and to deduce whether they understood the curatorial intention, or whether their perceptions of the social narrative of technology overrode the curatorial narrative.

The research was carried out using the cyclical model of action research. Action research is a practical research method, which focuses on an identified situation using a cycle of four steps: planning, taking action, observing, reflecting. These steps are repeated, applying the findings and knowledge that results. The cycle can be repeated indefinitely. The pragmatic needs of the exhibition made action research a suitable method for this enquiry. Change was inevitable since three different exhibition venues would require different selections of work presented with different configurations, due to the physical variations of the spaces. Changes could also be made to the texts and captions for the exhibition, but without deeper input, these decisions would have been only based on curatorial instinct and not on knowledge of the audience.

At each venue audience members, gallery invigilators and the resident curators were interviewed. The outcome of the interviews revealed what interested the audiences but also made it clear what they were *not* interested in. Using a semi-structured interview technique, audiences were freely able to make responses; critique, enthuse or give uncommitted observations. This was followed up with more detailed questioning. One point that immediately became obvious was that the retrospective narrative of the exhibition was not being noted by the audience. Even though at the first venue the layout was structured on a timeline, the audiences felt this was irrelevant. Instead of contextualizing the works within a chronology, they saw them all as being contemporary: having 'now-ness'. What had been intended as a curatorial imperative was seen merely as a subtext.

While it is undisputed that gallery audiences will make multiple readings of an exhibition, the feedback of the audiences indicated that while the interview subjects of the Rokeby exhibition picked up on many different themes and brought their own readings to the work according to their own subjectivities, aspects of the technology appeared to dominate the discussion and inflect the audience's recollection. The research also highlighted in particular that when interactive works and non-interactive works were juxtaposed, it was easy for the mode of engagement with one to dominate the way that the gallery space was being used, and this was reflected in the observations the audiences made and their emphasis on spectacle and sensation.

Research of this nature is informal and relatively open-ended, partly because it is driven by practical outcomes and affected by site-specific conditions. Many variables apply, so it is impossible to compare the outcomes in the way that might be done in a study with a more positivist approach. However, the key findings were consistent: there were clearly two narratives at work in the exhibition that the audiences and gallery staff responded to. The narrative

privileged by myself as curator arose from the artist's concerns, and was theorized in gallery texts and demonstrated through the organization of the exhibition. The other was the narrative of technology. It gave rise to a set of expectations about the experience the audience might have, but also strongly affected the way they responded to the work. Of the two narratives, the curatorial narrative was under the control of the gallery team, but the technological narrative had to be seen in relation to the personal and social viewing contexts of the audience. It could be confronted or addressed, but managing it was beyond the gallery's control.

As a result, over its three presentations in different venues, the exhibition changed in selection and arrangement. Texts were rewritten and the website altered, and following the action research method, feedback was constantly gained to evaluate what effect the changes had on the audience's perception.

Building on this experience, I have focused on a number of exhibitions curated by colleagues that can be seen as addressing similar concerns. Recent museum exhibitions in London have provided a number of examples of the way that the context of the museum can confront the effect of New Media artworks, and how the artworks can impact upon the experience of the audiences. These exhibitions have ranged from permanent installations to temporary installations in spaces; and from self-contained exhibitions of digital media to works integrated into collections.

The investigation that has resulted has used observational methods, unstructured interviews – and a visual culture model of the exhibition as a 'visual event' – to look at the engagement and response of the audience.[11] As with the previous audience research, it is not sustained ethnographic research but, rather, a series of 'snapshots' across different spaces. As such its purpose is not to present distinct 'findings', but to use the observations as a way to question how artists, curators and institutions have attempted to create particular relationships within the triangulation of museum, art and technology, as well as to raise questions about the audience's response.

In 2008 the Science Museum, London, installed as a 'special exhibition' the artwork, *Listening Post*, by artists Mark Hansen and Ben Rubin (Figure 24.2). The work is described by the museum as 'a "dynamic portrait" of online communication, displaying uncensored fragments of text, sampled in real-time, from public internet chatrooms and bulletin boards'.[12] The exhibit is unusual in that the artwork has been acquired as part of the permanent collection of the museum, collected within the context of the Internet and computing, but as an artwork not as an industrial artefact. The mode of display presents it as such: the work is presented in a contained gallery space, arrows on the floor point to 'Listening Post the award winning experience', and introductory texts describe it as a work by artists.

The viewer's experience of *Listening Post* is a complex one because different factors encompass the subject matter, the environment and the mode of presentation. The artwork can be described as a visualization and sonification of traffic on the Internet. *Listening Post* is based on computer programs that collect, sample, process and analyse thousands of public online conversations in live time. These are then sorted and filtered to become the raw material for the artwork, and are presented within a series of different 'movements', and given visual form as words flickering across a wall-sized bank of small screens, and interpreted as sound through a computer-generated voice and a responsive audio soundtrack. The subject matter goes beyond the content of the stream of data as it also embraces the 'live-ness' of the Internet, and the unexpected language and immediately contemporary references give the work the authenticity of a direct online connection that is unmediated and unregulated.

In this way, *Listening Post* is both a referent to the technology of the Internet and an online

FIGURE 24.2 Mark Hansen and Ben Rubin, *Listening Post (2003)*, exhibited at the Science Museum London, 2008–2011.

gateway itself, but in addition it suggests the quality or the experience of what it means to be connected and online. The physical space that the audience experiences is not only the space of the museum, but the space of chat-space or cyberspace.

My observation of the audience of *Listening Post*, over several visits and during a variety of times and days, revealed a remarkable characteristic. Whereas the Science Museum reports that 30 seconds to 2 minutes is considered a typical 'dwell time' at most exhibits, in *Listening Post*, sample audiences demonstrated different behaviours, staying for up to ten times longer than normal.[13]

The reason why a complex artwork would hold the attention of the audience in such an atypical fashion could be put down to a number of factors, but a specific intention to engage with art was unlikely to be one of them: in sample interviews of audience members who stayed for a substantial time, no one stated that they had come in with the intention of experiencing art, or even described the work as art, despite the labels and handouts that emphasized this. No one reported that they knew what to expect before they entered the piece.

However, the work takes the unfamiliar and inexpressible material of Internet data and represents it using familiar conventions by creating an almost cinematic viewing environment. In a busy museum with a huge amount of visual competition, it is possible such an immersive experience is reassuring. But possibly also one of the appealing aspects of the work is that it runs counter to the visitor's expectations of the museum, for although it provides spectacle and expects passivity, it is also clearly an uncontrolled, unfiltered and live environment.

It could be argued, however, on the basis of its reception, that the qualities that make

human engagement across technologies a meaningful event are embedded within the work. These contribute to make the work inspiring, engaging and memorable – which are the three distinct qualities that the museum identifies as key to providing a life-enhancing experience.[14] And although it is atypical as a new media project in that it delivers content to a passive audience, as opposed to engaging with participants, it creates an environment which, for reasons of the technology, mark it out from other museum spaces, and directly appeals to the audience, reflecting their own experience back at them.

An entirely different approach to juxtaposing the social space of the museum with the space of the Internet can be seen in a project, *The Interactive Dictionary*, exhibited at Dr Johnson's House in London. *The Interactive Dictionary*, by artist Jason Cleverly, was one of a series of commissions that formed part of the 2009 project, *House of Words*, which celebrated the 300-year anniversary of the birth of Samuel Johnson and was organized by independent curators Tessa Peters and Janice West (Figure 24.3). In the project a series of artists' works were

FIGURE 24.3   Jason Cleverly, *The Interactive Dictionary (2009)*, exhibited at Dr Johnson's House, 2009.

commissioned to respond to themes within Johnson's life, work and his existence within the historic house. The *Interactive Dictionary* was located in the garret of the house where Johnson's team was engaged in writing the dictionary of the English language.

To encounter Cleverly's artwork, visitors entering the garret would come across an open book on a table, with a text inviting them to create a word and definition. The book and pen were, in fact, peripheral devices to a computer. Once the visitor's contribution had been written, and the pen returned to its base – which was the command to 'submit' – their handwriting would be analysed and the word was then entered into an online database. A nearby screen showed a selection of the contributions, so that the visitors were always aware how their contribution would be seen and demonstrated the link from pen and journal to Internet.

The Interactive Dictionary used technology to intervene in the narrative of the house in two ways, first by introducing an interactive device into a space that was otherwise concerned with passive reflection, and second by introducing, by association, current approaches to the dictionary and online compilations of knowledge, such as the Wiktionary and Wikipedia. Interestingly, however, the project resisted the possibility of operating as a fully online activity, in that online viewers could see the definitions but could not contribute. Therefore, the purpose of the artwork was fundamentally an installation linked to the actual experience of being in the house. In ways that made it similar to *Listening Post*, the work required an understanding of the Internet but was not dependent upon the audience having a direct involvement. However, unlike *Listening Post*, the audience of *Interactive Dictionary* were required to perform the work. Participating in the work became an event.

The Interactive Dictionary had a playful aspect to it: the project enabled a seamless transference from play to creative contribution, the definitions being frequently witty or whimsical, yet the actual interface had no particular characteristics, hardware or software, that could encourage play more than any other pen and writing ledger might. The opportunity to make comments in a gallery is not unusual, but when the means to do it comes through handwriting recognition, it becomes novel. Although it is not a game in any conventional way, using an innovative technology can equate to playing and provides an incentive. This suggests that in considering if technology has a conditioning narrative, we need to address the novelty of the experience and how this may condition the visitor or participant.

Maybe in considering how audiences respond to New Media artworks, the two aspects of play and spectacle, identified in the previous examples, need to be seen in relation to each other. Interactive technologies in museums are often studied for their capacity to facilitate informal learning and because of the way that the involved visitor can experience a number of different forms of engagement which can be speculative, collaborative and investigative. New Media artworks like *The Interactive Dictionary* demonstrate another mode of play which is participation as a creative act in itself, so that the engagement of the audiences in an interactive project is both the creative purpose of the work and the means by which creative content is developed. In comparison, works that require a passive reception, like *Listening Post*, may employ spectacle as a way of engaging the audience. However, other works might combine both spectacle and play, so that the audience is responsible for creating a heightened environment. This is demonstrated by the exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum, *Decode: Digital Design Sensations*, in 2010.

Decode was described as 'a showcase of the latest developments in digital and interactive design, from small, screen-based, graphics to large-scale interactive installations'.[15] It was structured around three themes: 'Code' showed how computer code, whether bespoke and

tailored, or hacked and shared, has become a new design tool; 'Interactivity' presented works that respond to physical presence; 'Network' charted or reworked the traces network traffic leaves behind and illustrated social connections and communications.

The design team had used three stylistic modes, one for each of the themes. These ranged from 'Code', which largely used plasma screens and suggested a solemnity in keeping with the way design is shown elsewhere at the museum, to 'Interactivity', which often involved hand contact or body gesture. Not only did the environment for the 'Interactivity' section bring people in close proximity to the exhibits, but it also brought them close to each other.

The exhibition curator, Louise Shannon, comments that the exhibition created challenges for the V&A in terms of visitor behaviour: visitors felt free to physically connect with the works.[16] As a result, more works were damaged through unexpected contact, labels torn and fixtures dislodged, than had ever occurred previously at the museum. Attendance research showed that the audience was typical for the V&A, yet it behaved in atypical ways, which presented the curatorial and administrative staff with a challenge in terms of exhibition management and contingency planning. But it also provided the opportunity to consider how the effect of design and content planning on the visitor is compounded by other factors such as the social behaviour around technology.

My audience research was conducted using observational and interview methods similar to those used for the David Rokeby exhibition discussed previously, creating brief 'snapshots' of the audience experience across a number of days and viewing times. It became apparent that the interactive exhibits dominated audience experience, not just in time spent viewing them, but in the way that the audience members reflected upon what they had got out of the exhibit.

The observation revealed that while audiences in the space for 'Code' and 'Network' maintained the same sort of physical relationships observed elsewhere in the traditional museum galleries – such as maintaining boundaries of individual space, not making physical or eye contact with others, reading captions before or after looking at their exhibit and then progressing on – audiences in 'Interactivity' displayed different behaviours. Although there was often little verbal communication between audience members, there were often tactile signs of cooperation, such as people ushering others into an interactive arena or demonstrating how they were using the interface. Frequently individuals would start by standing back, as passive onlookers, and progress to being active participants, by mimicking the behaviour of others or creating a variation on what others had done. In this way participants could be thought to be establishing the rule sets by which they would engage and experiment. It was notable that textual information became of secondary importance to observation, and very rarely did visitors look at captions if there were other people to watch. Strikingly the viewers were also very willing to share their opinions with the interviewers which was not the case with visitors in other exhibitions at the V&A, who were sampled to provide a comparison, and were typically more reluctant to discuss their impressions.

The experience of visitors in an exhibition such as *Decode* suggests that the extent to which a narrative of technology affects the experience of the visitor can be social as well as cognitive. Possibly the technological space can be thought of as a new form of 'transitional space', which, in a cross-disciplinary approach, hybridizes the ideas of connecting architectural areas with individuals making experimental forays that take them beyond normal social mores.

These examples have attempted to illustrate that when museums commission or present creative works by artists within the gallery space, they create sub-narratives that may both

work with, and in opposition to, the prevailing narratives of the gallery. When these works use new media, additional complexities clearly arise in terms of the audiences' understanding of the space, of their expectations of their role within the museum, and their expected physical behaviour. These examples point towards the need for varied approaches to surveying the experience of the visitor, and how technology might not only empower the museum but may also invigorate the way the visitor has a role within it. Understanding the conditions that new media creates, what is unique and what complications it evokes, are issues that need to be continually examined – as the use of technology changes.

Notes

 1 N. Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture*, London: Routledge, 1999, p. 1.
 2 J. Falk and L. Dierking, *Learning From Museums: Visitor Experiences and the Making of Meaning*, Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2000.
 3 M. Henning, *Museums, Media and Cultural Theory*, Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2005, p. 91.
 4 Interview with H. Redler, Head of Arts Projects, Science Museum, London, May 2009.
 5 H. Hein, *The Museum in Transition: A Philosophical Perspective*, Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2000.
 6 M. Augé, *Non Places, Introduction to an Anthropology of Super Modernity*, London: Verso, 1995.
 7 J. Putnam, *Art and Artefact: The Museum as Medium*, London: Thames and Hudson, 2001.
 8 B. Graham and S. Cook, *Rethinking Curating: Art After New Media*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009.
 9 The Variable Media Project led by the Guggenheim Museum has contributed significantly to setting standards for the documentation and archiving of New Media works: A. Depocas, J. Ippolito and C. Jones (eds) *Permanence Through Change: The Variable Media Approach*, New York and Montreal: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation and The Daniel Langlois Foundation for Art, Science, and Technology, 2003.
10 *David Rokeby: Carbon Remembers Silicon, Retrospective of New Media Artworks*, (curated by Peter Ride), was exhibited at the Foundation for Art and Technology (FACT), Liverpool, April–May 2007; The Centre for Contemporary Art, Glasgow, August–September 2007; and as *David Rokeby: Plotting Against Time*, Art Gallery of Windsor, Canada, January–March 2008.
11 G. Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, London: Sage, 2001, pp. 10–15.
12 Science Museum website text, Special Exhibitions, Listening Post. Online. Available at: www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/visitmuseum/galleries/listening_post.aspx. Accessed 8 February 2010.
13 Of visitors who came in and settled, 25 per cent stayed for over 5 minutes, of which often more than 5 per cent stayed for 10 to 15 minutes, and 5 per cent for 15 to 20 minutes. In comparison, at the newly installed *Muslim Inventions* exhibition, few people would follow a talking head video through its full length of 3 minutes. The greatest dwell time in this gallery was a character-driven video dramatization about children discovering the delights of ancient knowledge, in a Harry Potter style, and featuring Ben Kingsley, which could hold an audience for 12 minutes.
14 Interview with K. Steiner, Head of Visitor Research, Science Museum, London, March 2009.
15 'Decode: Digital Design Sensations', Victoria and Albert Museum. Online. Available at: www.vam.ac.uk/microsites/decode/. Accessed 8 February 2010.
16 Interview with L. Shannon, Curator, Victoria & Albert Museum, London, April 2010.

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THE THICK PRESENT

Architecture, narration and film

Samantha L. Martin-McAuliffe and Nathalie Weadick

How can exhibitions convey the essence of buildings that are distant, both in space and time? Is it possible, moreover, for film to grant access to architecture, to help us experience its spaces? This chapter uses these questions as points of departure for reconsidering the ways we exhibit architecture. Central to its discussion is the role of the moving image and its ability to cultivate not only a visual understanding of architecture, but also the exchange of ideas.

The Lives of Spaces, Ireland's exhibition at the 11th International Architecture Biennale in Venice, set out to harness the immersive and narrative capabilities of film. Rather than seeing this medium as a purely documentary tool, the curators proposed that film be used to unveil the intrinsic, even elusive, qualities of several buildings. Space was thus broadly conceived – part history, part narrative, part experience. Just as any film is composed of not one but a multitude of frames, the spaces in the exhibition embodied exceptionally varied and overlapping conditions, such as collective life, identity and renewal. Hence the idea of the 'thick present': while the films comprising the exhibition addressed the here and now of buildings, they were informed by the past and anticipated the future.

Ultimately, *The Lives of Spaces* provided an opportunity to rethink the purpose of an exhibition. It was innovative because visitors were understood not as passive onlookers, but as active participants in a generative process of asking questions about architecture. Our analysis presented here builds upon such an experience by further exploring how architectural exhibitions can foster a dynamic reciprocity between the audience, authors and curators. Furthermore, we hope that this exploration will illuminate – as well as enrich – the intersections of visual art and architecture exhibitions, thereby broadening current discourses concerning narrative space.

This chapter is comprised of two halves, each of which considers, or rather re-evaluates, the conditions and possibilities of film in exhibiting architecture. The first half explores some of the larger questions and perceptions that inform the relationship between architecture and the moving image. In particular, it seeks to clarify our own expectations as well as preconceptions about how we can exhibit, view and discuss architecture in a gallery or museum setting. This part of the discussion will undoubtedly raise many more questions than answers, but in doing so, it will hopefully provide a platform for us to step back and revisit aspects of archi-

tectural curation that deserve further attention and critical reflection. The second half of the paper productively expands this discussion. By using Ireland's entry for the 11th International Architecture Biennale in Venice during 2008 as a case study, it will explore new initiatives for using film in the practice of curating architecture.

Architecture, curation and film: a prolegomenon

Is it possible to ask categorically: What can film tell us about architecture? Superficially, such a question is direct and fundamental, and yet it is also deceptive; a Pandora's box of preconceptions and assumptions that are enormously difficult to clarify. Nonetheless, we argue here that it is not a question that is asked frequently enough, or with due diligence. Of course, the rapport between cinema and architecture has been well documented, and moreover, an increasing number of architects and architectural historians are using film as a vehicle for research and analysis into the built environment. For example, Penz and Thomas have addressed the technical as well as the theoretical cross-fertilizations of architecture and the moving image.[1] In a different vein, Nezar AlSayyad examines the fine line between 'real and reel' space, particularly in the representation of the city.[2] Other authors have explored how, in certain circumstances, the architectures depicted within a film transcend the conventions of being a stage or backdrop in order to become one of the main actors in the plot. In his volume, *The Architecture of Image*, Juhani Pallasmaa scrutinizes this phenomenon, concentrating on how something as inconspicuous as a film set can influence the way we interpret and perceive social situations. Two general comments can be made about such studies. Interestingly, while the amount of research into architecture and film appears to be rapidly widening, the specific topic of the city has steadfastly remained the predominant and favoured theme.[3] Texts about the cinematic city and urbanism abound, whereas there are, in comparison, few studies into filmic landscapes or gardens – an ironic situation given the fact that ancient and early modern theatres maintained a close reciprocity with landscapes.[4] A prolonged discussion of the reasons behind this situation is outside the remit of this chapter, but the issue is important to mention here because it underscores how the relationship between architecture and film has many angles that are still ripe for exploration. Closely related to this is the role of film in curating architecture. Only very recently have the two spheres of the architect and curator merged to form a single discipline or avenue of research.[5] Although the medium of film clearly offers many advantages for curating architecture, it is crucial to point out how the role of film as a creative vehicle for architectural curation remains overlooked and understudied. Often, within the framework of a public exhibition, we find that the moving image is treated as a formal, documentary tool for illustrating and 'explaining' the process of a design or a finished product. In such cases, it is employed more as an extension of the still camera than an agent for questioning – much less interrogating – architecture and the built environment.

For architects and architectural historians, film is understandably an appealing medium. In theory, it can provide almost limitless data, thereby serving as a kind of permanently growing visual and audio dossier. This kind of chronicle can be seductive because it seems to promise an exhaustive record of life and events. Likewise, the alleged objectivity of the camera's lens intimates that the integrity of a particular space will be preserved, ostensibly ensuring that a building 'captured' on film is in effect a design – an architect's vision – conclusively preserved and indefinitely available. Therefore, it is not surprising that we frequently hear both students and colleagues note that they use film to document sites in order to communicate what it is

like to experience a building first-hand, but is this a satisfying interpretation of what film can or should do within the specific context of architectural curation?

André Bazin, the French film theorist, challenged the presumed omniscience of the camera lens, arguing that it betrays the diversity and richness of the lived world situated beyond the confines of the captured image.[6] In effect, a film has blind spots, like the areas around a vehicle that the driver cannot directly observe. Likewise, as cinema audience members, we cannot directly view that which lies outside the limits of the rectangular frame. But, those people, buildings and streets just out of sight do affect our interpretation and understanding of the scene at hand. This idea can be further developed within the particular forum of architectural curation.[7] Rather than dwelling on the perennial question of whether a moving image can produce a complete or authentic record of a building, might we instead inquire how it can allow us to transcend the visual? Put categorically, can we ask film to convey something more than we currently envisage? Can its communicative properties express not just the literal and concrete, but also the invisible, and even the ineffable, qualities of architecture?

Architecture and the invisible; film and the ineffable

Although visual qualities and conditions are fundamental to our perception of architecture, they alone cannot convey the full experience of place. We instinctively know that other senses and sensitivities, such as smell, touch, memory, and even empathy or trepidation, can be vital and inevitable to understanding a building. However, we do not necessarily address these attributes when representing and exhibiting architecture through visual media, including film. In fact, we avoid them. They are, so to speak, too elusive, too impalpable, too ineffable.

The complexity inherent to the invisibility of architecture is germane to the wider arguments that underpin this chapter, and thus deserves further consideration. Developing an understanding of the built environment is not based solely upon the acquisition of literal and objective facts, but also the cultivation of critical thinking and reflection. This is a pedagogical matter that is directly relevant to all forms of architectural education, from the formal academic curriculum to the wider public exhibition. Buildings most often leave a lasting impression on people when they somehow tap into or evoke the characteristics and sensations that are evasive and yet typically human: memory, identity, emotion, character and social interaction. While it is unlikely that most people will recall the precise plan of a building many years after seeing it, a particular smell, sound, tactile sensation, or taste can instantly elicit clear and profound recollections of place.[8] It is this relationship – the connection between the material presence of architecture and its intrinsic qualities – that particularly interests us. In the present chapter this relationship is referred to as the 'thick present', because while it embodies exceptionally varied conditions of architecture, it also accounts for its different senses of time.[9]

Like a poem or a symphony, a building can yield a new interpretation each time we encounter or experience it. This is so even if we revisit the site at the same time of day or the same time of year. Our judgements of it change. We bring different emotions, memories and revelations to a place each time we explore it anew. The architecture changes, too. It ages, acquires a patina, accumulates furnishings and people. As such, the values and meanings expressed by the physicality of architecture are themselves likely to shift and change. Sometimes the meaning of a building is usurped and exploited; occasionally it is completely lost.

Considered from these perspectives, architecture is much less a tangible object than a phenomenon, a situation within an ever-expanding horizon that at times verges on the limits of

the knowable. Pallasmaa has described this precise idea within a much larger frame of reference than an individual building: 'The city', he writes, 'is a phenomenon that exceeds all our capacity of description, representation and recording and, consequently, it is always experientially infinite'.[10] It cannot be overstated that although such conditions and complexities have long been at the centre of academic scholarship and debate, they have not yet established a firm foothold within architectural curation.

Architectural exhibitions tend to cope with the ambiguities and invisibility of spaces in a paradoxical way: an implicit acknowledgement of the limitations of visual representations often leads us, inadvertently, to over-emphasize or privilege the role of images as documentary tools, as if quantity will counter the paucity of active engagement with narrative space. This situation ultimately moves us further away from representation, and closer toward a synthetic simulation.[11] Pallasmaa has been an outspoken critic of the 'ocularcentric paradigm' prevailing in architecture, particularly in the West.[12] Following numerous philosophers, from Sartre to Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, he argues that

> the dominance of the eye and suppression of other senses tends to push us into isolation, detachment and exteriority. The 'art of the eye' has certainly produced some imposing and thought-provoking structures, but it has not rooted humanity in the world.[13]

Our specific interest in this argument is to explore whether modes of visual representation, especially film, can be reconceived so that they focus less upon recording impartial truths – if there can be any – of architecture, and instead reawaken our engagement with the narratives that buildings embody. David Michael Levin speaks of vision as being 'capacity', whereby 'its nature constitutes a multiplicity of different developmental potentials – different possible directions for maturation'.[14] It therefore should be possible to emancipate film, to understand it in a capacity other than being an omniscient eye. In other words, perhaps we should also be inquiring how film might transcend the visual and aural in order to verge on the more intuitive and subjective qualities of a place. This could potentially create an exhibition that framed the viewer as a participant in an immersive environment, rather than as a mere consumer of images.[15]

Can we, therefore, by extension, also ask whether it is possible to imagine what an architecture exhibition would look like that was based upon such perspectives? What would happen if we designed an exhibit around the intangible attributes of a building; or used the social relationships of a particular place as the starting point?

The narrative exhibition

The Lives of Spaces, Ireland's exhibition at the 11th International Architecture Biennale in Venice, set out to explore such questions using immersive and narrative capabilities of the moving image. It was curated by Professor Hugh Campbell from the University College Dublin School of Architecture, and Nathalie Weadick, the Director and Curator of the Irish Architecture Foundation (IAF). As opposed to interpreting the moving image as a neutral mediator between the designer and user of a building, the curators proposed that it be used to unveil or awaken in the viewer the innate and exceptionally varied conditions of place. While the films comprising the exhibition addressed the here and now of buildings, they were informed by the past and anticipated the future. Moreover, from the very onset of the show's

inception, it was hoped that visitors would be active participants in an immersive, even dialectical, process of asking questions about architecture.

The simple, central proposition for *The Lives of Spaces* was that the designed spaces that architects produce play a crucial role in supporting, shaping and framing our individual and collective lives. In an attempt to get beyond the common abstract, distancing effect of traditional architectural displays of drawings and models, film was used as the primary medium. The exhibition consisted of a series of filmic representations displayed in specially designed armatures. Most displayed film on single or multiple LCD screens; some broke film down into its constituent elements of sound, light and time.[16]

Space, broadly understood, is central to architecture, yet it is a notoriously slippery and, at times, a controversial term to define or articulate in concrete language. It can be felt, but it is not tangible. The ineffable qualities of architecture that we referred to earlier in this chapter are often left out of discourse and hardly ever explored in architecture exhibitions. The dynamic conception of architecture, in this instance, overrides the tradition of a building as a tectonic construct, and allows us to think of space as central to practice and central to life. Subsequently, *The Lives of Spaces* was planned and orchestrated to interrogate the commonplace or the so-called 'ordinariness' of architecture, in contrast to conventional architectural exhibitions that often seem to aspire towards a glass and steel utopia. In particular, it was anticipated that the 2008 Biennale exhibition would move away from the received notion – conceit, even – that exhibitions about contemporary architecture demonstrate how the built environment can make our lives better; or how architecture can be a cleansing influence on the ills of society. As you will see, the architectures addressed in the exhibition encompassed the chaotic and lamentable as well as the hopeful and anticipatory. They included private homes and public institutions, such as a notorious prison, a city-centre convent, and a new community centre on the outskirts of Dublin. Some of the buildings in the show belonged to the very distant past and were nearly forgotten. Others were not even built yet and belong to tomorrow. One in particular, a space of incarceration, no longer exists. Dara McGrath and Rachel Andrew's project, *The Topography of the Demolition of the Maze*, was about a space of incarceration and the literal removal of space. The Maze/Long Kesh prison was for over 30 years a symbol of the conflict or 'Troubles' in Ireland. Recently it was decided to demolish the former prison and build a new national stadium on the 360-acre site. Through an extensive photographic survey of the prison during demolition, the artists explored two unanswerable, messy questions about what happens to space at the end of its life: By deconstructing an architecture of containment do we also simultaneously erase our memories of it? Or, are memories intimately wedded to the space that is being left behind? Moreover, can a deeper understanding of the voids, rather than the container, also inform our understanding of the creation of architecture? (Plate 25.1).

The installation by McGrath and Andrews took shape as a series of still images that were displayed as a rolling slide projection. The continuous yet stilted and halting rhythm of the display created a sense of unease, as if each sharp click of an advancing slide signified not a moment of continuity, but the final instance of a place.

The partnership between Campbell and Weadick – with one coming from academia and the other from professional curatorial practice – enabled the planning of *The Lives of Spaces* to consider, from multiple perspectives, how exhibitions can communicate to the general public. Beyond this, the different backgrounds of the curators ultimately gave them the freedom to think more openly and speculatively about how we organize these public initiatives so as to

explore and examine a particular theme. In their conversations on curating, as well as during discussions about the potential of exhibitions to slowly or quickly release an experience to the viewer, they assembled what might be referred to as a working taxonomy of conventional exhibition practices, theories and precedents. While a full discussion of these classifications would merit their own investigation, it is worthwhile mentioning them here in brief because they represent, collectively, a curatorial orthodoxy from which *The Lives of Spaces* attempted to diverge.

The principal categories examined by the curators included the survey or retrospective,[17] the display (as in an architectural competition), and the intervention, for example the annual summer pavilion designed for the Serpentine Gallery in London. In each of these classifications, the architecture is little more than a mute object. It is considered objectively, and yet it also is disengaged from the wider world. With the Serpentine Pavilion the ratio of the relationship between the object and the viewer or visitor is 1:1, but in the case of the survey, retrospective and display exhibitions, the contents on display are part of a process of removal, or even theft.[18] In a very basic way, they refer to a building or place that is not in the exhibition room but present elsewhere. However, as Jeremy Till has pointed out, removal in this context refers to both 'the sense of being apart but also of eliminating – a certain set of values is privileged … [m]ost obviously the visual dominates, but in a very particular manner that displaces any bodily engagement with space'.[19] In a discussion that indirectly evokes Lefebvre's critique on the abstraction of social space, Till elaborates his argument, noting that architecture exhibitions are inherently abstract, and in this literal compression of the subject, we fail to acknowledge not only the conditions of a place, but also their capacity for inhabitation.[20]

Conventional architecture exhibitions tend to imply that the 'authentic' way of experiencing architecture is for the viewer to stand in the building itself. Anything less starts to erode the integrity of a space. Thus, there is a prevailing viewpoint that architectural exhibitions – as opposed to fine art exhibitions – are by default incomplete or an imperfect substitute. As a counterpoint or foil to this perspective, the curators of *The Lives of Spaces* wanted to create an exhibition that conveyed to the viewer the experience of architecture itself, without having to be inside an actual building. To do this they explored and considered the subjective qualities of architecture; values that cannot be calculated in square metres but, rather, are measured as emotional or psychological understanding. In short, they wished to test a non-physical validity for architecture. In this particular instance the subject was the significance of 'space'.

One of the participants in the exhibition, dePaor Architects, devised a research project that took the 'act of cinema' as a starting point for investigation (Figure 25.1). The resulting intervention, *Delay*, does not chronicle the design process of a particular theatre building but instead probes the reciprocity between film and the spectator's experience, thereby exploring ideas of time, intimacy, vision and sound. As such, the very conditions that are fundamental and yet normally implicit to watching a film become the main subjects of study.

Another particularly interesting aspect of *The Lives of Spaces* exhibition was how it stimulated other 'spin-off' events and productions. An example of this was *Image*, a play organized by the Lyric Theatre in 2009. Student actors, aged between 18 and 25, staged a play within the exhibition of *The Lives of Spaces* while it was on tour in the Ormeau Baths Gallery in Belfast. Their performance responded to the overall theme as well as the individual films of the show, thereby adding onto it another narrative.

The Lives of Spaces curators attempted to explore buildings as a singular story, or an account of events, and chronicles from the perspective of the individual. Furthermore, they wanted

FIGURE 25.1   *The Lives of Spaces*, dePaor Architects (2008). Photo: Dara McGrath. Reproduced with kind permission of the IAF, 2008.

to uncover and communicate the stories – as fragments and layers – that buildings can tell us about society, politics and history. What was produced in the end was the narrative exhibition. Above all, this project aimed to challenge the prevailing notion that in order to tell the story of a building one must focus on the process of its tangible design rather than its hidden or underlying dimensions and contexts.[21] Arguably, all visual representations – film, models, plans, photographs – attempt to communicate something beyond themselves.[22] Whereas an architectural plan is an interpretation of a three-dimensional object that exists outside of the designer's studio, a film can go even further, transcending the limits of the pictorial.

Telling time, telling stories

Earlier we posed the question: what would happen if we designed an exhibit around the intangible attributes of a building, or used the social relationships of a particular place as the starting point? By using *The Lives of Spaces* as a case study, we can go some way towards answering this question. This exhibition was a record of research, providing more questions than answers

and, crucially, the show as a whole was unapologetically experimental. In direct contrast to a conventional architectural exhibition comprised of plans and photographs, it prioritized the audience and the audience's reaction to the experience of architecture, thus revealing process, analysis and success, as well as failure. *The Lives of Spaces* looked to both the past and the future, but always in relation to the present. In an approach similar to archaeology, the curators conducted a systematic study of the lives of the buildings included in the show and the impact those very spaces had on culture.[23] It was as if they had stood on a sod of earth and listened as the layers beneath their feet told a story. Ultimately, what they excavated was the 'thick present', which was intended, for this project, to be about where we have come from and what that might say about us now. The 'thick present' can also be described as a kind of 'architectonics of recollection'.[24] It helps us discuss buildings as objects layered with memory, emotions, sensory endowment and societal evolution; and as triggers to understanding our culture and human behaviour.

A poignant example of this is *Sanctuary and Congregation*, the installation by Gerry Cahill Architects, which consists of two films considering a convent in central Dublin. Together, these films can be understood as a figurative 'plumb line'. While the first film reaches into the deep past, chronicling the historical continuity of the religious congregation in this particular place, the second film uses a mature tree in the convent's central garden as the 'bob' or 'weight' that perpetually marks the existence of the community.

Given this experiential and hermeneutical approach to examining architecture, and the fact the show was not primarily about award-winning buildings, the value of the exhibition had to go beyond the economic, and the medals and accolades, to a place of truth, honesty and value in architecture, with a small 'a'. The spaces chosen for inclusion were not precious, pristine places, removed from the ordinary business of life. Instead, they were right in the thick of it, providing accommodation for living, for working, for creative production, for institutional support, for education, for leisure, for collective action. A case in point is the installation featuring the Brookfield Youth and Community Centre by Hassett Ducatez Architects (Figure 25.2).

In writing about the building itself, Grainne Hassett notes how it was described as an 'anti-institution' by members of the community involved in the planning of the project.[25] The Centre was intended to be an anchor point for Tallaght, which sits on the outskirts of Dublin. This is an area marred by economic problems as well as social deprivation. To a large extent, the film expresses the mediating 'dialogue' that the architects attempted to cultivate between the commissioning clients and the eventual inhabitants or users of the building. This dialogue consisted of light, colour and movement – elements that transcend the language of political legislation and building codes.

Film was the vehicle of choice for telling these stories because it offers a vivid immediacy, a readily accessible language, and the capacity to incorporate time into the depiction of space. Film is also a consumer of architectural space. Because the nine participants in *The Lives of Spaces* came primarily from architectural practice, they often found that making a film, or something referencing it, was not only challenging but also potentially risky. The curators, in their role as orchestrators, quietly and anxiously experimented with the participants, testing whether there was a way to pursue film spectatorship as an act of architecture. Beyond this, the larger, overarching question remained: can the spectator experience architecture by viewing it through film? Like the cinematic experiments of Charles and Ray Eames, these films aimed to convey or communicate ideas rather than precise analyses of dimensions.[26] For example,

FIGURE 25.2 Brookfield Youth and Community Centre, Hassett Ducatez Architects (2008). Photo: Alice Clancy. Reproduced with kind permission of the IAF, 2008.

Simon Walker and Patrick Lynch conceived of an exhibit that told the story of the house that Robin Walker built in a remote area of Cork in the early 1970s. The house, named Bótharbuí (meaning 'yellow road' in Irish), is sensitively portrayed in a film by Heathcote Barr. The installation invites us, the viewers, into the home, and regards us more as casual or informal guests than as members of some kind of tour. We catch glimpses of family gatherings and encounter commonplace situations, such as a running tap. Simultaneously, just out of sight, but constantly present, is the voice of Seamus Heaney reciting a poem that he wrote about the house (Plate 25.2).

Taken individually, each display in *The Lives of Spaces* had something of the condensed power of a short story. As with the best short stories, it is through the intense focus on the particular qualities of a particular space at a particular time, that much larger social and cultural themes are illuminated. Thus, taken cumulatively, what emerges is nothing less than a spatial portrait of Irish society. The narrative emerging from the exhibition has a universal relevance and potency.

Notes

1 F. Penz and M. Thomas (eds) *Architecture and Cinema: Méliès, Mallet-Stevens, Multimedia*, London: British Film Institute, 1997; F. Penz and M. Thomas (eds) *Architectures of Illusion: From Motion Pictures to Navigable Interactive Environments*, Bristol: Intellect, 2003.
2 N. AlSayyad, *Cinematic Urbanism: A History of the Modern from the Reel to Real*, London: Routledge, 2006.
3 However, it is worth noting how this situation has undergone immense change in the last few years. Refer to D. B. Clarke (ed.) *The Cinematic City*, London: Routledge, 1997, p. 1. On film and the

city see: M. Shiel and T. Fitzmaurice (eds) *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2001; J. Hallam, R. Koeck, R. Kronenburg and L. Roberts (eds) *Cities in Film: Architecture, Urban Space and the Moving Image*, Liverpool: University of Liverpool, 2008; L. Creton and K. Feigelson, *Villes cinématographiques: Ciné-lieux*, Paris: Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2007; S. Barber, *Projected Cities: Cinema and Urban Space*, London: Reaktion, 2002; B. Mennel, *Cities and Cinema*, London: Routledge, 2008; and A. Webber and E. Wilson (eds) *Cities in Transition: the Moving Image and the Modern Metropolis*, London: Wallflower Press, 2008.

4 A notable exception is the current research into landscape video at the DesignLab, ETH Zurich, supervised by Christophe Girot. For a discussion of the role of landscape in auditoria, see G. Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, New York: Verso, 2002, pp. 47–50.

5 See S. Chaplin and A. Stara (eds) *Curating Architecture and the City*, London: Routledge, 2009. Also K. Feireiss (ed.) *The Art of Architecture Exhibitions*, Rotterdam: NAi Publishers, 2001.

6 A. Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, ed. and trans. H. Gray, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967, vol. I, p. 166. Thank you to Douglas Smith for bringing this passage to our attention.

7 See, for example: D. Smith, 'Delayed Departures: Cinema/Venice Architecture,' in H. Campbell, S. Martin-McAuliffe, B. Ward and N. Weadick (eds) *The Lives of Spaces*, Dublin: Irish Architecture Foundation, 2008, pp. 134–145.

8 See, for example: M. Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, trans. C. K. Scot Moncrieff, Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 2006, vol. 1, pp. 61–64. Also: A. Barbara and A. Perliss (eds) *Invisible Architecture: Experiencing Places through the Sense of Smell*, Milan: Skira, 2006; T. Engen, *Odor Sensation and Memory*, New York: Praeger, 1991, chs. 1 and 8; J. Pallasmaa, *Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*, London: Academy Editions, 1996, pp. 37–42.

9 We understand and refer to what may be called a horizon of time, not the post-modern condition of a time-space compression about which David Harvey writes; see D. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992, pp. 284–307.

10 J. Pallasmaa, *The Architecture of Image: Existential Space in Cinema*, Helsinki: Rakennustieto, 2001, p. 21.

11 J. Baudrillard, *Simulations*, trans. P. Foss, P. Patton and P. Beitchman, New York: Columbia University, 1983, p. 11.

12 J. Pallasmaa, *Eyes of the Skin*.

13 Ibid., p. 10.

14 D. M. Levin, 'Decline and Fall: Ocularcentrism in Heidegger's Reading of the History of Metaphysics', in D. M. Levin (ed.) *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993, p. 192.

15 K. Feireiss, 'It's Not about Art', in Feireiss, *The Art of Architecture Exhibitions*, p. 10.

16 The exhibition first opened at the Palazzo Giustinian-Lolin in Venice, September 14–November 23, 2008. It subsequently travelled to venues across Ireland and in England. See: Campbell *et al.*, *The Lives of Spaces*.

17 Survey exhibitions contain a large amount of primary material and research, original sketches, drawings, and working models referring to an architect's building or practice, or often an architectural movement. An example was *David Chipperfield Architects: Form Matters*, organized by the Design Museum, London, 21 October 2009–31 January 2010.

18 B. Podrecca, 'The Exhibition: a Substitute Reality', in Feireiss, *The Art of Architecture Exhibitions*, p. 54.

19 J. Till, 'Afterword: Please ~~do not~~ touch', in S. Chaplin and A. Stara (eds) *Curating Architecture and the City*, London: Routledge, 2009, p. 246.

20 Ibid. See also H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. D. Nicholson-Smith, Oxford: Blackwell, 1991.

21 This was posited by B. Lootsma, 'Forgotten Worlds, Possible Words', in Feireiss, *The Art of Architecture Exhibitions*, p. 16.

22 M. W. Wartofsky, 'Picturing and Representing', in C. F. Nodine and D. F. Fisher (eds) *Perception and Pictorial Representation*, New York: Praeger, 1979, p. 281.

23 Interestingly, both architects and archaeologists tend to examine and understand buildings through layers. The form and meaning of buildings can shift, and often new evidence comes to light that changes long-standing ideas. In archaeology, the close study of buildings – not just their form, but their material composition, topographical context, and contents – can reveal essential clues about past cultures. On how archaeology can illuminate the complex and multifarious layers of a single site,

see: J. K. Papadopoulos, *Ceramicus Redivivus*: *The Early Iron Age Potters' Field in the Area of the Classical Athenian Agora*, *Hesperia* Supplement 31, Princeton, NJ: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 2003.

24 Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion*, chapter 7.
25 G. Hassett, 'Colour Field', in Campbell *et al.*, *The Lives of Spaces*, p. 28.
26 P. Kirkham, *Charles and Ray Eames: Designers of the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995.

26

A NARRATIVE JOURNEY

Creating storytelling environments with architecture and digital media

Tom Duncan and Noel McCauley

At the Brickworks Museum, in Zehdenick in the state of Brandenburg, Germany our task as designers was to identify and present the memory of its industrial usage which, together with its social context, would enable visitors to connect emotionally with the location's multi-layered cultural heritage. Located near Berlin, it is the largest of its kind in Europe and the interpretive intervention consists of a sequence of installations synthesizing architecture and digital media to create experiential storytelling environments. As architects and storytellers, our understanding of the individual's perception of space and its associative qualities is the basis for our exploration of the narrative potential that space embodies. Furthermore, our interest in film and digital media, with their narrative and spatial possibilities, has led us to investigate how they can be combined with architecture to create spatial storytelling environments.

The first section of the chapter will present the historical context of the site. The second explores how the combination of film and architecture embodies memory and creates a narrative experience. The third section traces a visitor's journey through the area of the museum depicting the history of the Brickworks during the time of the GDR.[1]

Context: a brief history of the brickworks

The Zehdenick Brickworks is situated within a network of lakes covering some 3,200 hectares along the river Havel from Zehdenick to Marienthal. This idyllic environment featuring a diverse range of both rare and common flora and fauna is, however, a man-made phenomenon. The 50 or so lakes are in fact former clay pits that have since filled with groundwater. The site spans a period of over 100 years of German history and has seen significant social and political changes. Shortly after its opening in 1894 by Friedrich Hornemann, the Zehdenick Brickworks stood out as one of the most flourishing enterprises in Berlin-Brandenburg. The invention of the circular kiln by Friedrich Eduard Hoffmann in 1859 enabled bricks to be fired continuously in a circulating fire inside a ring-shaped tunnel; bricks could be inserted and removed while the firing process continued uninterrupted. This pioneering development made the industrial mass production of bricks possible for the first time and was a prerequisite for the construction boom, which accompanied the rapid industrialization and dramatic urban

growth of Berlin during this period. Brickmaking in Zehdenick was still, however, largely seasonal until the steam-powered Stackebrandt brickyard of 1927 was built. This combined the various production phases from clay treatment to drying and brick firing underneath one roof, enabling year-round production for the first time.

The Nazi seizure of power in 1933, the preparations for war, and the Second World War itself, had a great impact on the Zehdenick brickyards. Among the consequences were the expropriation of Jewish-owned works and the deployment of forced labourers. By 1939, all the brickworks had been 'Aryanized', meaning that Jewish owners – who had made a crucial contribution to the development of the Zehdenick brickmaking industry – were dispossessed. In addition to Herzberg, one of the original owners of the Brickworks Museum site, those affected included the works owned by the Frank, Hirschfeld, Levison, Prerauer and Zöllner families. During the war, inmates from the Ravensbrück concentration camp were forced to work on the site. After the war the brickworks were taken over by the East German government. In 1951 they were merged into the new state-owned 'VEB Ziegelwerke Zehdenick'. A labour camp was in operation next to the brickworks between 1953 and 1963. It was one of many such facilities in East Germany in which convicts had to work for minimal pay. Camp inmates were guarded closely while at work.

In autumn 1961, the labour camp, previously occupied by criminals and political prisoners was transformed into an *Arbeitskommando* ('labour detachment'), which saw increasing numbers of 'idlers' assigned for 'education through collective labour'[2] at the brickworks. Due to the ineffectiveness of the inmates as a workforce, this system was discontinued in 1963. Some of the most prestigious building projects of the GDR, such as the Karl-Marx-Allee housing development in East Berlin and the Palast der Republik, were built using bricks from the Zehdenick Brickworks. In this period, the production process saw increased mechanization, though the ovens for firing the bricks were still the Hofmann circular kilns dating from the nineteenth century.

After the reunification of Germany in 1990, the brickworks, like many other industrial sites in the former GDR, were found to be uncompetitive and did not comply with Western ecological and safety standards. The previously state-owned firm was forced to close. Originally saved from demolition by conservation enthusiasts, the brickworks was recognized as an industrial heritage site in 1997. At this time many of the buildings were repaired and restored. With the help of European funding the site has been transformed into a regional museum with exhibitions and event spaces focusing on the area's social and industrial heritage. In its new function as a museum, the brickworks plays a fundamental role in the wider processes of economic, social and cultural regeneration of the region and contributes to nurturing a sense of place, identity and belonging.

Memory and place

The heritage of the site is inherent in the visible traces of its industrial past, from the surrounding clay pits to the markings on walls and the silent machinery. As Pomian points out in his analysis of decommissioned factories, the site has gained in terms of its museal value: 'The function of the factory now consists of referring to a lost past. It points towards something that does not exist anymore, it relates to an invisible reality.'[3] (Figure 26.1)

With this in mind, we recognized our task consisted of identifying how the history of the site presents itself to a contemporary audience.[4] It was important to us not to challenge the

FIGURE 26.1   The Zehdenick Brickworks, circular kiln and new entrance element. Reproduced with kind permission of Jan Bitter.

strength of the space's existing narrative, which consisted of altering social and political structures against the background of the brickmaking process. Every intervention we made was to enhance the narrative and not detract from the authentic storytelling experience already intrinsic in the sequence of spaces. The empty brickworks act as a witness to our shared industrial past and the communities that it supported. The silence of the stationary machinery speaks directly to the visitor about the end of an era of industrial production in the area. The visitor identifies with the former use of the spaces and the work that was carried out there: 'The industry within us disappears more slowly than the industry around us.'[5] Considering the brickworks as an industrial artefact, it is possible to read the prosperity and technological advancement of the late nineteenth century in the architecture of the circular kilns, contrasting with the culture of privation, improvisation and reuse in the GDR, as is reflected in the patchwork quality of spaces built in the post-war period. The spaces are embodied with the stories of their past; the materiality speaks directly of the society that produced and used it. 'Architecture carries content through the arrangement of spaces, materials, social relationships and the cultural processes with which it is invested. It is underpinned by agencies and the systems of thought that are involved in its production.'[6]

Narrative and emotional perception

Storytelling that specifically addresses the visitor's emotional perception enables communication of messages at a profound level. We take the view that emotions are an integral part of spatial perception and communication with our surroundings. As is reflected in recent research findings in the field, neither emotions nor feelings are mere spontaneous, uncontrollable reactions on the part of an individual. Rather, they are regarded as 'embodied, temporally and spatially

situated configurations'.[7] They encompass processes of energy, space, performance, and social relations. Emotions, therefore, exhibit a web of cultural customs that a perceptual individual links with his or her environment, or 'habitat'.[8] In other words, emotions and feelings display performative effects of social interaction: 'Where feelings are perceived, experienced or shown, a circulation of energies and forces is embodied and materialized, which has the potential to affect all parties involved and can also imbue non-living elements with a particular atmosphere.'[9] Social learning processes, thus, function better if they are supported on an emotional level. To paraphrase Gertrud Lehnert, memory is only enabled by imbuing experiences with emotions.[10] In our work, we take account of this spatial-atmospheric conception of emotions, as emotions can be learned and strategically created. Spaces possess an emotional language, which the visitor can read while walking through them. 'An exhibition design – like any work of architecture – reproduces its content in its form.'[11] We consider exhibitions as agents mediating an holistic experience for the entire body, as they convey certain moods. If we regard a space as a series of three-dimensional views, it emerges as a tableau or image that can be physically entered and exited, which opens up an interstitial space for perception. Such walk-through images, or staged spaces, require both an object of observation and an observer. The exhibition space is thereby imbued with a performative quality, and its visitor understood as a moving, perceiving body.

Museum, film and movement

It is no coincidence that film and exhibition have a shared history, which is inextricably linked with forms of staging and *mise-en-scène*. Film, exhibition and staging are related through the nexus of time, space and feeling used to meet their ultimate purpose: creating a rendering of the real or the non-real that is not directly visible, regardless of whether that means distant views of unfamiliar places or past events.[12] By means of images or exhibits, fragments are processed for a twofold journey on the part of the viewer, with the two strands unfolding simultaneously: the actual movement of the object displayed (or of the viewer him or herself, in other words extrinsic motion), and the emotional journey to the viewer's own interior triggered by viewing the objects. In both cases, a kinetic process characterizes the narrative, which is impossible without motion.

Using the existing architecture of the Zehdenick Brickworks, combined with digital media, we designed a narrative promenade to make the site's industrial and social memory visible. Museum visitors simultaneously traverse the architectural and media spaces of the factory. Their experiential understanding of the surroundings is augmented by the use of soundscapes and projected images. Visitors can activate audio and light so that machinery moves, creating illusions that enhance their emotional connection to the industrial environment. The films shown are bound to the spaces by their synchronization with sound and light that expand beyond the screen space. The experience of moving through the brickworks is structured like a film narrative. It is a journey in the same way that a film is a journey; the visitor moves physically through the sequence of spaces, the sequential unfolding being both in the architecture and in the narrative. Interpretive installations placed along the route are created as parts of a whole, analogous to the various scenes in a film. Together the scenes create a story with a twofold narrative: the brickmaking process and the social structure in which it took place.

Both film and architecture are temporal storytelling media. They communicate stories by movement through a sequence of spatial images; viewers move through the spaces of a film in the same manner that visitors move through physical space. Bruno writes:

> As the architectural promenade unfolds a variety of viewpoints, it makes the visitor of
> the space quite literally into a consumer of views. From this moving perspective one
> also performs an act of imaginative traversal. An architectural ensemble is read as it is
> traversed. This is also the case of cinematic spectacle, for film – the screen of light – is
> read as it is traversed and is readable inasmuch as it is traversable. As we go through it,
> it goes through us and our own inner geography.[13]

She goes on to draw a specific comparison between the museum and cinematic experience as
'both create space for viewing, perusing, and wandering about and in such a way engage the
architecture of memory'.[14]

Stephen Heath's essay *Narrative Space* describes how space is perceived in film and the
importance of the scene space or screen space for transporting the narrative. He divides filmic
space into space in frame and space out of frame. The space in frame is 'narrative space'.[15]
The camera, with its central perspective, draws the viewer into the centre of the space.[16] We
combine the idea of narrative space, described by Heath, with the space in the brickworks that
the viewer moves through. The visitor is on a journey, simultaneously traversing the physical
space of the brickworks and the space of the films. The films are shown as part of a museum
experience, so the storytelling does not stop at the edge of the frame or the projection, but is
encompassed in the whole environment.

The screen is not a frame like that of a picture but a mask, which allows us to see a part of
the event only. When a person leaves the field of the camera, we recognize that he or she is
out of the field of vision, though continuing to exist identically in another part of the scene
which is hidden from us.[17]

Bazin refers here to the space off-screen as a continuum of the story where the viewer imag-
ines the extension of the space. In the brickworks the off-screen space of the films becomes
the real space of the factory, thus strengthening the connection between films and architecture
and heightening visitors' experience of both. They are not only visiting the historic, industrial
site, but are also cohabiting the screen spaces with the characters in the films. The positioning
of the speakers in the adjacent areas expands the off-screen space of the films, continuing the
narrative from the screen into the factory/museum space. Interpretive installations combining
scenographic display, digital media and visitor movement stimulate the senses, enhance the
experience of the space and engage the imagination, transforming the factory into a living site
of memory.

The notion that memory and imagination are linked to movement was central for the
development of landscape design in the eighteenth century. The garden aesthetics of this era
understood the process of walking through a garden as an emotional and spatial phenomenon
that combined two simultaneous experiences: the multi-sensory experience of the body in
the garden and the personal mental journey triggered by the sensory perception of the staged
views, scents and sounds. Bruno describes the experience as 'a memory theatre of sensual
pleasures, the garden was an exterior that put the spectator in touch with inner space'.[18] In
the garden a planned sequence of sensory impulses provoked an imaginative and emotional
response in the spectator, similar to the museographic experience.[19] 'In this moving way we
come to approach the kind of transport that drives the architectonics of film spectatorship and
of museum going.'[20] At the brickworks the narrative journey leads visitors along a path that
enables them to experience the site as an historical industrial landscape that gives an insight
into working life in former East Germany. The factory space with its machinery and remnants

of production is both the main artefact and the main character. The experience is both museal and filmic. As with architecture, film can be interpreted as a tactile experience. Peter Wollen interprets Benjamin's thesis on using touch to apprehend both artforms, architecture and cinema, stating that Benjamin argued that, 'cinema and architecture both required a kind of kinaesthetic habit-formation, the acquisition of a habitual mode of moving through space in order to understand and inhabit it unconsciously'.[21]

To draw a direct allusion to landscape in film, the post-industrial machine rooms in the brickworks can be compared to the 'zone' in the film *Stalker* (1978), by Andrei Tarkovsky. The landscape, or the 'zone' as it is known in the film, is portrayed through perception and memory and changes depending on who enters it. Visitors to the brickworks become an integral part of the story just as the viewer's imagination engages with the spaces and narrative of the film *Stalker*. The machine rooms section of the brickworks, just like Tarkovsky's 'zone', is a place where something of significance once happened but which is now abandoned. The narrative in *Stalker* is composed of a journey through the 'zone'. Unlike a traditional film where the narrative is strictly dictated, the diegetic landscape in *Stalker* changes, reflecting the viewer's perception and so the film changes through the viewer. The viewer projects his/her own perception onto the landscape, which then transforms itself into that projection.[22] As memory and perception are malleable in time, it is not time- or site-specific, but perceptually specific. Time is not reflected chronologically and fact and fiction become blurred.

During the design process we visualized the spatial and narrative structure of the museum journey in a diagrammatic form inspired by the filmmaker Eisenstein.[23] Using a graphical representation analogous to an orchestra score, he analysed the connection between visual and aural elements of the film and their projected effect on the viewer. It was thus possible to map the evolution of the emotional effects of the combination of image and sound over time. In order to create a dramaturgy for the visitor's journey through the site, it was necessary for us to visualize the visual and aural components of the exhibition experience in order to create and position thresholds and dramatic peaks. A visit to the machine rooms was calculated to last approximately 45 minutes. The temporal order of the film sequences was implemented in continuous spatial images, in other words in staged environments. The visitors progress through a series of spatial and narrative stages. Along the journey the level of their engagement progresses from passive viewer to active participant in the narrative.

Narrative journey

The journey begins with the short film 'Production Target' ('Plansoll').[24] It acts as a prologue and immerses the visitor into the brick factory and its environment. The film has a cinematic narrative structure, conceived as an introduction to the journey and is an integral part of the experience of moving through the factory space. It is a story within a story; a starting point or an establishing shot for the understanding of the brickworks and the life of a worker in the GDR. Set in 1985, the plot revolves around a family in which the parents, both workers in the factory, have to overcome a crisis in order to be eligible for a much-needed bonus. Their young daughter saves the day. The story illustrates how working and private life were closely interwoven in former East Germany, and transports the visitor into the period when the factory was still producing bricks, introducing fictional characters who worked there. Viewers traverse the working brick factory and the domestic space of the workers' apartment (Plate 26.1). The memory of the characters in the film personalizes visitors' connection to

the disused brickworks.[25] At the end of the film a door in the room opens automatically, inviting the visitor to cross a threshold and continue on a journey into the historical machine halls.

Augmented screenspace: 'Talking Heads'

A series of modern exhibition elements with inbuilt screens are interspersed among the historical machines. The aim of the 'Talking Heads' is both to document the industrial process and to reintroduce the presence of the workers at their former workplaces, creating an emphatic connection between the subject and the viewer. Over 40 interviews that we conducted with former brick workers form the basis for this installation. The information and anecdotes collected from the last generation of workers gives an additional insight into the brickmaking process and the social structure surrounding the brickworks in the post-war period. Integrated media-stations are created, where these films become part of the environment with up to 18 synchronized audio channels placed within the adjacent factory space. The audio animates the workers' descriptions of the brickmaking process and is accentuated by lighting that illuminates the sound source and the movement of the clay or bricks. In activating the films by choosing a narrator, the visitor is confronted with the memory of the site in the form of a spatial filmic experience. The workers were interviewed at their former place of work as this proved the most conducive place for them to tap into and access memories of the daily processes involved in brick production. The positioning of the screens at these points enhances the relationship between the viewer and the subject. A transfer of experience takes place, connecting viewers to the site emotionally (Plate 26.2).

Loudspeakers are positioned specifically to create the sound of the working factory, for example along the train tracks, inside the conveyor belt mechanism, or in the clay-mixing machine. The audio environment enables visitors to empathize with the place where bricks were once made; the former factory resonates with its industrial and cultural heritage. The soundscapes have a strong reference to the brick factory but also respond to the site as a contemporary museum, projecting an intuitive collage of memories onto the space. The interviews with the final generation of workers at the site, documenting the cultural heritage of the brickmaking process in the GDR, have now become an important part of the museum's collection.

Augmented physical space: the 'Trolley Shift'

In the drying tunnel an audio and light installation reacts to the movement of the visitor and reflects a shift in the narrative form of the exhibition. The tunnel acts as a threshold to a new sequence of halls where the visitor encounters the 'Trolley Shift' installation. This is a kinetic media installation that enables us to reinterpret and represent space within the factory. By combining a moving object with the projected image, an illusion is created where the boundaries of the physical space and the implied projected space intertwine. The installation works based on the position of the visitor and their perception of depth of field and line of sight. A trolley moves along a length of track behind an existing wall, which is projected with the image of the background and the tracks. Essentially the wall is projected away; made invisible by the continuum of the background image. As the real trolley passes behind the wall, a projected trolley appears, being pushed by a worker. The real trolley reappears from behind

the 2.5-metre-wide projection screen and continues to move but the worker disappears. The trolley returns, and the projected worker reappears pushing the trolley back in the opposite direction (Plate 26.3). The moving trolley is a continuum in both the physical space and the digital projection, and so connects the two realms. The presence of the real trolley draws the content of the projection into the physical space, enhancing the connection of the viewer to the projected figure of a female worker. The real moving trolley increases the impact of the digital image in the space to such an extent that the viewer is momentarily surprised by the fact that the projected image of the worker cannot cross the boundary into real space. Bazin's mask is, in this case, only a partial mask where the off-screen space is the factory space itself. The real trolley moves through the mask but the female worker cannot, so her presence is missed outside of the area of the mask (screen). The fictional factory worker is Doreen, the main character in the short film at the start of the journey, her reappearance acting as a narrative echo. The appearance of Doreen responds to Derrida's definition of the 'ghost'. Derrida maintains that film can only represent ghosts in the sense of present absences, persons and places that are not on the screen even though we see and hear them in real time and appearance.[26] Visitors are witness to a play of presence and absence. They begin to understand that the history of the brickworks is not being communicated by people, but by 'magical' illusions or 'ghosts'. In the same sense, Aleida Assmann refers to the phantasmagoric quality of the places of memory, describing them as 'sensorial auratic places':

> An auratic place is somewhere where the insurmountable distance and concealment of the past is made perceptible to the senses. The memory site is in fact a special web of space and time which interweaves presence and absence, and the tangible present with the historical past.[27]

The 'Talking Heads' installation connects the visitor to the site through storytelling and aural spatial interaction, whilst the 'Trolley Shift' installation draws visitors into the illusion of a person at work by stimulating their experiential and spatial perception. Both installations blur the boundaries of screen space and physical space, and engage visitors with the exhibition narrative. The subsequent installation in the circular kiln is the final scene, where the visitor becomes an active participant in the narrative.

The circular kiln: haptic media space

Throughout the project, synchronized lighting illustrates the sequential industrial process on the journey through the factory spaces. Only two colours of light are used; white light traces the path of the clay and un-burnt bricks while red light is used to denote heat. At the last stage of the journey both colours combine in an installation in which visitors are invited to pick up a glowing white brick and take it with them through the 80-metre-long firing tunnel of the Hofmann circular kiln. Ultrasonic sound waves trigger preset colour settings in the programmed lights in the translucent brick, depending on the visitor's position. As they proceed with the light-brick around the tunnel, it changes colour in relation to the different temperature zones within the kiln. The firing tunnel is illuminated in shades from white to deep red (Plate 26.4).

An accompanying 32-channel soundscape recreates the circular movement of air and fire in the kiln. The loudspeakers are placed out of sight within the firing-tunnel vault and

randomly spaced so that visitors cannot locate the source of the sounds. The soundscape within the kiln is in two sequences, each about four minutes long: 'Firing Process' and 'Reflection'. During the 'Firing Process' sequence, visitors move through different dedicated sound areas in which activities within the kiln are re-enacted: green bricks are stacked, air moves, coal is tipped and the fire ignites, the fired bricks cool, and the bricks are transported out of the kiln. The 'Reflection' sequence is a response to the architecture of the kiln and the circular movement of the fire. It is a composition, both musical and spatial. Similarly to a film score, the music underscores the associative qualities of the implied space of the kiln. It creates a dynamic tension and moves in space in relation to the visitor.[28] The chord structure shifts harmonically, repeating as it circulates. Within the dramatic architecture of sound, the changing colour of the brick in the visitor's hands involves the visitor in a haptic media experience that is emotional, spatial, museal and filmic at the same time. By accepting the invitation to carry a brick in the circular kiln, the visitors become actors in the story being told. Here, exhibition visitors do not merely identify with the narrative, but instead they become an element of that narrative. To cite Mieke Bal, the exhibition visitor becomes exhibited.[29]

Conclusion

The unique aspect of this project is the manner in which video, audio and light are combined with the heritage site's architecture to create experiential narrative environments. In an interface between imagination, experience and movement, visitors are confronted with the industrial and social memory of the site in the form of a spatial filmic experience. Their perception of the surroundings is augmented by soundscapes and projected images, where illusions are created that enhance their emotional connection to the otherwise static, industrial environment. Along the exhibition journey a convergence of film and museum space takes place, culminating with the experience in the firing kiln. Sound creates a bridge between screen and physical space in the 'Talking Heads' installations. The boundaries of museum and film are further blurred in the 'Trolley Shift' as not only does filmic space became museum space, but the museum space itself also becomes film. The installations are scripted as part of a whole; they are instruments of communication, which also allow scope for the visitor's own interpretation. The visitor accumulates visual, aural and haptic experiences along their journey and personalizes these. The poetic quality of the work is not dissimulated by its didactic nature in the context of the historical exhibition environment, and speaks directly to our intuitive understanding: 'We live in worlds in which the material and the mental, the experienced, remembered, and imagined completely fuse into each other.'[30]

The visitor experiences the space on a tactile and visceral level, through their bodily emotions, rather than an intellectual, interpretative level. In the words of Goethe, the visitor 'feels with a seeing eye and sees with a feeling hand'.[31] This enables them to identify with the narrative and form lasting personal memories of their own.

Notes

1 German Democratic Republic; Deutsche Demokratische Republik.
2 'Young people who are not willing to work will learn how to in labour camps.' Walter Ulbricht (East German Head of State), 22 August 1961, in the Politburo.
3 Quoted by A. Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume. Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses*, Munich: Beck, 2009, p. 331.

4   'How does history encounter us?' (*Wie begegnet uns Geschichte?*) is the question shaping Assmann's exploration of contemporary use of scenographic settings in historical and memorial sites. A. Assmann, *Geschichte im Gedächtnis: vor der individuellen Erfahrung zur öffentlichen Inszenierung*, Munich: Beck, 2007, p. 12.

5   Dr R. Kuehn, IBA 2000–2010 Fuerst Pueckler Land, Speech at the opening of the exhibition 'Land in Motion', April 2005.

6   S. Psarra, *Architecture and Narrative*, New York: Routledge, 2009, p. 2.

7   D. Kolesch, *Theater der Emotionen. Ästhetik und Politik zur Zeit Ludwigs XIV*, Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2006, p. 25.

8   S. Flach, D. Margulies and J. Söffner, *Habitus in Habitat I. Emotion and Motion*, Bern: Peter Lang AG, 2010, p. 8.

9   Kolesch, *Theater der Emotionen*, pp. 32–33.

10 G. Lehnert, *Raum und Gefühl. Der Spatial Turn und die neue Emotionsforschung*, Bielefeld: Transcript, 2011, pp. 17–18.

11 G. Bruno, *Public Intimacy: Architecture and the Visual Arts*, London: MIT Press, 2007, pp. 3–4.

12 In her analysis of Sergei Eisenstein's 'Montage and Architecture' (c. 1937) Bruno points out that in Eisenstein's film theory 'the (im)mobile film spectator moves across an imaginary path, traversing multiple sites and times. Her fictional navigation connects distant moments and far–places'. Film viewers move into a spectatorial voyage akin to the physical path of walkers through an architectural itinerary creating thus its own montage of cultural space. Bruno relates this way to construct the cultural to the museographic experience, that is a 'way to collect together various fragments of cultural phenomena from diverse geohistorical moments open for spectatorial recollection in space'. Both quotes: Bruno, *Public Intimacy*, p. 19.

13 Ibid., p. 26.

14 Ibid., p. 27.

15 S. Heath, 'Narrative Space', in A. Easthope Longmann (ed.) *Contemporary Film Theory*, London: Longman, 1993, pp. 73ff.

16 Ibid.

17 A. Bazin, *Que est-ce que le cinema*, vol. II, Paris: Cerf, 1959, p. 100.

18 Bruno, *Public Intimacy*, p. 25.

19 See quote cited in note 12 above.

20 Bruno, *Public Intimacy*, p. 25.

21 P. Wollen, *Paris Hollywood: Writings on Films*, New York: Verso, 2002, p. 200.

22 D. Lowenthal, 'Past Time, Present Place: Landscape and Memory', in *Geographical Review*, vol. 65, no. 1 (Jan. 1975), pp. 1–36.

23 S. Eisenstein, *The Film Sense*, London: Faber & Faber, 1948, attachment.

24 Produced and directed by Tom Duncan and Noel McCauley, 2008. 10 min.

25 Ott's analysis shows the qualities of a film create 'emotional spaces' in which the viewer can identify with the protagonists of a story. See, M. Ott, 'Unbestimmte Affekträume im Film', in G. Lehnert (ed.) *Raum und Gefühl. Der Spatial Turn und die neue Emotionsforschung*, Bielefeld: Transcript, 2011, p. 96.

26 Compare to Jacques Derrida's exposé of his theory on new media as 'ghosts', memory and past as seen in the film 'Ghost Dance' (1983) directed by Ken McMullen.

27 A. Assmann, *Errinnerungsräume. Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses*, Munich: Beck, 2009, p. 338.

28 Pallasmaa describes the connection between space and sound as follows: 'A space is understood and appreciated through its echo as much as through its visual shape, but the acoustic percept usually remains as an unconscious background experience. Sight is the sense of the solitary observer, whereas hearing creates a sense of connection and solidarity; our look wanders lonesomely in the dark depths of a cathedral. But the sound of the organ makes us immediately experience our affinity with the space'. J. Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*, Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, 2008, pp. 50–51.

29 M. Bal, 'Exposing the Public', in S. Macdonald (ed.) *A Companion to Museum Studies*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2006, pp. 525–542.

30 J. Pallasmaa, *Encounters, Architectural Essays*, Helsinki: Rakennustieto, 2005, p. 129.

31 J. W. Goethe, *Römische Elegien*, Munich: Römische Elegie V, 1978, p. 108.

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