Museological Review, Issue 15: 2011

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MUSEOLOGICAL REVIEW

A Journal edited by Students of
the School of Museum Studies

Issue 15
2011

University *of* Leicester

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School of Museum Studies

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Editors:
Jennifer Binnie,
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Jennifer Jankauskas,
Julia Petrov

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Notes for Contributors

Aims

- To enable museum studies students and other interested parties to share and exchange museum information and knowledge.

- To provide an international medium for museology students from around the world to keep in touch with a relevant centre of research.

- To bring innovations and new thinking on museums and related matters to the attention of the practising and academic museum world.

Objectives

- To provide a platform in the form of a peer-reviewed online journal to be published per annum, for postgraduate museum students and others in related fields to present papers and reviews of a relevant nature from around the world.

- To widen the constituency of readership beyond the normal museological boundaries (e.g. to teachers, historians, artists, sociologists, environmentalists and others) in order to emphasise the importance of museums to society as a whole.

- To promote and advertise the research of contributors to as wide a public as possible via the journal and other means as the committee may from time to time decide.

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The Editors welcome submissions of original material (articles, exhibition or book reviews etc.) being within the aims of the *Museological Review*. Articles can be of any length up to 5,000 words. No fee is payable.

A digital copy of the typescript will be required in Microsoft Word format; please ensure you keep a copy for your own reference, and make sure that all copies carry late additions or corrections. ***It will not be possible for us to undertake or arrange for independent proof reading and the obligation for thorough checking is the responsibility of the authors, not the Editors.***

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Editors' Letter

This year's issue of *Museological Review* is a special one not only because it contains selected articles developed from presentations given at the highly successful AHRC and University-funded postgraduate symposium, 'Materiality and Intangibility' we held at the School of Museum Studies in 2009, but also because it marks the first time that this journal has moved to being officially peer-reviewed. We hope that this sets a standard for intellectual and academic rigour that will continue.

We are also extremely pleased to feature a foreword by Susan Pearce, Professor Emeritus at the School of Museum Studies here at the University of Leicester. Professor Pearce was a keynote speaker at the symposium from which this issue has been developed, and in her piece she outlines her own position on materiality and intangibility, as well as the new directions opening up in the field.

This issue brings together a variety of articles on many different topics, with approaches ranging from documentary film studies to literature, history, anthropology and psychology, demonstrating the interdisciplinarity that has become standard practice in museological studies. The journal also features some of our own students and recent alumni (Binnie, Iervolino, Magnusson, Walklate), but also scholars from other universities (*e.g.*: Birmingham, Canberra, Kent, Leeds, Royal Holloway), institutions (Iinstitute of Historical Research, Museum of London), and countries (Australia, Portugal). The issue concludes with an innovative response to the conference presentations, which mediates further the boundaries between materiality and intangibility using words and images used in the proceedings.

We sincerely hope that the approaches and perspectives featured within inspire dialogue, debate, and further development. You are welcome to contact the authors or the editors with your comments or suggestions. You are also welcome to our next postgraduate symposium, 'Curiouser & Curiouser', to be held March 28-30, 2011, where we will be discussing the weird and wonderful in museums.

Until next time,

Jennifer Binnie,
Brenda Caro Cocotle,
Jennifer Jankauskas,
Julia Petrov

Materiality and Intangibility: Contested Zones.

Foreword.

A significant area that the conference *Materiality and Intangibility: Contested Zones* opened up is the discussion between 'materiality' as cultural constructs that can be touched, and 'intangibility' as culture which can be apprehended by our other senses. Let me start by making my own view clear. For me, everything is material, and I see no distinction between the solidity of touch, and the impact made by the other forms of less obvious materiality, like movement, skill, speech or song, which we apprehend through other senses. All that we think or feel is, fundamentally, as much a product of physicality as are the things that we make, or the landscapes that we produce, because both we humans, and the world in which, and with which, we interact are completely material.

Indeed, on the wilder shores, some are wondering if there is no real distinction between animate and inanimate matter, just different possible combinations coming and going as atoms and molecules form and create varying degrees of elaboration, that then allow various ways of becoming, one of which we call 'life'. Each of us is an ongoing part of all this, as our cell-based capacities build up, and then separate, as we go through our lives.

Be this as it may, back on home planet, recent developments in neurological science are making it clear that thought and feelings (and the differences between them are becoming steadily more blurred) are the outcome of completely physical impulses in our brains which create what we call our minds; nerve cells process vast quantities of information from the world, including the world of our own bodies which intermesh with our surroundings through our senses, and match this with what happened in the past, drawn from our memory banks.

Split decisions are taken, which produce our reactions to the given situation, which is itself a material intervention in the physical realms of sound and movement. It is clear that special kinds of understanding come from each of our sensual capacities: being told what fur is like is qualitatively different to feeling it, and the specialness of feeling feeds its own contribution into our reception and making of meaning. Our memory banks are unique to each of us, and so probably are the pathways our neural reactions create, so we have equally unique capacities for agency and freedom.

It seems to me that the upshot of all this, as it is gradually worked out, is overwhelming, and I can best express what I mean through an example. A

Persian carpet is an iconic piece of material culture, because of the skill it involves, because our sight and touch love its colours and feel, because its patterning seems immensely symbolic, and because we are told of the deliberate mistake through which men avoid the sin of pride. But perhaps the carpet is not just a material symbol through which other kinds of creative energy can be brought within an imaginative frame. Perhaps other human constructs are not *like* a Persian carpet, they *are* Persian carpets (or carpets are them) made with different combinations of different kinds of materiality, which therefore give different results.

All this opens enormous new fields for exploration. The world of individual meanings making needs study, and so does how we do, and do not, succeed in transmitting our own take on meaning to one another. What happens when the material world is translated into art, particularly perhaps, the visual and written arts, is fascinating to speculate about. The historical opportunity is immense, for here we need to get a purchase on how billions of complex, individual neuro inter-actions combine into a recognisable period character, a Zeitgeist.

This is not simply a matter of saying that, for example, Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill medieval-revival villa was the architectural equivalent of his Gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto*. We need an infinitely closer analysis, which can start to explain why, to take another example, early seventeenth English woodcarving has the same dense, intricate, slightly neurotic character as contemporary metaphysical poetry, and both could be confidently appreciated by those then alive. Moreover, the same characteristics appear in the spoken English, the clothes, and the ethical sensationalism (witchcraft, revenge, fanatical religion) of the day. It begins to seem that a major way – perhaps the major way- in which each of us, and all of us together, build our meaningful world of ethics, beliefs, hopes and desires, is through the creation of an over-arching and ever-changing aesthetic; and this is, after all, what we would expect in a material world where the physicality of appearance and apprehension is what creates definition and distinction. Contested zones, indeed.

These are immense tasks for future scholars, and they have several obvious implications. We need research teams, which can bring expertise from scientists and arts people together in carefully crafted projects, and the appropriate social networks to support them. We will need the academic appointment of neuroscientists within Schools of Museum Studies (and elsewhere in Arts and Humanities), and of material culture specialists in the scientific departments. And, it goes without saying, we need more conferences like the hugely stimulating one which has given rise to this present valuable volume.

Susan Pearce.

The Effect of Encouraging Emotional Value in Museum Experiences

Jenniefer Gadsby

Abstract

Visitors seek many outcomes from their museum visits to justify their investment of time, money and effort. It is proposed that the primary outcomes which visitors seek from museums can be categorised as: physical, intellectual, interpersonal, social, collection or emotional values. In devising this 'value grouping' system a number of interviews were conducted with museum staff from across the United Kingdom. During these conversations the last proposed group, emotional values, was received with mixed enthusiasm. Though mostly in agreement that audiences want to be moved, shocked or excited and to feel empathy, nostalgia, awe and wonder, some staff were sceptical of the role this plays in museums and the effect of visitors having affective responses.

To further investigate this topic the Materiality and Intangibility conference was utilised as an opportunity to collate further opinions and insights, from a wider range of industry professionals and academics. This paper is a summary of the discussion and feedback in that session. What is concluded from this process of investigation is that there are clear identifiable benefits to encouraging affective experiences within visitors but there should be thorough consideration of why and how museums achieve this.

Key words: Value, experience, emotion, affective.

> *'Yet so much more is happening within the visit than a quest for learning'*
> (Kavanagh, 2000:149)

Value is a judgement of worth; investors assess the value of a product or service to ensure the outcomes will justify their investments. There are many different investors in museums and many types of value they seek in return. This formed the basis of my own PhD research and as part of examining the values which investors seek from museums, a variety of museum professionals were interviewed from across the United Kingdom. A system for categorising visitors desired values (see Table 1), had been devised from an extensive review of literature and a series of visitor consultations. The value grouping system was presented to interviewees for consideration and feedback and what arose from those interviews (as well as the addition, subtraction and redefinition of groupings) was a mixed enthusiasm towards one of these; emotional values. A number of interviewees were concerned about the effect that encouraging visitors to have emotional responses may have on the museums other objectives and if it was really the business of

museums to encourage affective responses in visitors. Owing to the usual restrictions of time and need to maintain focus with doctoral research, I was unable to further investigate this alone, but as a platform for interactive workshops, debate and discussion, the Materiality and Intangibility conference provided an ideal opportunity to further consider this. With an international mix of museologists and academics in related fields, the conference provided a plethora of minds to reflect and discuss; what is the effect of encouraging emotional values in museum experiences? What follows is a summary of delegate's discussions, including excerpts of written feedback to represent general opinion. Conclusions are drawn on three central points: whether encouraging emotional values is appropriate in museums, the affect this has on learning and how it may influence visitor's experience of real objects. First, further context to this discussion will be provided by highlighting the difference between institutional value and the value of experience, and explaining the value of experience groupings.

When considering the value of museums we often think of their contribution to communities, their efforts in reaching out to the socially excluded or minority groups or ways in which they work with councils and government agencies to deliver on local authority priorities. This is best described as institutional value: the wider contributions which a museum makes to society, local communities, residents or even the nation or the economy. It is this type of value that government, local authorities and funding boards seek to justify their investments in museums. This paper considers visitors as the investors and the outcomes that they seek to justify their investments in museum visiting, which is referred to as value of experience.

Intellectual- Visitors seek to learn, to be mentally stimulated, made to think or question what they already know, to find out facts and expand existing knowledge.

Interpersonal – Visitors appreciate the ability to spend time with their friends and family, to meet new people, to take part in group activities and talk to staff.

Social – People visit museums to be connected to their local heritage. They take a sense of civic pride and enjoy seeing how the museum portrays and engages with the local community.

Physical- People value the ability to get hands on in museums, to take part and become immersed. They are also influenced by the atmosphere, layout and flow of the space and exhibitions.

Collections- Visitors want to see 'real things'. They value the ability to witness valuable, rare, strange, one of a kind objects and artefacts.

Emotional – Visitors want to be emotional stimulated, they want affective experiences relating to mood, attitude or feeling.

Table 1. Value of Museum Experience Groupings

Value of Experience

From the money spent on entry, the use of their sparse free time and even the energy in making the effort to get to and walk around the site, in return of these, visitors have certain expectations, payoffs which will make it all worthwhile. '*Museums need to recognize that they are in the experience business and that it is the distinctive theme, context and value of the experiences they bring to a particular audience that will increasingly define their success.'* (Skramstad, 2004: 127). Much more than just ensuring visits are satisfactory, value of experience examines the specific outcomes which visitors seek. Much research has been done into what motivates people to visit museums (Falk, Moussouri & Coulson, 1998, Merriman, 1991, McManus, 1991) and this provides some initial insight into what visitors seek from their museum experiences. From this existing research we identify that visitors want to learn, they also want to be entertained, they want to see real artefacts and have memorable, family days out where they feel secure and comfortable. '*Museum goers may legitimately be seeking frivolous diversion, consolation, social status, an opportunity for reverence, companionship, solitude or innumerable other group or individual goals'* (Weil, 2004:78). Visitors also seek to be engaged, immersed, informed, enthused, and relaxed, to understand their local heritage, to be shocked, surprised, to spend time with their loved ones and simply to just have fun; '*even the most broadly defined learning outcomes may not be sufficient to explain the value and benefits of the museum experience'* (Packer, 2008). Appreciating that there is potentially an infinite number of outcomes that visitors may desire, and recognising that many of these outcomes share characteristic similarities, a categorisation system was devised. The 'value of museum experience groupings' framework (see Table 1) brackets together similar outcomes into values. It is proposed that there are six key types of value which visitors seek from their museum experiences: intellectual, interpersonal, social, physical, collections and emotional. '*Museums exist to enhance the quality of peoples lives, to satisfy their needs in every sense- physically, socially, intellectually, emotionally, spiritually'* (Black, 2007: 286). These groupings highlight the most common values attained from museum experiences and are not intended to cover every possible outcome that may be sought by museum visitors.

Though a good system for categorising outcomes, this is not a framework to segment audiences as visitors may seek and attain more than one type of value simultaneously. '*The museum experience can be as much an emotional as an intellectual experience*' (Falk and Dierking, 1997: 92). It is emotional value which is the focus of this research and these are most simply described as the affective responses visitors have. Packer (2008) highlights the 'restorative' role of visiting museums and how audiences often describe museums as being an escape from the outside world, calm and relaxing as well as providing visitors with a sense of positive psychological wellbeing. From existing research on emotions in museums (Alt & Shaw 1984, Bicknell & Farnello 1984, Chamberlain 2007, Falk & Dierking 1997, Funch 2006, Hilton 2007, Packer 2008, Suchy 2006, Umiker-Sebeok 1994, Weaver 2007)

can identify some of the common emotional values attained by visitors in museums which include: awe, wonder, excitement, nostalgia, pride and empathy. It is now accepted that visitors will have and do seek emotional responses in museums and that these play a crucial role in the value of experience, as Falk (2009: 176) points out '*all visitors will be particularly prone to remember those things that struck an emotionally positive chord for them'*.

Most of the emotional responses which visitors have in museums are natural, unprompted and sometimes unexpected reactions, often from witnessing an object or gaining new insight on a topic. This paper is not intended to discuss these reactions, instead this research aims to investigate examples where an emotional response has been instigated, encouraged or scripted by a museum. This research is analysing the methods which curators, managers, exhibition developers and designers use to encourage a visitor into having an emotional response and the effect this has on the visitor experience. Nostalgia at finding a long forgotten childhood toy is not something manufactured from clever design tricks. However dimming lights and adopting Brutalist, angular shapes in the design of an exhibition on the Holocaust, will encourage certain attitudes and behaviours in visitors. It is these strategies of directing and ensuring emotional outcomes from visitors which is the focus of this discussion; when museums have striven to ensure that visitors leave feeling, not just thinking, and the effect this has on the museum experience.

Method

The question of encouraging emotional values in museums arose from a series of interviews conducted with museum staff throughout 2007-2009. In total 19 staff were interviewed from 18 different museums across the United Kingdom. The primary aim of these interviews was to test the 'value of museum experience groupings' (see Table.1.) as part of which interviewees were asked to detail methods they used to ensure visitors were realising each of the six desired values. When it came to disclosing ways in which they ensured visitors were attaining emotional values, some interviewees were unsure of how they currently did this. Meanwhile others felt it was not something museums should actively encourage. Though they were able to recognise visitors having emotional responses during museum experiences, a number of staff were resolute it was not something they consciously strove or planned to happen. Interviewees discussed how they did not 'manipulate', 'persuade', 'enforce' or 'encourage' emotional responses in visitors and expressed some concern in the possible effect of doing so. Though it had not been an objective of these interviews to discuss this issue, the sceptical opinions of staff were motive for further investigation.

An interactive session was planned to be held at Materiality and Intangibility: Contested Zones, at the University of Leicester in December 2009. With the aim of exploring the parallels, synergies and clashes between the tangible

and the intangible facets of museums, this conference offered an optimal opportunity to foster discussion and collate opinions from a variety of interested industry professionals and academics[1]. During the session delegates were given a short introduction to the concept of 'value of experience' and the 'value of museum experience groupings' before being asked to individually reflect on and collectively discuss the effect of encouraging emotional values in museums. These informal group talks went on into the lunch hour and participants were given comment sheets, to feedback points of conversation and any further personal reflections. Prompt-questions were used to structure and instigate group discussions. These questions were devised from the primary concerns identified in the aforementioned interviews with museum staff.

The most common apprehensions which interviewees had were that: actively encouraging emotional values could make visitors passive receptors not active participants, it could undermine or over-power the genuine reactions visitors may have to the subject or an object and that encouraging emotional values may discourage intellectual values. Some interviewees also felt that provoking affective responses or scripting outcomes was not the purpose of museums but the work of theme parks and visitor attractions. To consider if encouraging emotional values is appropriate in museums and identify the types of institutions where this currently occurs, two lines of questioning were used in the interactive session. The first asked delegates to try and identify a time when they felt they had been encouraged to have a certain emotional outcome in a museum experience. These were noted on individual post-it-notes and collated on boards. For further clarification, during group discussions, participants were asked to consider: *could encouraging emotional values undermine the purpose of museums as institutions of learning?*

A further concern identified in the interviews with museums staff was that scripting the way in which visitors are expected to respond may encourage them to become passive and discourage them from creating their own values. In light of this, one of the prompt questions posed to promote discussion amongst delegates was: *to what extent does actively encouraging a specific emotional value interfere with visitors ability to identify their own values*? Some interviewees also expressed a concern that encouraging emotional values in the interpretation of real objects may discourage or distract visitors from learning about the objects. As one curator of a private museum stated in an interview; *'It* (encouraging emotional values) *will overlay their reactions to them* (objects) *certainly. It may also drown out other possible aspects of that object'* (anonymous interviewee, 2009). This prompted the discussion topic: *does the attainment of emotional values from a museum object distract a visitor from learning about that object?*

Not all discussion of emotional values in museums was sceptical; some interviewees were extremely positive of encouraging emotional reactions and identified benefits this can provide to visitors. One interviewee who was Head of Exhibitions at a national museum in the North of England discussed

how visitors having emotional responses can enhance learning; '*emotional value helps engagement with the subject and retention of information*' (anonymous interviewee, 2009). It arose from interviews that some museum staff felt that a visitor having an emotional response may motivate that visitor to learn more about an object or subject they would not have engaged with through conventional methods of interpretation. In light of this, and to balance the tone of discussion and ensure delegates were invited to discuss the positive effects of encouraging emotional values in museums, one of the prompt questions used in the interactive session was: *Does emotional value encourage intellectual values which may not otherwise have been sought?* Participants in the interactive session were also invited to note any further comments or thoughts on the effect of encouraging emotional values in museum experiences.

Encouraging emotional values: a role in museums?

Delegates were asked to provide an example of a time when they felt they had been encouraged into having a specific emotional reaction by a museum they were visiting, and to note these on individual post-it notes. From the examples given, one type of exhibition featured recurrently. Exhibitions tackling sensitive topics such as the holocaust or war were frequently specified as having encouraged an emotional reaction; '*Holocaust museum Washington DC- room of shoes where you stand on a little bridge and look at the sea of shoes*' (Anon delegate). These exhibitions were described as having an element of self-reflection and being encouraged to relate ones own experiences to that of others, or to reflect on the topic through personal experience, '*Personal encounters e.g. use of medicine*' (Anon delegate). What was apparent in the examples discussing self-reflection in exhibitions addressing sensitive topics, was it then leading to a feeling of empathy; '*Empathy at the "Ann Frank & You" exhibition (travelling). Design of the space, including reconstruction of her room made me identify in some way, with what Anne must have gone through*' (Anon delegate) another example specified '*Liverpool Slavery exhibition. Shackles made me feel empathy, pity and shame*' (Anon delegate). The concept of self-reflection having an affective response was not only identified in exhibitions of an inherently emotional content, some examples discussed reflecting on more everyday topics. '*Excitement- 'Hair' exhibition at Birmingham City Museum and Art Gallery... Used fun activities such as trying on wigs and drawing your own hair on a "bad hair day"*' (Anon delegate). With inherently sensitive and emotional subjects it is difficult to distinguish if an emotional response is simply due to the object/ information being presented or if this has been emphasised through subtle devices. As with the given example of the 'shackles at the Liverpool Slavery Exhibition', it may be the object themselves that caused an emotional reaction but it may have been the context and design devices used to present them.

Other emotional responses, which were identified by a large number of delegates, as currently being encouraged in museum experiences, were

'surprise' and 'excitement'. This was predominantly discussed as occurring in museums that may be described as having 'children' as a primary target audience; '*Random noises in the w.c's at the Roald Dahl Museum and Story Centre encourages surprise*' (Anon delegates) and '*Spider in the toilet bowl at Bristol Zoo'* (Anon delegate). No further correlations were found in regards to the type of museums currently encouraging emotional reactions or the emotional outcomes being scripted. In fact, the range of museums given in the examples by delegates, demonstrate emotional values being encouraged across the industry. In addition to those already mentioned, other institutions that featured in delegates examples of experiences where emotional outcomes are encouraged include: Oxford Museum of Natural History, St Fagans Museum in Wales, Leeds Discovery Centre and Abbey House Museum. The variety of emotional responses identified by delegates as encouraged in museums include: empathy, surprise, fear, shock, excitement, anticipation, suspense and awe. Although some concern that encouraging emotional values is not the business of museums had been identified in the aforementioned interviews with museum staff, delegates' discussion at the Materiality and Intangibility conference would imply that, in today's museums, it is. Although this suggests encouraging emotional values is a relatively widespread phenomenon it does not help clarify what is the effect of doing so?

Emotional value and learning

In the past museum staff were divided in a dispute of education versus entertainment and though most people working in the industry today would agree that museums should provide experiences which are entertaining whilst informing and encouraging learning, it is still a line delicately trodden. The divergent opinions on the role of emotional values in museums may be a debate resulting from the now somewhat resolved discussion of 'edutainment'.

'Popularisation has been described in a sterile debate as involving a conflict between 'education' and 'entertainment'. In this debate, an underlying conflict between inappropriate characterisations of 'cognition' and 'affect' has been proposed.' (Bicknell and Farnelo 1993:109)

A prominent concern from the interviews was that encouraging emotional values is more pandering to the entertaining than the educational function of museums. However this was not evidenced in discussion at the Materiality and Intangibility conference. Almost unanimously, delegates specified that; they do not believe encouraging emotional values undermines the purpose of museums as institutions of learning. '*I think that by encouraging emotions a museum can make the experience more valuable to a visitor, therefore more memorable, whether that is learning or entertainment'* (Anon delegate). Many delegates discussed how emotional responses are in themselves a form of learning:

- '*Experiencing emotions is a way of learning as well'* (Anon delegate).

- '*No, learning should include the attainment of emotional values (as embodied in the Generic Learning Outcomes)*' (Anon delegate).

- '*Most museums now work with the theory of Multi Intelligence, so emotional feedback is part of that recognised framework'* (Anon delegate)

As identified in the above feedback, emotional outcomes are now frequently recognised as being a valid form of learning, such as identified in MLAs Generic Learning Outcomes (GLOs) which acknowledges '*Attitudes and Values'* as one category of learning (MLA, 2008). There was some discussion amongst delegates that emotional outcomes can enhance the quality of learning; '*to my mind it helps memorise things better while learning'* (anon delegate) and '*in my mind it enhances the learning experience*' (Anon delegate). Around three quarters of the feedback to the prompt-question 'does emotional value encourage intellectual values which may not otherwise have been sought' was reassuring that it can, to some degree. Some feedback was entirely confident that encouraging emotional values does instigate further intellectual outcomes.

'*Addressing an emotional side of the visitor may challenge their perception/ understanding. Intellectual values are not always created on a rational side, the emotional experience can provide intellectual value'*. (Anon delegate)

In contrast to this a significant amount of feedback was keen to emphasise that though it is possible for emotional outcomes to lead to learning this does not always happen: '*not always but it is always good when it happens'* (Anon delegate). The discussion and feedback from delegates at the Materiality and Intangibility conference would strongly indicate that encouraging emotional values does not interfere with the learning objectives of museums and even that responses are a valid form of learning and can in fact enhance the learning experience. Falk and Dierking (2000) suggested that to maximise the personal nature of learning museums should build emotion into the learning experience. It would appear that encouraging emotional responses can benefit the museum experience by promoting further intellectual values and inspiring visitors to learn more about an object or topic as well as enhancing learning by making the experience more memorable.

Emotional value and real objects

Though encouraging emotional values does not appear to have a detrimental effect on the intellectual outcomes of museums, there is another facet of a museums service which is detrimental to both its institutional value and the value of experience visitors seek. This is the collection *'museum objects*

must, by definition, be 'the real thing' in order for it to have value, and thus be given respectful observance' (Prince, 1985: 245). The value of preserving and displaying a collection is both crucial to the museum's institutional value and the value of experience for visitors. The ability to see real objects and artefacts and to hear real stories, were identified as key outcomes sought by visitors and formed the value grouping 'collection value'. In the consultations with museum staff, interviewees were concerned that if a visitor is encouraged to have an emotional response to an object that this may distract them from learning from or about that object. This was then posed to delegates for discussion at the Materiality and Intangibility conference, where a dichotomy of opinions on the effect of encouraging emotional values in the interpretation of real objects was identified. Some delegates believed that attaining emotional value does not distract from learning; '*the emotional value of an object is normally the first point of engagement for a visitor. It doesn't have to distract from learning'* (Anon delegate). Other delegates were more sceptical:

> '*I think it can prevent a deeper engagement with an object- leading to a singular point of view about it. I think it can hinder their ability to spark dialogue- sort of like touching for the novelty of it- but not really thinking about the emotions and why they are happening'* (Anon delegate)

What the collation of delegates' feedback suggests is not concern of how encouraged emotional outcomes effects visitors' learning from or about an object but rather how this influences the visitors quality and depth of engagement with it. As the quote above shows, there is some alarm that encouraging emotional values may prevent visitor's from reflecting on an object and provide a one dimensional experience in which the outcome is only that which was scripted by the museum; '*not necessarily distract but can lead/ force/ direct an interpretation over another'* (Anon delegate). If we consider the long term projection: what if museums become more adroit in ways of encouraging emotional values, could visitors become so over-stimulated or so accustomed to the devices used to encourage emotional values, that they become unable to recognise the emotional value of the real? Would this then not undermine the unique, intrinsic value of the real objects and stories? After all, what is the value of a collection of real objects and stories if visitors need to be directed to attain the awe, wonder, shock, nostalgia, pride or empathy in witnessing them. This is the scope of a research project in itself and is not answerable from the consultation so far, all that can be suggested now is that there must remain a balance in the value of encouraging emotional responses and respecting the value of real objects. As Dr David Flemming, director of National Museums Liverpool said in an interview:

> '*Museums are about people and emotions rather than about things. But the reality is that objects are terrifically important. What we have to do is achieve the right balance between objects and stories so that we are not obsessed with objects at the expense of communicating their power and meaning.'* (Chamberlain, 2007:16)

Museums need to remember the intrinsic value of their collection and should consider the emotional outcomes that an object or subject may inherently induce in visitors before planning how to encourage responses.

What might be right for some...

Undoubtedly there is some level of subjectivity and a number of variable contexts to consider in analysing the effect of encouraging emotional values in museums. Firstly is the unavoidable factor that no two visitors are alike and in a similar vein- no two museums are truly the same. So there is destined to be some differentiation in the effects of encouraging emotional values and discussion at the interactive session at Materiality and Intangibility highlighted some of these. In regards to the variety of visitors, delegates identified that the outcome of attempting to encourage emotional values may be dependent on an individual's demographic characteristics; '*it depends on various factors; from individual to individual (their knowledge, their sex, their age etc)*' (Anon delegate) or their previous experiences and expectations of the visit '*it depends on the intelligence and/ or motivations of the audience to begin with*' (Anon delegate). It was also identified that the different strategies and methods used to encourage emotional values would have different outcomes;

- '*it depends on the exhibition strategy but it certainly can interfere with visitor's ability to identify and encourage their own values and emotions*' (Anon delegate)

- '*depends on the degree of manipulation and intention*' (Anon delegate)

- '*it would depend on whether the visitor was aware of what was going on and what the intention of the exhibition was- propaganda or speculation*' (Anon delegate).

What can be suggested from the delegates' discussion is that less forceful or scripted and more apparent methods are most suitable in museums, when attempting to encourage emotional values; '*Museums can (should?) guide visitors much like a piece of music or a film. A feather is better than a sledgehammer though*' (Anon delegate). Further feedback quoted: '*giving an over-directed experience will work for some people but not for others*' (anon delegate). Museums need to consider the methods they use to encourage emotional values, they need to provide a variety of experiences and not singular scripted outcomes which provide visitors little or no opportunity to create their own values and to form their own opinions and thoughts. Perhaps this was the concern of interviewees who were sceptical of the role of emotional values, feeling it was more customary to large tourist attractions[2] such as Disney Epcot Centre or one of Madame Tussaud's sites. These attractions are adept at emotionally stimulating visitors and are not shy of using whatever methods necessary to exhort visitors into having emotional reactions; it is in fact integral to their survival.

'*Emotions influence every aspect of our thinking life, they shape our memories; they influence our perceptions, our dreams, thoughts, and judgements- and our behaviours, including our decisions whether to return to a place of business, how much we are willing to pay for a product or service*' (Barlow 2000:14)

Without the requirements to deliver 'intellectual value' and 'collection value' in their visitor experiences, visitor attractions are free to manipulate visitors emotions, to script experiences, to bend truths and even make their own truths. Museums however do not share the same artistic license as these well-financed, service-oriented, visitor attractions. Museums are perceived as institutions of truth, knowledge and learning; they are not expected to be misleading. They also have social responsibilities to fulfil and a key responsibility in preserving and displaying a collection, one of real objects and artefacts. It is these key responsibilities that museums must consider when attempting to encourage emotional values in visitors. The research and discussion here would suggest that encouraging emotional value has great strength in supporting learning objectives but has highlighted caution in doing so in the interpretation of real objects.

Delegate discussion at the Materiality and Intangibility conference session has brought to light a number of further points which have not been addressed here, but which provide possible avenues of further research. Firstly is the question of why: '*the question needs to be asked as why self consciously evoking emotion should be necessary'* (Anon delegate). A number of benefits from encouraging emotional values have been proposed here, particularly in relation to supporting intellectual values but are these genuine reasons why museums are currently encouraging emotional values or are there ulterior motivations for museums? What are the real reasons for museums currently encouraging emotional reactions? The second question which arose from the delegates' discussion was to what extent are we even able to control the way in which visitors react: '*how much control does a museum actually have over how someone will react?'* (Anon delegate). Despite good intentions and clever mechanisms, to what extent are museums able to influence the way in which visitors will respond? To further examine the effect of encouraging emotional values in museums, we need to understand the real reasons museums currently choose to do this and investigate if, and which of the methods, are in fact successful.

Encouraging emotional values can provide benefits to the museum experience for visitors and is particularly beneficial in supporting intellectual outcomes. However, if deciding to encourage emotional responses museums should consider their target audience and respect the inherent values that the subject or objects they are presenting may evoke in visitors. Museums may also be best advised to adopt methods which do not dominate visitors and allow them the ability to reflect and form their own values to prevent escalation to a point where future generations of visitors are passive and unable to engage with the real.

Notes

[1] The general opinions and quotes of persons interviewed are anonymously referred to and referenced as 'interviewees' whilst discussion and feedback from the Materiality and Intangibility: Contested Zones conference are referenced as anonymous 'delegates'.

[2] Visitor attractions are here differentiated from museums as being institutions which do not preserve and display a collection and are likely to have less or no intellectual value for visitors.

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Acknowledgements

About the Author

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Interpreting Art in the Public Sphere: the Ways Display Locations and Strategies Affect the Meaning of an Artwork

Magnus Gestsson and Serena Iervolino

How is the meaning of art affected by display locations and strategies? How do especially unconventional display locations and strategies impact upon the meaning of art? In this paper we explore the potential of displaying art unconventionally in museums and galleries as well as in other spaces. In doing so, the paper seeks to challenge the role attributed to museums and art galleries as the only legitimate spaces with authority to display art. Drawing on the concept of "journey" (Bourriaud, 2009), in this project we embarked on a voyage through the public realm of Leicester with an artwork and stopped in several locations where randomly selected individuals were interviewed and their reaction to the artwork was filmed. The paper describes the project and clarifies its methodological approach. Secondly, it presents the data gathered and our interpretation of it. Finally, the paper concludes with some considerations regarding meaning-making in the public sphere, and the way in which display strategies and locations affect the interpretation of art.

Key words: Display strategies, locations, journey, public realm, art worlds

Museums and galleries are increasingly seeking to understand how visitors interpret and experience art. Research has been carried out to investigate visitors' interpretation of artworks exhibited in museums and galleries (RCMG, 2001a; RCMG, 2001b). Some investigations have explored how people look at art (Buswell, 1935; Yarbus, 1967; Livingstone, 2002). Other research has focused on the operations activated in the visual brain when people look at art (Zeki, 1999), while Plumhoff and Schirillo (2009) have examined whether eye movements could explain viewers' aesthetic preferences and bias. Current research on eye movements explores whether art enhances wellbeing and quality of life (Binnie, 2009).[1]

Existing research has overlooked how art is approached in other settings leaving unquestioned the role of museums and art galleries as the only institutions that have the authority and the knowledge to display art (Adams, 2006).[2] This study questions this exclusive role and explores the ways in which people interpret art in museums and galleries as well as in less authoritative spaces of the public sphere. We are interested in understanding whether different locations and display methods influence the ways people interpret art. By exploring how art is approached by visitors and non-users to a variety of exhibiting venues, we believe lessons useful to museums and galleries could be learnt. The paper presents our methodological approach, analyses the data gathered and draws some conclusions which may be useful to museum and gallery display strategies.

The journey

We embarked on a journey across Leicester with a contemporary artwork, a large format photograph (104cm x 76.04cm) that was displayed in several locations to investigate how these affected viewers' interpretation. We conceive the social spaces where the artwork was exhibited as 'third spaces' (Bhabha, 1994), where new possibilities are engendered, fixed categorizations of identities are rejected and new cultural meanings are produced. By moving through the city, crossing its spaces and borders, we sought to disturb monolithic thought-patterns and open up for alternative interpretations.[3] By displaying the artwork in both conventional and unconventional locations and filming people's reactions, we sought to stress the fluid meaning of the *Prayer* by the Icelandic artist Snorri Ásmundsson.

Figure 1. Snorri Ásmundsson, The Prayer*, 2004.*

This study draws on the concept of journey discussed in Bourriaud's book *The Radicant* (2009). He refers to the journey as an art form in itself and seems to criticise art galleries by emphasising that currently some artists find 'the barren experiences or no-man's-lands of post-industrial society surfaces for inscription much more exciting than those offered by art galleries [...]' (ibid: 107). His consideration suggests the possibility of taking art out of the comfort zone of authoritative institutions and displaying it in 'unsafe', but perhaps more stimulating locations. Although the urban spaces where the

Prayer was displayed are not 'no-mans-land', as they belong to the public sphere, they represent alternative 'post-industrial society surfaces' (Ibid) where art can be displayed. We conceived the *Prayer* as a work in migration, whose journey started in Iceland where it was created by Ásmundsson. Postcolonial writers have discussed their displaced and multi-layered identities and how migration and diaspora induced them to think in fluid ways about their identity (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1991). Drawing on this, we attribute a hybrid identity to the *Prayer*, whose transformation is wrought by its migration. This socio-cultural investigation carries within itself a grain of displacement as the *Prayer* was removed from the collector's home in Leicester and taken on a journey. The voyage, the displacement and the display became instruments to investigate the meaning of the work and to encourage a dialogue between the work, the interviewees, the research team and the following display locations in Leicester: the Railway Station, the City Gallery and the Clock Tower in Leicester city centre, the New Walk Museum and Art Gallery, St. Martins Square shopping centre and the Turkey Café, a bar near the city centre.

The *Prayer* was selected for being potentially controversial as it contains a variation of the Serenity Prayer usually resited by those who attend Al-Anon[4] and Alchoholic Anonymous[5] meetings. The original version goes as follows:

God grant me the serenity

To accept the things I cannot change,

Courage to change the things I can,

And wisdom to know the difference.[6]

The alterations made to the *Serenity Prayer* can be seen clearly in the following version, which is included within the photograph:

God, grant people serenity

To accept me as I am,

The courage to live with that,

And the wisdom to buy my art.

Amen

We selected the work because we believed that it could inspire interesting reflections on art, alcohol abuse and religion.

Methodology

In this project we employed a combination of qualitative research methods, i.e. observations, filming and interviewing. Filming was considered to be the

Figure 2. Magnus and Valentina getting ready for filming at Leicester Railway Station

most effective method to capture the viewers' spontaneous reactions to the work. The interviews with passers-by who agreed to participate were filmed by a professional film-maker, Valentina Mele, who also produced a video titled 'Embarking on a Journey with the Prayer', which was shown at the Symposium 'Materiality and Intangibility: Contested Zones' that took place in the School of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester (December 2009). The video can be viewed at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XuL5KVcjrOs.

Following the requisite ethical requirements we protected the identity of underage individuals and people who were accidently caught in the frame by not including their images in the final video. Participants were asked to sign an informed consent, ensuring that their images could be used with their permission. We also offered our interviewees the possibility to agree to only use their replies but not their images for research purposes. All the participants were adults (over 18) and gave us permission to use both replies and images. In the paper participants' anonymity has been ensured by using pseudonyms.

In order to be able to film in the indoor locations, we liaised with the railway station Manager, the Managing Curator at the New Walk and the Exhibition Officer at the City Gallery. In the museum and the gallery the work was displayed on an easel, which enabled us to respect the requirements of not affixing the work to walls, while still being consistent in our unconventional display method. We were also required not to include in the video works from the exhibitions at the City Gallery and New Walk Museum. In addition, the *Prayer* was displayed without interpretative aids to encourage viewers' imaginative meaning-making. However, we noticed that a few of the interviewees searched for interpretative aids that could facilitate their interpretation and not finding any, they asked the interviewer questions in an attempt to find out more information about the work and the artist.

Figure 3. The Prayer *in the foyer of New Walk Museum and Art Gallery.*

In the locations we observed passers-by and when potential interviewees were identified, one of us conducted the interview while the other gathered demographic data. In some instances we struggled to recruit participants. In the railway station (see fig.2), for example, we positioned the artwork near the exit, hoping to attract the attention of people arriving in Leicester, but they tended to rush out of the station.

In the New Walk Museum we were allocated a place in the foyer, where we found it particularly difficult to attract visitors' attention. We tried to solve this by moving the work around but without success. We believe that this happened because the work was displayed in front of a wall covered with posters, making the picture disappear in the background (see fig. 3).

At the City Gallery we were allowed to display the work in the gallery space and interestingly visitors paid attention to it as a part of the exhibition. The different reactions of visitors at the New Walk and the City Gallery were particularly interesting because they indicated that even in authoritative exhibiting institutions, art may go unnoticed when placed outside the galleries.

Participants were asked three open-ended questions varying slightly from one location to the other. The following questions were asked in the museum and the gallery:

1) What do you think about this work of art?[7]

2) What do you think about displaying art in this way in a museum/gallery?

3) Would you like to see more art displayed in an unconventional way?

In the other locations the second and third questions varied as follows:

2) What do you think about displaying art in this place and in this way?

3) Would you like to see more art displayed in a place like this?

Data presentation

In this section we will present the data collected in the interviews and the demographic survey. Thirty adults agreed to participate, of which nineteen were male and eleven female. The majority of participants were between 25 and 34 years old (see Table 1).

AGE	PARTICIPANTS
18-24	2
25-34	14
35-44	7
45-54	2
55-64	-
65-74	2
75-84	1
n. a.	2

Table 1

Seven interviewees did not visit museums and galleries, while eleven visited once or twice yearly. Eleven interviewees attended museums and galleries more than twice a year. Some interviewees approached in the museum and gallery, but also in a few of the other spaces, regarded themselves as frequent visitors and emphasised their belonging to art worlds by referring to previous visits. Jim, interviewed at the City Gallery, said: 'I remember that Tate had slides one time, which looked as a very interactive thing. […] I missed that unfortunately but I went to Rachael Whiteread's [...]'. Leon, interviewed in the same location as Jim, stressed his membership to an international art community: 'I went to an exhibition in Venice a few weeks ago and it was amazingly curated and it was a completely different space in comparison to the white cube […]'. This approach was also evident in Laurence's reply, interviewed at the Clock Tower: 'I believe in art myself, because you got to be

artistic to [wear]sic the one-wheel bicycle over there', pointing at his unicycle parked nearby. On the other hand some interviewees saw themselves as art world outsiders. Ben, interviewed at the railway station, said: 'To be honest art does not say to me a lot. I do not really understand a lot about art', and Justin, approached at the Clock Tower, stated: 'I do not know anything about art'.

Interpretative strategies

While some interviewees used a descriptive approach and interpreted the work mainly in relation to the scenery, others built on the text. Paul, interviewed in St. Martins Square, favoured the descriptive approach: 'It looks beautiful to me. […] It has a bit of a dark side and a sunny side', while Annie, interviewed at the City Gallery, built exclusively on the text: 'It is really strange. I was a kind of surprised to see it because it seems to me a sort of prayer but it is kind of ironic. It seems that it stages a kind of commercial relationship between art and the power of living [...]'. A few participants interpreted the work by drawing on both the text and cloud formations in the picture. Daniel, interviewed at the City Gallery, said: 'I see some clouds, a nice sky and "god grant serenity, accept me as I am, […] and the wisdom to buy my art?"', while Sigmund, interviewed at the Turkey Café, stated: 'I get the joke, if you can call it that and I think it could be stuck on […] any photograph […]. The graphics do not convey the irony of the message [...]'.

Participants' interpretation of the work tended to fall within four themes: visual qualities, religion, art as business and meteorology. Will, interviewed in St. Martins Square, focused on visual qualities, such colour and composition: 'it is aesthetically pleasing. […] The way it looks. It is blue. […] I like the text where it is in the picture'. John, approached in the same location, was critical of the visual qualities: 'it is somehow mediocre to be totally honest. [...]'. Michael, interviewed at the Clock Tower, argued that the work was stereotypical: 'It is a bit generic […] I have seen so many like it [...]. It is [...] only a photograph. […] It is good but it has already been done before'. Three interviewees mentioned the tone of the photograph by referring to the contrast between darkness and brightness. Carl, interviewed at the Turkey Café, said: 'You have got the darkness and the clouds and the light coming through in the middle as well with a two tone effect'. Justin's reply, recorded at the Clock Tower, suggests that the tone expressed human fluctuation between happiness and sadness: 'I feel that someone has been in darkness and suddenly there is a spot of light in life. But do not give up because there is always something that will help you [...]'.

A majority of interviewees favoured a religious interpretation varying from being supportive, to indifferent or against. Believers used the work to underpin their faith, while non-believers manifested a dislike for a religious message. Clare, interviewed at the railway station, stated: 'I believe that there is a God that is watching over and everything that is going on is what God predicted to happen. [...] in other words, I fully believe'. Theo, approached at the Turkey

Café, was fairly critical towards a religious meaning: 'I'm not very religious. It is not something that really strikes me [...]. Being an atheist it is not really something that I am going to stop and look at on the basis that I was walking by it in the street'. John, interviewed in St. Martins square, on the other hand expressed an indifferent attitude: 'It obviously has religious or spiritual connotations. […] The poem itself is not particularly engaging or it is not particularly insightful. It does not challenge any other perceptions that I have of nature, of god or reality and the picture is somehow archetypical'.

Drawing on the prayer some participants made a connection between art and business. Will, approached in St. Martins Square, said: 'This looks like it is written by someone who is an artist and wants people to buy his art'. Charles, interviewed in the railway station, also argued that the work referred to religion as an instrument to achieve economical goals: 'I thought it was quite ironic. I like the fact, "god accept me as I am" but in the end of the day, I will try to make some money too'. Only Albert recognized the *Serenity Prayer* but disapproved the artist's adaptation: 'I like the picture. I am not sure about the sentiment of the words. It is a copy of "God grant me serenity". It does not quite work for me'. Leon, approached in the City Gallery, seemed confused by the prayer and said: 'To buy my art? I do not know. I do not know what he is trying to say'.

A number of interviewees saw the artwork purely as a depiction of meteorological conditions and completely disregarded the text in their process of meaning-making. Alan, interviewed at St. Martins, said: '[...] it is a nice picture of the sun and black clouds and it is gonna rain'. Helen, approached at the railway station, also referred to the cloud formations: 'It does not look bad, it looks good. If it was sunny, it would be better', suggesting that weather conditions in pictures influence people's mood similar to the natural world. Stephen, interviewed in St. Martins Square, also suggested that the *Prayer* had the power to affect his state of mind: 'For me it looks like really peaceful. Quite uplifting [...].' It could be argued that their interpretation of the work might have been influenced by their conception of what art is or should be. Yet, their disregard of the text in the picture and their complete focus on the image of the cloud formation in the background seem to have been influenced by what they regard as art.

Reactions to display strategies and locations

Participants' reaction included being sceptical, relativist, positive and pro-innovative. Will, interviewed in St. Martins Square, disapproved of the display location: '[...] You do not normally find art just put in the middle of a public walkway or in front of shops. I do not think it is the right place for it. […] I didn't know what it was doing here so it [...] looks out of place […]'. He added: 'I can see that someone is making a prayer hoping to grant […] other people the ability, the serenity to buy his artwork, but unless you got a price tag on it and you got a shop built around it, nobody is gonna buy that [...].' He evidently

linked the meaning of the work to the display location and seemed to regard art shops or commercial galleries as the most appropriate venues for the work. His statement suggests that in his view the 'correct' locations impose a sense of authenticity to art and ensure artistic value. John, approached in St. Martins, expressed a similar view: 'It could almost be outside a shop'. Jim, interviewed at the City Gallery presented himself as an art insider, and appeared sceptical. However, his scepticism seemed to be more related to the artistic value of the work than to the appropriateness of the display location. Indeed he stated: 'there is such a variety in the art world and exhibition space that it does not go against any expectations that I have cause I do not have any expectations [...] I am not too sure if it is meant to be taken seriously or if this is art. I am not really sure if I can approach it in this sense'. He seemed not to believe that the work had to be in the 'correct' location to acquire meaning and value. His statement suggests that he was unsure of whether he regarded it as art or not. Pat, interviewed by the Clock Tower, suggested that busy places are inappropriate display settings: 'It is not a bad idea but we could ask how many people will really stop and look at the picture. In my view few people will be interested, especially people that like looking at pictures. Probably a lot of people would just ignore it [...]'. Although she did not identify a specific appropriate display space, her reply suggests that only art-insiders are interested in seeing art. Justin also referred to the Clock Tower as an inappropriate location because 'all the people are busy doing shopping, going to a restaurant […]'. Interestingly Greg, interviewed in St Martins, argued the opposite: 'Perhaps, if it was a busier venue […] it would be better […]'.

Sigmund, interviewed at the Turkey Café, expressed a relativist approach, supporting unconventional display locations but stressing the maintenance of a distinction between galleries and other spaces: 'there has got to be a dividing line between an art gallery and somewhere to go and have a drink […]. But, […] to a certain extent, yes, I do not think that a few pieces around would do any harm [...] As long as it does not interfere with the design of the particular place'. He distinguishes between spaces devoted to the display of art and settings where art serves as a decoration. Greg, also approached at the Turkey Café, sustains a similar conception of bars as inappropriate places to ponder art: '[...] when you are in bars […] people may take a cursory glance at them as they walk in but they do not spend much time appreciating them or looking in any detail [...]. They just see them as bits of work on the wall'. Like Sigmund, Greg seems to regard art exhibited in bars as a decoration. Theo, interviewed at the Turkey Café, also regarded art as a decoration making bars aesthetically pleasing but he strongly stressed that an artwork with a religious message should be displayed in other locations: 'In this building it does not really fit in with the rest of the decor [...] It is more the sort of a thing you are going to see on the outside of a church or a religious building. Not the sort of thing I expect to see here. [...]'. Theo's statement seems to go in the same direction as Will's and John's views by linking the meaning of the work to the display location. As Theo identified a religious meaning in the artwork, he did not regard the Turkey Café as an appropriate location to display the photograph but he believed that a religious space, like a church, would have

been more appropriate. Judd, approached in the Turkey Café, also stresses the potential of art to make bars more pleasant: '[...] I like when bars have some artistic things inside generally. [...] When I go out, I do not really mind to see art. But I think it would be pleasant to see more'. In the same spirit, but referring to an outdoor location, Paul stressed that St Martins was an appropriate space for art: 'This square is [...] a suitable space for art. I find it artistic. I like the architecture here and it is my favourite area in Leicester. So I would say it fits here'. Two interviewees in the City Gallery suggested that, depending on the work, alternative display strategies may or may not be suitable in gallery and museum spaces. Leon said: 'You mean on an easel? Well, it is a bit arty-artist's-easel. You might as well have the thing with different colours and an artist with a beard and in a stripy t-shirt. This is cliché'. Then he added: 'It depends on the artwork [...]. I would like to see more works shown in unconventional places but it got to be extremely well thought out and on the occasions I have seen this sort of things done, it was not really well thought out. So I think, stick with the white cube, unless you have a very good reason for not doing so'. Daniel was also critical towards the display strategy: 'It is a waste of time. It is just for giving jobs to people and spend some public money', supporting the idea that museums and art galleries are increasingly subjected to public policies (Boylan, 2006) and they are increasingly overlooking activities, such as collectioning, research, and display (Appelton (2001). On more general terms though, Daniel added: 'it depends on what you do [...] Unconventional is one thing, to be different just for being different is another thing'. In this way he seems to approve of unconventional displays of art if quality and originality are maintained.

Several interviewees were positive towards displaying art in public spaces. Clare, interviewed in the railway station, said: 'Yes, of course, because it is a public space. It depends on what sort of pictures you are showing [...] but in a place like this, it works well'. Similarly Albert, approached in the same location, said: 'I think it is a good idea. I think we need to see more art in public places'. Philippa also said: 'It is good. It is there and people will notice it. It's better than in an office', making a reference to art in public spaces (such as the railway station) as a means to increase access to art. Justine suggested that in busy places like the Clock Tower art could be contemplated in the company of friends or partners. Michael on the other hand was more in favour of events in outdoor spaces like the Clock Tower: 'If we think about art it needs to be more event art so that you have more pictures around but you will be doing the art there and then'. He added: 'I am in favour of any art really as long as it does not go against my faith [...]. But anything that encourages people, that gets out there and shows people that there is more to life than just working, working, working [...]'.

Three out of the six interviewees in the railway station were positive towards art in public spaces, because they felt it reduced the overwhelming presence of advertisements. Jennifer said: 'You know, seeing all these billboards and advertisements, that is something better to see', pointing at the work, while Ben argued: 'It is nice to see something that is not a plain advert. It is quite

nice, something different'. Helen also commented: 'Yes, of course, much better seeing pictures like that than something like that over there [...]', pointing at an advertisement.

Interviewees in the gallery and museum settings as well as in unconventional spaces demonstrated support of innovative display strategies for their potential to generate surprise. Referring to the way the *Prayer* had been displayed, Annie and Victor saw it as a work in progress or an installation. Annie said: '[...] It seems that you have the canvas there and something that is in process of construction somehow'. Victor was puzzled by the use of an easel to display a framed picture: 'Like [a] work in progress. It is good. Still it doesn't look like something you are still working on because you have the framework [...]'. On more general terms, he added: 'It is always good to have new ways of showing art'. Annie suggested that unexpected display strategies may reduce the boredom that occasionally is experienced in museums and galleries: 'For me visiting galleries and museums is a kind of paradoxical experience because although I really enjoy to see artworks [...], sometimes I feel really bored about how art is displayed at the museums [...] I really prefer when something surprises you, when you see something that you were not expecting. I think that in that way art becomes more effective'. Victor and Annie support display strategies which generate surprise. A similar approach was taken by a few interviewees in St. Martins Square. Deborah stated: 'Generally, I like the fact that you do not expect to see something but you just find it and you are kind of surprised by that [...]'. Criticising the display strategy for being conventional, John said: '[...] generally art is everywhere, […] and the more obscure it is the better […]. The more unexpected it is the better, and this is not particularly unexpected'. However, he showed support for unconventional display strategies by saying: 'Yes, as long as it is good. We were discussing yesterday how bad public art is generally in England, […] The trouble with public art is that it seems to forget that it can be just as conceptual as gallery art […]'.

Discussion and conclusion

Based on the research, conclusions can be made about the ways visitors and non-users interpret art displayed in traditional exhibiting spaces and in other locations of the public sphere. Participants interpreted the work by drawing on their background, cultural capital and previous experiences of art-related activities, particularly museum and gallery visits. Participants with previous relevant experience showed more confidence in presenting their interpretation of the work and critically engaging with its message beyond aesthetic considerations. In order to show their expertise and ability to understand art, they tended to emphasize their belonging to art worlds. Interviewees without previous experiences demonstrated less confidence in interpreting the work. In their replies they stated that they did not belong to art worlds and stressed their inexperience of art appreciation. Their insecurity seems to demonstrate that art continues to be seen as something obscure

that can be comprehended by individuals confident about their visually literacy. Their approach also demonstrates that nowadays museums and galleries are still perceived as institutions that can only be appreciated by the so-called educated. Conversely, the research shows that, although not having a specific vocabulary to discuss the work, interviewees without previous experiences referred to its visual qualities and critically engaged with its message.

In their attempt to make sense of the work, interviewees primarily alluded to themes like religion. We believe that the revised version of the *Serenity Prayer*, especially the words 'God' and 'Amen', encouraged some interviewees to identify a religious message in the work. Believers tended to applaud this message and used the *Prayer* to confirm their faith, while non-believers criticized it. Unexpectedly, a few interviewees identified a meteorological message. Drawing on this interpretation, a few interviewees favoured a dualistic interpretation of the work and life and suggested the potential of art to affect their mood and improve well-being. Surprisingly, only one interviewee recognized the allusion to the *Serenity Prayer*. A few participants referred to the message of the work as an expression of artists' longing to find patrons and of their inclination to pray to a god in which they may not believe in order to sell their art.

The research indicates that people tend to rely on interpretative aids to understand visual culture. Not finding any text next to the *Prayer*, some interviewees asked us questions about the work and the artist, and they also used the text in the picture as their meaning-making instrument. Despite the overwhelming presence of visual culture in contemporary societies, the interviewees' approach demonstrates that textual information is still highly valued. In our view the search for textual information of some of the interviewees is even more interesting if we take into account that a few participants completely ignored the text within the picture or were critical of the artwork because they disagreed with the artist's alteration of the Prayer. It could be argued that the text within the picture did not satisfy their need for information about the work and the artist that might have aided their meaning-making process. This interpretation of their reaction to the absence of textual aids and to the presence of the text within the picture seems to be another indication that there is a place for everything, and everything needs to be in the right place, not just in terms of display locations but also in relation to the use of interpretative text in art displays. In addition, it could be maintained that interviewees found the interpretation of the work more demanding in the unconventional display spaces. We believe that the lack of interpretative aids or the impossibility of moving on to the next work placed the burden of the interpretation completely on the viewers, who had relied on themselves to interpret the work. As a contrast, visitors to museum and art galleries produce meanings by drawing on all the artworks, the semiotic resources like texts, lighting, colours, and design of the space. In this respect we wish to acknowledge that museums and galleries have a unique meaning-making potential compared to spaces not specifically devoted to the display of art.

The research also suggests a link between display locations and the meaning attributed to the work by viewers. Interestingly, the interviewees who saw a religious message in the *Prayer* suggested that the photograph should have been displayed in a place like a church. Similarly, those interviewees who identified a relationship between art and business referred to commercial galleries as the only appropriate venues. This indicates that people tend to see unconventional display locations as appropriate or inappropriate in accordance with the meaning of the work and whether they categorise it as art or not.

Most of the participants expressed a positive attitude towards the use of unconventional display strategies and locations. However, some interviewees who were approached in the bar, the shopping centre and public thoroughfares seemed to view museums and galleries as the most appropriate display locations. Although demonstrating an open-mindness in relation to unconventional displaying spaces, some participants seemed to value art displayed in these locations as a decoration or as a substitute to advertisements. Their responses also indicate that displaying art in more accessible spaces of the public sphere is appreciated as it gives a larger proportion of the population the possibility to see art, regardless of their visual literacy and previous experiences in museums and galleries.

The study indicates that by taking art out of exhibiting institutions, a lot can be learnt about how non-visitors approach art. This may help museums and galleries to understand how non-visitors understand them and, building on that, they may succeed in diversifying their audience. Without diminishing the importance of research into how visitors interpret art in museums and galleries, we believe there is a strong need for additional investigation into the ways art is interpreted by non-users in other spaces. We hope that this study will be used as a basis for follow-up research.

Notes

[1] See Anonymous, 'Understanding the WOW factor' see http://www.artfund.org/news/772 (Accessed 28/11/2009)

[2] Adams (2006) stresses that art is not just in museums and demystifies the creative process favouring a broader appreciation of the relevance of art in everybody's lives

[3] In this respect we wish to stress that we did not attribute any artistic value to our act of walking across the city. The purpose of our walk was to move the work from one display location to the other. Our focus was on the steps of the journey (which represented our display locations) and not on the journey itself.

[4] 'The Al-Anon Family Groups are a fellowship of relatives and friends of alcoholics who share their experience [...] in order to solve their common problems', http://www.al-anon.alateen.org/ (accessed 09/11/2009).

[5] 'Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism' http://www.aa.org/lang/en/subpage.cfm?page=1 (accessed 09/11/2009).

[6] See http://www.cptryon.org/prayer/special/serenity.html (accessed 09/11/2009).

[7] It could be argued that by using the expression work of art, we may have induced the interviewees to regard the photograph as something special or exceptional and, therefore, worth being considered as art. However, interviewees' replies evidently show this argument being incorrect as the expression 'work of art' did not seem to influence their replies. Indeed, participants felt free to judge the artistic value of the picture and a few of them stressed that they did not regard the photograph as a work of art.

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Intangible Material: Interventionist Art Works

Helen Saunderson

Is a thought material? Is an experience intangible? Can the intangible be made material? These key questions relate to and underpin various issues raised at the Materiality and Intangibility: Contested Zones Symposium, and are also reflected in the development of two interventionist art works (*Intangible Material*[3] *and Intangible Material*[4]) created, in situ, as a response to the event. A further work, *Intangible Material*[2], produced after the event, functions as a re-examination of ideas initiated at the Symposium. The aim of the three art works is to engage the delegates, either as an accidental viewer or an active participant, in interventionist events that prompt questions about the relationship between the "intangible" and the "material", and explore the arguably fuzzy boundaries between them.

The first part of *Intangible Material*[4] (see images above) involved symposium delegates expressing their opinion of 'What is intangible?' on Post-it notes. The responses, displayed on a window, ranged from "Beetles breath" to "Glanced out of the corner of an eye, tasted on the tip of your tongue." Following the symposium, the Post-its were encapsulated and obscured within a wool ball, thus the delegates' thoughts were rendered inaccessible and, arguably, conceptually intangible. These wool balls, with their hidden contents, are gradually being left on the artist's route between home and the symposium venue (Museum Studies Building, Leicester), physically demarking a largely intangible experience of the journey to the conference. The balls are then photographed in their new placement, and by virtue of the transformation into an intangible world of computer code, the images of the wool balls last known location will be recorded on the artist's web site: (https://sites.google.com/site/hmsaunderson).

The site-specific art work *Intangible Material*[3] involved the 'yarn bombing' of two museum display cases (see images above) located on the premises of the symposium in the Museum Studies Building. The 'yarn bombing' took the form of wrapping the cases in wool. This operation subverted the usual status of the display case and its objects. A display case is generally a relatively passive object that provides a protective vessel and confers status/focus upon the objects displayed within. By wrapping the display case, its contents and original purpose were obscured and thus conceptual become intangible, whilst the display case itself became an art object. When the case was released from its yarn constraints, the resulting heap of wool was tied together to form a ball, ready to yarn bomb the next, as yet undecided, object.

The third art work *Intangible Material*[2] '(see *Lift Art Work*, below)', has been specifically designed for this edition of *Museological Review* to further investigate the arguably fluid relationships between what is intangible and material. Drawing upon Yoko Ono's *Grapefruit* book (Wunternaum Press, Tokyo, 1964) instructions for an art work are attached to this article. Once created by the participant the art works, sent to the author as per the instructions, will be displayed in a lift with the aim of focusing the viewers' attention upon a normally voided and intangible space (raising themes similar to Rachel Whiteread's sculpture, *House*, London, 1993). The debatably intangible - namely instructions upon a computer screen – transform into a tangible object, the art work. The art objects created in this manner and sent to the author will be photographed and uploaded on to the artist's web page, so that they return to the realm of the intangible world of computer code.

The continuing development of the *Intangible Material* series of art works provides those who experience it with the opportunity to consider the fluid nature between the material and the intangible. Indeed, this state of flux is the reason for using the equilibrium symbol from chemistry. The symbol is used to reflect when elements on one side of the equation, like 'intangible' transform into the 'material', yet as there is also an equivalent opposite reaction the total amounts on each side remain stable. Therefore, there is a constant dynamic and non-discrete relationship between the elements of 'material' and 'intangible', which is furthered through the audience's continued reflection on the artist's art works.

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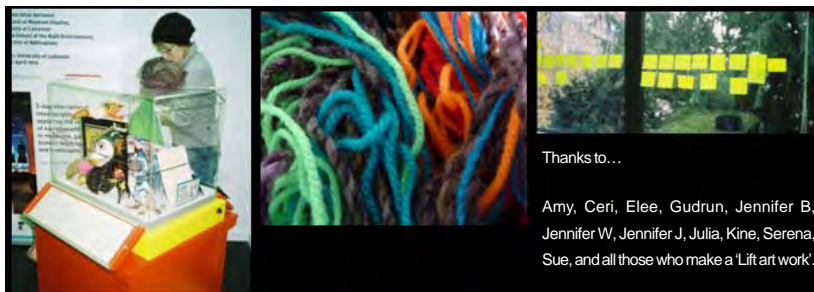
LIFT ART WORK

Imagine a void 5cm wide, 7cm high and 4 cm in depth.

Make an art work to fit the void.

Pack up the art work safely and send it to:

Helen Saunderson,
School of Psychology,
Henry Wellcome Building,
University of Leicester,
Lancaster Road,
Leicester, LE1 9HN.

Winter, 2010.

'My London': Exploring Identities Through Audience Participation and Critical Consumption

Mary Lester, Joanna Marchant, Ellie Miles and Kathrin Pieren

Abstract

Recently a growing recognition of partiality in the museological representation of community identity has encouraged museums to strive towards producing more inclusive narratives with a broad appeal (Sandell, 2002; McLean, 2008). Yet it is an indisputable truth that a narrative always remains the product of a conditioned selection process. Despite the use of multimedia and interactive elements, material culture displays tend to be static and, therefore, contrast with peoples' multiple and transitional identities. Consequently a greater focus has been placed on raising awareness of the constructed nature of museum displays. Involving visitors in the production of exhibition content has also provided museum professionals with a clearer understanding of their contribution to meaning-making (Mason, 2005). This article outlines an approach to developing these ideas concerning visitor interpretation through exploring the creation of identity at the Museum of London. Additionally it documents the process by which Collaborative Doctoral Award (CDA) students and the Museum of London sought to identify a means of conveying knowledge resulting from academic research.

Key words: Civic identity; knowledge transfer; social inclusion; sharing authority; Museum of London.

Negotiating conceptual representations of identity within the museum display in a manner which confronts, informs or resonates with visitors' personal identities is a challenging task. Engendering a meaningful dialogue between the curator and the visitor on a subject so subjective and intangible has been dealt with in a variety of ways by museums and museologists, whether addressing identities influenced by location, ethnicity or gender. Running parallel to this trend has been a move towards heightened transparency within the museum walls, enabling visitors to recognise curatorial biases and raising awareness of the decision processes behind an exhibition. It is the marriage, and the material outcome, of these two approaches that this article proposes to consider by discussing an idea for a collaborative project between the Museum of London and its Collaborative Doctoral Award PhD students which never came to fruition.

Collaborative Doctoral Awards (CDAs) are an Arts and Humanities Research Council funding scheme designed to promote partnerships between universities and non-university institutions and to encourage knowledge

transfer. In addition to writing a thesis, the student realises a project with the partner institution based on their doctoral research. Where the external partner is a museum this could be anything from an exhibition to a conservation project. Three of the article's four authors are PhD candidates at the Institute of Historical Research, University of London, where they are carrying out research under the common remit of 'London on display: civic identities, cultures and industry, 1851 to 1951'.[1] In contrast to most CDA projects, in this case the output was not specified in advance; rather it was anticipated that this would develop out of the three research projects, allowing for more flexibility and creativity.

Developing the project

Over the course of about six months the students discussed various possibilities for a potential project with the Museum of London. Although a variety of research interests are explored within the three theses, one important unifying strand was 'London identity'. This theme could link the students' work with the museum's remit and collections, as well as with contemporary research on identity construction within museums. Some months into the project a fourth student, based at Royal Holloway, University of London, and also partnered with the Museum of London, joined the team. Since her research focuses on the observation and documentation of the process by which the Museum of London's staff developed the Galleries of Modern London (opened Spring 2010), she was well placed to develop a project that could produce rich quantitative data. This idea was incorporated into the CDA project which, it was hoped, would address ideas about London identity present in this new permanent exhibition.

The project was provisionally entitled 'My London'. Its objective was to provoke visitors to think critically about their experience in the new galleries and to explore their own, and London's, identities. By providing information about the processes of exhibition curation, particularly object selection and labelling, it was intended that visitors would be prompted to reflect critically on these processes and how they relate to identity-creation. The envisaged format for the project was a series of activities for the visitor, linked to videos, pictures and short texts, hosted on computer terminals placed at the gallery exit. The planned activities were designed to explain and explore the curatorial process and the cultural and social role of museums. Some were also designed to collect visitor comments about the meaning of London for them, about 'their London', and how they felt this interacted with the Galleries of Modern London they had just visited. For example, users would be shown a selection of London icons (a routemaster bus, the Houses of Parliament, the London Transport logo etc) and asked to note whether they thought these represented London adequately, before being asked to suggest and explain other possible icons. Each subsequent user would have been able to see both the original icons and other visitors' suggestions and comments. In order to make the project relevant to all visitors and thus capture as wide a response as

possible, the project sought to include specially recorded oral history extracts (videos). These were conceived to represent the diversity of London's population and of the 30% of visitors to the Museum who are not Londoners (Ross, 2006: 45).

The project was to be funded by the partner institutions, with the bulk of the design and implementation carried out by the four students. However, due to logistical pressures during the implementation of the Museum of London's new galleries, in the end the interactive display was not realised; it remains to be seen whether it may be possible in the future. However, the project's purpose and its approach are still of use. 'My London' offers an inspiration for future exhibitions to further their understanding of visitors' interaction with displays concerned with identity. We believe that giving visitors the tools to deconstruct curatorial decisions can help reveal the process by which they mediate between the information they encounter and their personal experiences.

This article explores current thinking about the relationship between museums and identity. It will seek to comprehend how this has been practically addressed in the past, before moving on to demonstrate how this body of work has impacted upon the Museum of London project. It will set forth our vision for its content and appearance and will judge alternative formats for these. The final section will discuss how and why an unrealised project is still of value to museum professionals through exploring its merits and the ways in which it might be applied to future exhibition scenarios. In addition, possible problems will be highlighted and comments on the experience of collaboration will be made.

Museums and Identity

Since their foundations in the late eighteenth century and increasingly from the nineteenth century onwards, public museums and galleries have been used by states, regions, cities and ethnic or interest groups, *inter alia,* to construct and reinforce identities and create a sense of community (Kaplan, 1994; Bennett, 1995; Duncan, 1995; Crook 2006; Mason, 2007). They belong to the institutions of civil society through which people define and negotiate their identities and produce and reproduce their beliefs and values (Karp, 1992: 4-5). Over the last two or three decades Museum and Cultural Studies scholars have stressed that museums have been highly selective, at times hiding, excluding and misrepresenting individuals, groups and entire peoples in their narratives (Macdonald, 1996; Lidchi, 1997). Rather than presenting value-neutral representations of a people's history, the museum 'is revealed to be a vital institution in the formation of powerful ideologies, categories and identities, perpetuating dominant national myths or providing cultural cement for socio-political order' (Nick Prior quoted in McLean, 2008: 285).

Increasingly made conscious of their social responsibilities, public museums in Britain have made great efforts at becoming more socially inclusive (Sandell,

2002). Visitor consultation, evaluation of activities, outreach to non-traditional audiences, collaboration with source communities, staff diversification programmes and frequently-changing museum displays are some of the many strategies to ensure that the museum reflects the entire local population and allows for everyone to identify with the stories it tells (McLean, 2008; for recent assessments of such schemes see Nightingale, 2010; Heywood, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c). The Museum of London is a case in point.

The new Galleries of Modern London explore the history of London from 1666 to the present day in a broadly chronological order. Their development was part of a major project to modernise the Museum of London's permanent exhibition spaces, which were not thought to adequately reflect either modern era London or the breadth of the Museum's collections. The galleries were intended to be more inclusive of London's diverse population, whose opinions were captured through audience consultation (Capital City Project; James, 2004), as described in the initial bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund. The bid includes quotes to convey the significance of London's distinctive multiculturalism. Several of these are taken from Jerry White's book *London in the Twentieth Century: A City and its People*. Professor White was a member of the academic advisory board for the Galleries of Modern London; in an interview conducted as part of Ellie Miles' PhD research in 2009 he commented that the increasing population diversity in twentieth century London was 'as big a shift as the Norman invasion a thousand years before', and something that he wanted the Museum to reflect upon in the new galleries. One of the key points raised in the Museum's formative evaluation was the need to 'ensure that the story is told through multiple perspectives, in particular the views and experiences of ordinary people and people from minority ethnic communities' (Museum of London, 2004: 19). The significance of representing London's diversity is recognised throughout the Museum, including by the Director Professor Jack Lohman, who suggests 'a new model of partnership and digital participation' in order to 'provide the opportunity for a collective response to the collective responsibility for our common cultural heritage at a local level' (Lohman, 2010: x).

Such steps are overdue and clearly needed. However, museums should not stop there, because when taken on its own the discourse on social inclusion still holds the false promise that a truly representative narrative of an existing society will one day be possible. This obscures the fact that museum narratives, like any narratives, are always the result of selection processes, several of which are not necessarily the product of conscious decisions. Moreover, it has been argued that identities are exclusively constructed 'through difference', through a 'constitutive outside', which suggest that identity-formation is intrinsically exclusive (Hall, 1996: 4-5). However, even if we reject the idea that identities are formed through distinction alone, full representativeness is hard to achieve in practice because of the limited spatial and financial resources of most museums. Furthermore, as Roshi Naidoo has observed, the representation of formerly 'hidden' minorities in heritage projects, although well-meant, has often resulted in reductive additions to

existing narratives, while leaving unchanged underlying traditional assumptions about national history and heritage (2005).

Moreover, material culture displays tend to be stable, dominated by static objects, and thus at odds with people's intangible, multi-faceted and fluctuating identities (Hall, 1997). This discrepancy is particularly accentuated by the fact that changes to collections always contain a degree of delay. Curators are faced with the challenge of making their eclectic collections, often based on the idiosyncratic interests of nineteenth-century white gentlemen, relevant to today's diverse audiences. According to Laurajane Smith it is the materiality of heritage that reinforces the illusion of objectivity and, it could be argued, the promise of representativeness:

The physicality of heritage [...] works to mask the ways in which the heritage gaze constructs, regulates and authorizes a range of identities and values by filtering that gaze onto the inanimate material heritage. In this gaze, the proper subject of which *is* the material, a material objective reality is constructed and subjectivities that exist outside or in opposition to that are rendered invisible or marginal, or simply less 'real' (Smith, 2006: 53).

In fact, history museums use the authenticity of their objects to promote their assumed capability to make 'history come to life', more so – they imply – than textbooks can. This is at its most explicit in the case of live interpretation, but it also takes place in the creation of 'period rooms', film or digital displays presenting invented characters that assemble in themselves the 'typical' characteristics of their age, dressing up facilities, dramatic sound and lighting and so forth.

For these reasons the authors of this paper believe that efforts should be made to open the museum to the critical gaze of the visitor and to increase visitor awareness of the constructed nature of museum displays. A source of inspiration for 'My London' was an exhibition at the Ashmolean Museum in 1991-2. By displaying antique sculptures next to cheap modern reproductions, labels with nonsensical instructions and other installations, the curators questioned visitors' expectations and the authority of the museum (Beard and Henderson, 1994). However, in contrast to the playful and intellectual approach of the Ashmolean Museum exhibition, the 'My London' project was supposed to be more openly reflective and participatory.

Developing 'My London'

The 'My London' project was designed to complement a lineage of previous projects, through which the Museum of London attempted to make visitors aware of the ways in which museum displays are constructed.[2] It would provide visitors with information about some of the considerations that influenced the production of the Galleries of Modern London, whilst prompting reflection on the role of objects, story and place in the construction of identity. In addition to giving information about the collection, 'My London' aimed to

collect feedback on the new galleries by inviting visitors to look critically at the displays and enabling them to share their ideas about the Museum of London and their identity with other visitors. Working out this format for the project involved a complicated series of negotiations and the careful balancing of a range of demands. These included the project's aims and those connected with the CDA studentships, but also needed to respond to the Museum of London. This negation required a constant balance of time, money, authority, ownership and impact and these demands shaped the project's eventual realisation.

In its early stages 'My London' was imagined as an object-focused installation, stemming from the belief that using objects was an eloquent approach to highlight the practical restraints of museum-work. The project team considered the possibility of developing a display case of objects that had been initially selected to be in the Galleries of Modern London but excluded from the final design, to illustrate the selection process. This would be supplemented by a display board of questions to prompt the visitors' critical engagement, with responses gathered on hand-written cards. However, it became clear that spatial constraints in the fast-developing Galleries of Modern London project meant that a site for the display case and response board could not be guaranteed, but that utilising the already-planned computer terminals would allow a screen-based version of the display to be created, with comments also recorded on a comments page. The turn to digital media opened up other rich possibilities. As the Galleries of Modern London took shape, the Museum became increasingly interested in the more complex evaluative opportunities that 'My London' might have provided. It was intended that the project would have been a useful and different technique to collect feedback from visitors, by prompting their thoughts about museum practice in general, and this exhibition in particular. The Museum of London identifies museum studies research as a key component of its research output (Ross, 2010). The 'My London' project represented a way that the Museum would be able to share some of this material with its visitors.

Oral history interviews, to be specially recorded for the project, were chosen to stimulate these discussions. Extracts of video interviews with a broad range of London residents and visitors talking about their experience of London, identity, home, place and belonging as well as the new galleries would invite visitors to think about relevant issues. Oral history interviews were chosen for several reasons. Firstly, they have established a reputation for being an engaging part of museums (see the experience of Green, 1996: 455; Day et al., 2010) and are used elsewhere in the Galleries of Modern London.[3] Secondly, by producing its own interviews with a diverse sample of London residents and visitors 'My London' would have contributed to the Museum's representation of the city's cultural diversity (it was anticipated that the full-length interviews would become part of its collections). Thirdly, it was felt that using oral histories would invite visitors to discuss their ideas on a 'level-playing-field'. By presenting the voices of other visitors the project would have looked beyond the voice of the Museum itself. It was expected

that this would provide a helpful amount of distance to position the visitors just outside the dynamic of museum-authority-identity-message-visitor that the project sought to question. Finally, the content of the oral histories would have constituted a small-scale preliminary research project in itself. It would have generated rich qualitative information about questions such as belonging, place, community and the way different audiences experience the museum, and it would have helped to refine the topics to address in the interactive.

It was intended that the edited video interviews would be used to encourage visitors to perform certain activities. After watching the extract the visitor would have been invited to make comments (as on familiar sites such as YouTube), watch another video, read more material, view a longer oral history extract, or take part in a short activity at the computer terminal. The activities were divided between three main sections: 'London icons', 'London people' and 'London objects'. Each section would give visitors the opportunity to write down their own memories of London, share their personal sense of home and their experiences of London, for instance. Activities included things such as label writing and object selection, designed to invite reflection on the practice of museum-making. By gradually feeding this material to the website, a thought-provoking dialogue would be initiated between visitors about how museums select objects and stories to tell. It was hoped that this would recreate some of the ways that museums make the intangibility of identity more tangible. Rather than shying away from personal narratives, the project aimed to respond to Graham Black's call to engage these personal narratives in conversations (Black, 2005: 266).

The move from the display of objects to an interactive display offered some advantages. One of these was the space it allowed for the provision of layered information. The layering of information is an engaging strategy for visitors and the use of digital technology meant that it would be possible to integrate the aspects of the project more fully (Black, 2005). Rather than relying on visitors to link oral history accounts with objects, the 'My London' terminal could have suggested connections between objects, icons, places and video interviewees' accounts, the responses of other exhibition visitors and the individual visitor's own perspective. The possibilities afforded by this kind of data management opened up the scope of the project. It also gave the possibility of displaying more information and the potential to pitch text for specific segments of the audience, such as children. The use of a computer display would have made it possible to collect demographic information about visitors, which could have been used in the analysis of materials.

It was felt that the visitor responses to the project would have provided a fascinating insight into visitor behaviour. Building on recent research in museum visitor studies (eg Falk, 2009), 'My London' sought to explore the ways that visitors go about attaching meaning and ideas to material culture. Visitor research often uses tracking, focus groups, interviews and questionnaires and then analyses the findings to categorize visitor

responses.[4] 'My London' was designed to prompt a sample of visitors to interpret and analyse their own reactions to meaning-making processes from material. As Michael Frisch has argued, it is important to 'involve people in exploring what it means to remember, and what to do with memories to make them active and alive, as opposed to mere objects of collection' (quoted in Green, 1996: 449). The project developers intended people would both share their memories and consider how they might be curated, which would prove more engaging than just making a recording. Basing the project on oral history would have also served as a way to involve the public in the production of the exhibit, something which has been frequently called for (see for example Walsh, 1992; Kadoyama, 1997; Hirzy, 2007).

Value of the project

'My London' would have encouraged visitors to reflect upon their experience of visiting the Galleries of Modern London, prompting a critical, engaged consumption of the exhibition. It was hoped that this additional engagement with the ideas of identity and curatorial practice would have enhanced their experience of visiting the Museum. As discussed, the representation of identity in London is a contentious issue, and it was anticipated that some visitors would feel dissatisfied with the Galleries of Modern London: the 'My London' interactive display was intended to help explore the reasons for that possible dissatisfaction, and hopefully to promote understanding of the inevitable complexity (as well as the opportunities) of representing a city like London in a museum display. The recorded visitor data would have provided the Museum with material through which to understand visitors' involvement with identity issues. This area is one which is hard to access and is therefore currently under-researched; the information gathered would have been of use to the CDA students and the Museum staff, and could have helped to influence the planning of future identity-related exhibitions, as well as being fed back into the assessment and update process for the Galleries of Modern London.

As detailed in the previous section, the 'My London' installation was intended to operate at more than one level, and in particular to prompt visitors to situate themselves amongst the multiple voices which make up 'London' and the Galleries of Modern London. The value of (self-) recognition and shared belonging is a well-known facet of identity-creation (Jenkins, 1996), and it was an aim of the project to explore and attempt to understand this mechanism. The delight can come from seeing your own family history reflected in a familiar household item, or the representation of a social, religious or ethnic group (or its practice) which you value or just recognise. In the context of a city museum, it can come from seeing a reference to your home neighbourhood or to a district which has personal importance to your own identity. All these processes are magnified in the context – as is true in the Museum of London's case – of a highly complex city in which identity is a contentious issue, and where multiple identities, multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism are increasingly part of the narrative. Recognition of this

sort can help bolster a sense of civic identity, a feeling that this it is 'your' city on display in the museum. In the planning process for the new exhibition the lack of representation of certain communities in the old Museum of London galleries was identified as a central issue.

This self-recognition influences how people would have judged such an exhibition, and the interactive would have harnessed this idea by asking direct questions about it, in order to encourage people to identify what they had enjoyed (or not). Discussing their personal life is also a way to make visitors feel confident and authoritative. They do not need specialist knowledge in order to make a comment, and the process will help them understand the ways in which individual personal experiences are fitted together by museum curators and historians to create the overarching narratives that are represented in the new exhibition.

There is of course a danger in over-emphasising the 'my' in 'My London': although a visitor's experience at an exhibition is personal and often influenced by their own family or individual history, the aim was not to suggest that a curator's role is irrelevant or that there is no value in having a single story set out by the exhibition. Instead, the aim was always to make the recorded interactive elements – the labelling, the comments, the video responses etc – cumulative, to demonstrate that identities are never clear-cut, and that whatever story the museum's curators chose to tell there would always be other versions that could have been told. The visitor would have also been aware that their own contribution to the project would be visible to future users of the interactive, thus bolstering their sense of having contributed to the museological process.

In visitor research there is often the danger that when offered opportunities to reflect, people may unwittingly exaggerate their experiences of the visit, either positively or negatively (Black, 2005: 108). This is particularly likely where the subject matter is contentious or emotive, as is the case with identity politics. The 'My London' exhibit was to have been deliberately provocative, asking the visitor to reflect upon curatorial decisions, and so it was desirable to avoid merely setting up a forum for negative comments. By using the idea of identity and 'My London' the project would have offered the opportunity for people to express dissatisfaction, but also to explore why it was that they might have been unhappy with what they encountered in the galleries. In identity terms, it was anticipated that this might have happened through lack of recognition, or a perception that the museum was 'telling a story' that the visitor did not share – and in fact the project's aim to promote questioning may have provoked more awareness of this disjunction than the visitor might have been aware of when visiting the exhibition.

Recording this dissatisfaction would have been as valuable as acquiring positive comments, and would have helped to build a mixed but realistic picture of the complexities of place identity. For example, a visitor might have used the object-labelling option to note that a particular item they expected to

see was in fact missing from the exhibition; they might have responded to a video by commenting that it was only dealing with one part of London, and their home district was under-represented in the exhibition. Such comments would be as useful to the museum as purely positive ones, giving them a much more detailed and personal, qualitative response to the new displays than is possible in a tick-box questionnaire. This function would also have been of great value to the overall aim of creating an inclusive gallery. No exhibition could ever fully represent every facet of London culture or history, but by using the 'My London' interactive those who still felt excluded would have had the opportunity to put forward a positive contribution to the process and, in effect, help to rectify the omission they felt they had identified.

From the outset, the limitations on the interactive terminal were clear, and as discussed above, issues of time and resources affected the development and particularly the format of the project. Using a screen-based interactive display provokes some clear challenges, and although methods such as text-to-speech technology could have been utilised to assist with some physical access difficulties, a major issue with interactive and computer-based displays is that users will be self-selecting. As well as those who are barred by external and accessibility restrictions, and those who perceive they will not enjoy or be able to cope with the technological aspect, some museum visitors wilfully distance themselves from electronic displays. In a recent column Kathy Brewis criticised both digitally delivered museum content and reflexivity in museums (2009); the data collected would always have been subject to these limitations, which could never be properly quantified.

The planned interactive was aimed at all ages of visitor, with some differentiated content for children; however, many younger children would have needed assistance to use it. It was intended that if the early stages of the project were successful, more child-friendly and curriculum-targeted sections could have been added, in consultation with the Museum's Education Department. Children make up a large proportion of the Museum's visitors, so their exclusion from the interactive would have damaged the validity and completeness of the data collected in order to understand the visitor experience.

A final category of complex users are all those for whom 'My London' is not an obvious concept: foreign visitors, or UK visitors not resident in London. However, as the capital city London obviously has potential meaning for any UK resident, and visitors from outside the UK have their views of the city as well. It would have been made clear on the front page of the interactive display that it was designed for any visitor, not just 'Londoners'. Deliberate questions were to be targeted at non-local visitors, asking for example how the exhibition had made them reflect on their own home town, or what was particularly individual about London. It was hoped that these visitors would have felt equally interested by 'My London' as the rest of the gallery, and their feedback would have been equally valuable.

No single method of implementing 'My London' could have solved all the

difficulties, but there were also opportunities to support and expand it in various ways. As well as extending the variety of technical platforms available (even by reverting to pen-and-paper comment methods, or putting the interactive onto the web) and developing the child-targeted content, the project could have been enhanced by the development of further workshops, seminars and presentations about the subject to interested visitors. It is hoped that some elements of the research and planned project can be used in such a face-to-face format, perhaps with the development of a seminar or focus group series that would involve some of the same questions, debates and reflexivity – for visitors and the museum – which the project was originally intended to promote. At the time of writing, some of these alternatives are under discussion.

Conclusion

It has been the intention of this article to illustrate the theoretical and practical considerations that informed the planning of a project tasked with the promotion of an open dialogue between museums and visitors about the construction and representation of civic identity. The output was to have consisted of an interactive multimedia display at the end of the Galleries of Modern London exhibition in the Museum of London, supplemented with observations and results from the visitors' recorded interactions with the display and comments on their exhibition experience. The project aimed to further understanding of the interaction that occurs at the moment when individual identities encounter a direct or indirect presentation of that cultural or collective identity through objects and text in a museum exhibition. The aim was to encourage a greater than usual level of critical assessment and engagement with the museum display by providing visitors with the tools to deconstruct identity formation. Ultimately this could hopefully have promoted a higher degree of introspective contemplation with regard to the visitor's perception of their own identity.

It was unfortunately not possible to implement this project in the planned format, although as noted some outputs may still be possible. This disappointingly removes not only the possibility of assessing the new galleries in this interactive and engaging way, but also of measuring the success of the project's ideas and implementation through the interactive. The Galleries of Modern London have been well reviewed in the press since their opening in May 2010, including a *Guardian* editorial 'In Praise of...the Museum of London' (2010). It is therefore all the more regrettable that the 'My London' approach to gaining qualitative data has been lost. Budget constraints are a familiar problem for the implementation of museum ambitions and projects, often resulting in the need for plans to be scaled back at the development stage, and this situation is not likely to improve in the near future. The example of the 'My London' project tells one story of such obstacles, but also suggests opportunities. For example, earlier integration of the project into the plans for the new gallery might have meant space would have been

available for the originally-planned display case and comment board. The difficulties this project faced also reflect the wider problem of getting access to data on visitors' subjective experiences, particularly relating to identity. Whilst it is clear from the Museum of London's good intentions and the trends in museum practice and studies outlined above that there is a desire to understand how visitors relate to and understand curatorial processes and the construction of identity in museums, this is difficult to achieve in practice. The imperatives of designing a multi-million pound exhibition or running a hard-pressed museum may sometimes conflict with the wish to expand these boundaries.

The story of this project is additionally useful as an example of the collaborative process. As a consequence of the growing popularity of CDA studentships, museums will more frequently find themselves acting as partners of PhD students with a responsibility for advising and collaborating with them. The possible outcomes of such partnerships have clear benefits for all parties involved: for the student valuable experience of working outside the university environment and learning from the expertise of museum staff; for the Museum the chance to facilitate knowledge transfer and an opportunity to obtain new perspectives and interpretations of their collection. The development and ultimate implementation of this project has highlighted both the potential and difficulties involved in negotiating a material outcome for these collaborations.

This article has laid out the theoretical argument for the ongoing need to confront the relationship between the museum and identity, but has also sought to demonstrate some of the practical difficulties that can be faced when attempting to foreground this relationship. Although the 'My London' project was not implemented as an interactive display, we hope that the theoretical exploration and project-development narrative outlined in this article might contribute to the ongoing debate in the museum sector about how visitors can be encouraged to engage critically with complex ideas about identity and the curatorial process.

Notes

[1] Joanna Marchant, Kathrin Pieren and Mary Lester are PhD candidates based at the Museum of London and the Institute of Historical Research. Each is conducting research under the unifying theme of 'London on display: civic identities, cultures and industry 1851-1951', and are working on London's museum environments 1851-1914, the representation of Jewish identity 1887-1956, and suburban/borough identity c.1885-1925 respectively. Ellie Miles is a PhD candidate at the Museum of London and Royal Holloway, where she is studying the development and reception of the Museum's new Galleries of Modern London for her PhD 'Curating the Global City'.

[2] 'My London' developed in relation to a lineage of projects at the Museum of London (and other museums), such as the 'Postcodes Project',

developed in (2005. Now defunct, this online interactive invited users to read and submit stories about London and the museum's objects, using a map-based navigation (http://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/postcodes). Another influential Museum of London project was an 'alternative census' which got visitors to reflect on the themes of London and identity. 'Questioning London' (http://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/archive/ londonsvoices/questioning/full.html) was a culmination of research which resulted in a website and a paper, and is now archived online. The novelty of our project is that it stimulates reflection and creativity in the visitors, thus hopefully enriching their experience, while at the same time providing the museum with some qualitative knowledge about their visitors and their perception of the 'Galleries of Modern London'.

[3]   Oral history is used to notably powerful effect in the museum's representation of the Second World War, for example.

[4]   For example Serrel's seminal work "Paying attention", and in a commercial context the work of firms such as Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, Creative Research, amongst others.

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From the Contested Zone:
String Figures in the Museum
Robyn McKenzie

Abstract

On the 1948 American-Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land, anthropologist Frederick McCarthy working with Ngarrawu Mununggurr as his principal informant and collaborator, made what stands as the largest known collection of mounted string figures from one community at one time, in the world. 'The String Figures of Yirrkala' sit on the line of demarcation between the material and the intangible: they exist as material objects, but any substantive sense that can be made of them relies on reference to a body of intangible embodied knowledge: the Yolngu practice of string figure making. As a collection, they also encode systems of western scientific thinking (recording, classification and ordering). An investigation of the collection reveals the tensions and disparities between these two systems of making meaning/knowledge. The particular cross-cultural nature of these objects dramatises the dialogical relationship between the intangible and the material available to interpretation.

Key words: Yolngu, string figures, intangible culture, embodied knowledge, museum objects

String figures are patterns or designs made with a loop of string 'by co-ordinated movements of the fingers of both hands, assisted by the teeth, neck, elbows, knees and toes when necessary.' (McCarthy, 1958: 279) (See Figs. 1-3) While usually executed by a single person some require two or more participants. Possibly made by all cultures at some time in their history, anthropologists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries collected string figures from indigenous peoples in various parts of the world, commonly by mounting the final 'designs' on card. In the Cultural Collections of the Australian Museum in Sydney, there are 193 mounted figures, collected at Yirrkala in the Northern Territory in 1948. This is the largest known collection and by inference the most comprehensive record of the practice from a single community of users (Probert, 2010).

Australia), it comprised a multi-disciplinary team of 12 researchers in all: including a mammalogist, an ichthyologist, an ornithologist, a botanist, a team of nutritional scientists, a photographer and a film-maker. (Thomas, 2009: 9-10) (Fig. 4) McCarthy, was given leave from his position as Head of Ethnology at the Australian Museum in Sydney to join the Expedition as one of three ethnographic researchers. His individual research to that time had focussed on archaeological subjects, and he was best known for his work

on the typology of stone tools and the sequencing of rock art. The Arnhem Land Expedition was the one and only time he worked on string figures, and the first of only two instances in his long career when he worked with living cultures.

Figures 1. and 2. Ngarrawu Mununggurr demonstrating manipulations employed in the making of string figures, Yirrkala Beach Camp, 7 September 1948. Australian Museum Archives: AMS 353, Fred McCarthy Field Trip Photographs, Fig 1, V08960.09 and Fig. 2, V08960.19

Figure 3. Ngarrawu Mununggurr making an unnamed figure, Yirrkala Beach Camp, 7 September 1948. Australian Museum Archives: AMS 353, Fred McCarthy Field Trip Photographs, V08960.08.

The collection was made by anthropologist Frederick McCarthy during the American-Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land. Often described as 'the last of the big expeditions' (jointly sponsored by National Geographic Society, the Smithsonian Institute and the Commonwealth Government of Australia), it comprised a multi-disciplinary team of 12 researchers in all: including a mammalogist, an ichthyologist, an ornithologist, a botanist, a team of nutritional scientists, a photographer and a film-maker. (Thomas, 2009: 9-10) (Fig. 4) McCarthy, was given leave from his position as Head of Ethnology at the Australian Museum in Sydney to join the Expedition as one of three ethnographic researchers. His individual research to that time had focussed on archaeological subjects, and he was best known for his work on the typology of stone tools and the sequencing of rock art. The Arnhem Land Expedition was the one and only time he worked on string figures, and the first of only two instances in his long career when he worked with living cultures.

Arriving in March 1948 the Expeditionary party spent approximately 8 months in Arnhem Land, at three base camps in different locations. (Fig. 5) It was at the second of these, Yirrkala, a coastal community on the mainland, that McCarthy made the collection of string figures. The majority of the figures were fashioned by McCarthy's principal collaborator, Ngarrawu Mununggurr: the final design slipped from her hands and fixed to a cardboard or brown paper support with small pieces of tape. Ngarrawu had exceptional skill, such that she could perform the figures, 'step by step, in slow motion', which was 'invaluable' for McCarthy's task of recording the sequence of manipulations, by which a figure was made – the second major focus of his collecting activity. (McCarthy, 1960: 415) These 'instructions' were transcribed in two dedicated field notebooks. In the Australian Museum Archives there are also 159 photographs of Ngarrawu and two male informants, (father and son) Mawalan and Wandjuk Marika, demonstrating designs.

Anthropological interest in string figures was driven and shaped by 'diffusionist theory', an influential paradigm in the development of this new area of scientific study from the later nineteenth century. Through comparative analysis of 'culture traits or complexes' diffusionists attempted to map the development and spread of culture (origins, influences, migration, change) through time and across geographic area. If the same string figure design was found to occur in different places, there was assumed to be some form of contact transmission between populations. As the same figure could be made by different methods however, the technique or order of manipulations was considered an essential factor in making such comparative analyses. Comparisons of final patterns alone were discounted as 'worthless for historical purposes'. (Davidson, 1941: 783)

Schemas of collecting and collections: stories in string

McCarthy set out on the Arnhem Land Expedition with the express intention of making a collection of string figures. At Yirrkala, after having found Ngarrawu

*Figure 4. 'Our camp and personnel at Oenpelli, October 1948'.
Photograph taken during the American-Australian Scientific Expedition to
Arnhem Land, at Gunbalanya (formerly Oenpelli).
Courtesy of National Library of Australia.*

*Figure 5. Map of Arnhem Land indicting the three principal Expedition base
camps. Courtesy of National Museum of Australia.*

to be an adept practitioner with a wide knowledge of designs – 'a positive genius with a loop of string'– he worked consistently with her. (McCarthy, 1948)

McCarthy's collecting practice (his methods and process as recorded in diaries kept during the Expedition) clearly reflected his 'diffusionist' motivations, as I discuss in detail elsewhere. (McKenzie, in-press) His overwhelming concern was to get as many different designs, or as 'complete' a collection as possible. Ever conscious of the limited time available and with competing demands on it, McCarthy's collecting process was atomised: he firstly secured a substantial number of mounted figures, and later, separately collected their techniques. All of the photographs were again taken separately, on his very last day in Yirrkala.

McCarthy never observed string figure making as practiced in context. The 'diffusionist' project described string figure designs as valuable data in and of themselves. Like the natural scientists he was working with on the Expedition, he collected the individual specimen, removing it from its environment, for later analysis. As he explains: 'the method I adopted in collecting the figures was to exhaust those voluntarily performed, and then to suggest subjects from the range of animals, plants and material culture of the people.' Requesting designs from the schedule of what he perceived as the range of different 'things in the world', each of the mounted figures was annotated with the name of its maker, the subject in English and its Yolngu Matha (or local language) name, and designated a unique field number. Relevant finger positions were marked, and sometimes the general position of the hands was sketched.

Taking string figures to be in some respect representational, McCarthy's approach presupposed a one-to-one correspondence between form and identity. One of the things revealed by the collection however, is that a single design can be ascribed multiple different identities or meanings. For example, arguably the same technique, and certainly pattern are attributed variously as 'Water-goanna / *Amiowa*', 'Rat / *Nik-nik*', and 'Bandicoot / *Wundgura*'. (See Figs. 6-8) Similar 'duplication' (in terms of McCarthy's paradigm) occurs in the figures for 'White goshawk / *Ngag-ngag*', 'Parrot / *Dummala*', 'Women's Crocodile / *Baru*' and 'Ripples on a Pool / *Gapu*', all being the same pattern made by the same technique. (See Figs. 9-13) This parity, between differently identified designs in the collection, is noted by McCarthy. One explanation he offers for 'why one figure bears several names' is that they are displayed in different ways 'with the hands in different positions'. (McCarthy, 1960: 418) This however, is not convincingly upheld by the documentary record. (Compare Figs. 12 and 13) An alternative explanation is that a design can mobilise different significations, that there are a range of possible meanings that can be attached to it or read from it, depending on the context in which it is used. The concept of a 'discontinuous meaning system' as this has been described by scholars, has been used in the analysis of other forms of aboriginal art, including that of the Yolngu. (Morphy, 1991: 167-169)
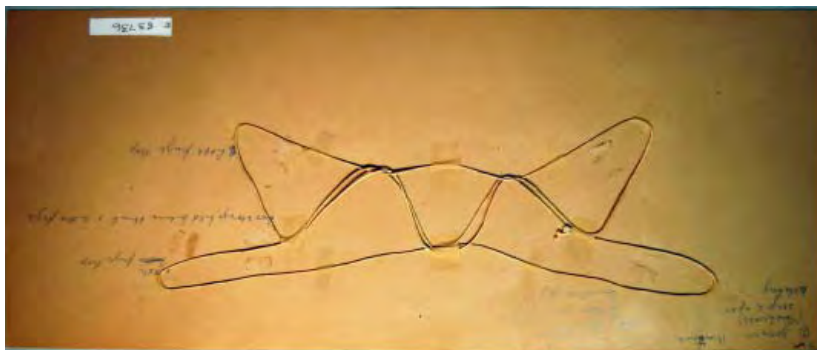
Figure 6. 'Water-goanna/Amiowa' maker unrecorded. 1948. E. 83736, Cultural Collections & Community Engagement, Australian Museum. Dimensions: mount board 19 x 45.5 cm.; figure 9.5 x 31.0 cm. Photo: Stan Florek.
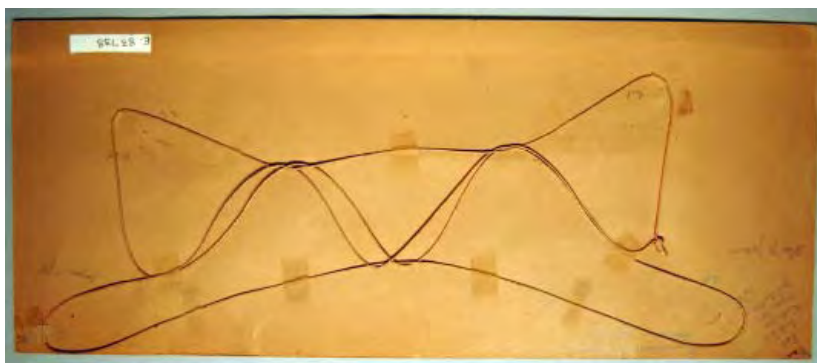
Figure 7. 'Rat/Nik-nik' made by Djunbiya. 1948. E. 83738, Cultural Collections & Community Engagement, Australian Museum. Dimensions: mount board 19 x 45.5 cm; figure 16.0 x 40.0 cm. Photo: Stan Florek.

Note: Both figures were mounted upside down. They have been rotated here for the purpose of comparison with the photograph of the figure being made.

Figure 8. Ngarrawu Mununggurr making 'Bandicoot/Wundgura', Yirrkala Beach Camp, 7 September 1948. Australian Museum Archives: AMS 353, Fred McCarthy Field Trip Photographs, V08961.20.

The larger part of McCarthy's paper on 'The String Figures of Yirrkala' in the published *Records* of the Expedition (72 of 96 pages) fulfilled the requirements of the 'diffusionist' project, providing a gazette of instructions for each separately titled design paired with an illustration of its final form, organised as was standard practice, following a typology based on their method of construction: those made from different opening or starting positions being grouped together. (See Fig. 11) However, McCarthy also included a significant section on the 'Socio-Magical Regulations' or customary significance of string figure making among the Yolngu.

At the end of August 1948, the transport that was coming to take the Expeditionary party from Yirrkala to their next base camp at Gunbalanya (formerly Oenpelli) was delayed. Up until this point McCarthy's attention had been firmly focussed on collecting mounted figures and their techniques. With the delay he began to record a new and different type of information: what he referred to as 'social background' or 'social tie-up' material. (McCarthy, 1948: Diary 5)

From conversations he had with male sources during this time he gathered information about customary aspects of string figure making: concerning various prohibitions or lore regarding the practice and regulations applying differentially to men, women and children. Whereas string figure making was an everyday activity for women, string figures were used in ceremony by the men. The men and women had different names for the figures, denoting their 'inside' and 'outside' significance, and there were a number of figures that were 'known' and made by men or women only. The children were instructed according to these rules. (McCarthy, 1948: Diary 6)

McCarthy recorded a number of narratives or myths involving string figures during these sessions. One of these (that he reported in full in the *Records* of the Expedition), was an origins or creation story relating the making of string and string figures to the well-known *Wagilag* Sisters myth cycle.

> 'String was first made by the two *Wawalik* sisters…they [made] a record in string of all the animals, plants and other things they saw, as well as their own activities.' (McCarthy, 1960: 427)

In the myth as he records it, there are 92 string figures mentioned, of which he notes, he has collected all but sixteen. (McCarthy, 1960: 427) McCarthy made the observation that the making of string figures provided 'a link between the women and the tribal mythology' which in the form of ceremonial ritual they were often customarily excluded from: 'As they make the string figures the women are thinking not only of a particular animal but of its significance in the *Wawalik* sister's saga.' (McCarthy, 1960: 427) (See Fig. 14)

While McCarthy was otherwise highly appreciative of Ngarrawu's skill and knowledge, a number of statements he made suggest a certain amount of frustration in eliciting the production of designs:

'my problem … was to suggest the subjects and Na:rau would make the figures, but she was not very resourceful in producing additional figures unless a request for them was made.' (McCarthy, 1948)

On his last day in Yirrkala, McCarthy escaped from packing up the camp to take photographs of the string figures. His approach to this was characteristically focussed. In the 3 hours between 9am and 12am Ngarrawu made 149 figures for him to photograph:

'…she made the next one in the time it took me to write down the name & number of the previous one.' (McCarthy, 1948: Diary 5)

In the hour after the lunch break she made another 40 figures. He writes: 'she did the figures in the order I requested and not at random as a subject came into her mind'. (McCarthy, 1960: 417) However, as well as this – making the ones he asked for in the order he asked for them – she produced 36 additional designs which he had not previously recorded.

The obvious point to be made here is that for Ngarrawu it is likely the order in which they 'came into her mind' was not random, but linked to narrative sequences or other meaningful syntagmatic or associative structures. For her the sequence in which she was asked to make them by McCarthy, was most probably quite random.

Figure 9. 'White goshawk/Ngag-ngag' made by Ngarrawu Manunggurr. 1948. E. 83662, Cultural Collections & Community Engagement, Australian Museum. Dimensions: mount board 19 x 45.5 cm.; figure 16.2 x 37.0 cm. Photo: Stan Florek.

Figure 10. 'Parrot/Dummala' made by Bali. E. 83721, Cultural Collections & Community Engagement, Australian Museum. Dimensions: mount board 19 x 45.5 cm.; figure 10.5 x 22.3 cm. Photo: Stan Florek

THE STRING FIGURES OF YIRRKALLA

54. WOMEN'S CROCODILE

1. Opening A
2. Release thumb loops
3. Place right thumb over three strings, pick up near little finger string with thumbs and return to position
4. Pick up near right index finger string with left index finger
5. Pick up near little finger string with thumbs from below and return to position
6. Insert thumbs inside index finger loops and transfer
7. Navaho near thumb string with teeth on both hands
8. Release index finger loops
9. Extend
10. Pick up from below far thumb string with index fingers
11. Release thumb strings
12. Pick up from below near little finger string with thumbs
13. Insert both thumbs inside index finger loops
14. Navaho near thumb string with teeth on both hands
15. Pick up near index finger string with middle fingers
16. Release thumb loops
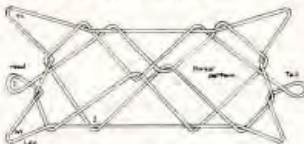17. Extend to figure.
Size 12 by 6 inches

FIG. 60

55. RIPPLES ON A POOL

1. Opening A
2. Release thumb loops
3. Place right thumb over three strings and pick up far right little finger string with right index finger
4. Pick up near right index finger string with left index finger
5. Extend
6. Pick up near little finger string from below with backs of thumbs and return to position
7. Insert thumbs under near upper index finger string
8. Navaho near lower thumb string with teeth
9. Insert index finger in thumb loop and transfer loops to index fingers
10. Extend (pindiki)
11. Pick up near little finger string with thumbs and return to position
12. Insert thumbs under near upper index finger loop
13. Navaho near lower thumb string with teeth on both hands
14. Pick up near lower index finger string with middle fingers
15. Release far little finger string
16. Extend to figure.
Size 7 by 4 inches
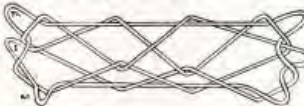
FIG. 61

56. CLOUDS

1. Opening A
2. Pull out from behind the right index finger loop with tips of left thumb and index finger
3. Repeat with left index finger loop
4. Insert left loop through right one
5. Pick up the two loops with index fingers
6. Extend to figure.

Size 11 by 5 inches

FIG. 62

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Figure 11. McCarthy, Frederick D, 1964, 'The String Figures of Yirrkalla', in Mountford, C P (ed.), Records of the American-Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land, Vol. 4, Melbourne University Press, Parkville, Vic., p. 465.

Figure 12. Ngarrawu Mununggurr making 'White goshawk/Ngag-ngag', Yirrkala Beach Camp, 7 September 1948. Australian Museum Archives: AMS 353, Fred McCarthy Field Trip Photographs, V08961.05.
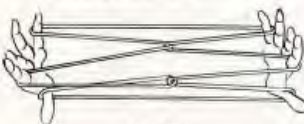Figure 13. Ngarrawu Mununggurr making 'Parrot/Dummala', Yirrkala

Beach Camp, 7 September 1948. Australian Museum Archives: AMS 353, Fred McCarthy Field Trip Photographs, V08960.12.

Materiality and Intangibility

'The String Figures of Yirrkala' are unusual museum objects. Firstly, this is because string figures are not 'things' capable of being collected as such. The whole fun of string figure making (and its foundational ontological premise) is that you always begin and end, with the dumb and inert material, the loop of string. By contrast the constituency or 'place of being' of the string figure is in the animation of the string, its transformation through movement

or manipulation. As one contemporary commentator has written: 'string figures exist only in the process of "making" them'. (Eastop, 2007: 197)

For McCarthy the mounted figures were a way of recording the final designs to which the step-by-step instructions for making referred. They represented the first column or row of a data table, providing the referent or master key for other fields, such as 'techniques of making', which could be considered just as, or more, important. As objects in themselves, they attracted no excess value. He did not accord them material culture status. Most tellingly, he did not accession them into the Museum's collection on his return, as he did with the other artefacts collected on the Expedition. (Konecny, 1993: 46) They were kept, but ended up buried under a layer of other unregistered items in the Museum's stores, until unearthed by curator Stan Florek in 1988. (Florek, 1993: 117)

The preferred type of object collected by anthropologists at this time as previously, was one customarily made (and best of all in use) by the people being studied – an authentic artefact, untainted by outside influence. Ideally, for the western collector, they were a kind of 'found object'. This was most obviously not the case here. (Made from lengths of industrially manufactured string the mounted figures have no pretence of being authentic artefacts of 'primitive man'.) Their self-declared cultural hybridity is the second factor that makes the mounted figures unusual museum objects.

The value of these objects today is different to what it was in 1948. And their material status is paramount to what they are, and what they mean. The result of a collaboration between the culture of indigenous Yolngu informants and the 'science' of western anthropology they appear now as authentic artefacts of cross-cultural encounter and exchange: the product of work done by two individuals with different skills, an engagement between two different enculturated knowledge systems. They would not, could not, exist without the contribution of both.

The materiality of the mounted string figures is a direct index of the time McCarthy and Ngarrawu spent working together, making and sticking down and annotating. Their 'matter-of-fact' status is the hinge connecting the intangible conceptual worlds of the two cultures that contributed to their making, and is our way into both.

The systems of thinking and knowing that ordered McCarthy's world view are the most accessible to a western researcher, through the evidence of the collection itself, McCarthy's publications on it, and other sources, most particularly his personal diaries. We know what McCarthy thought he was doing in making the collection, and how he interpreted these objects. Ngarrawu's personal voice is by contrast absent.

Ngarrawu Mununggurr was a young Djapu woman from the Caledon Bay area (south of Yirrkala), in her mid-twenties at the time the collection was made. Married to Nanyin Maymuru a leader of the Manggalili clan, she had

one young child. In Yirrkala, McCarthy's main Yolngu interlocuters belonged to two family groups, from two different clans: the Marika family of the Rirratjingu clan and the Maymuru family of the Manggalili clan. These were the men that then as later, as community leaders negotiating relations with the dominant mainstream Australian society, saw 'educating Europeans about aboriginal culture' as a strategic tool. (Morphy, 1991: 17) Ngarrawu, was through marriage to Nanyin Maymuru a part of this grouping, but as a woman, working as principal informant/collaborator with a male anthropologist, her role was unique.

Indications of Yolngu understandings can be located in the ways that the material facts of the collection exceed or escape the ordering principles and system that McCarthy imposes upon it, and reads it through. The 'duplication' in the collection for example (mirrored in McCarthy's catalogue) revealing that the same figure can be attributed with different identities, suggests that the system of meaning engaged in by Yolngu is in part at least, context dependent. McCarthy himself, records the relationship between string figures and narrative forms of myth and comments on their symbolic potential bridging the worlds of the everyday and the secret/sacred. I hope to be able to tease out more of the social context and ceremonial role of string figures in the Yolngu world from the rich ethnographic record and my own contemporary fieldwork.

While I have yet to complete an analysis of the way in which 'The String Figures of Yirrkala' function as an aesthetic meaning system, drawing its parameters through example and inference, the materiality of the collection provides the hard evidence of this intangible realm: the number and variation of designs, their similarities and distinctions, describing an order or system of some sort. But there is a caveat. Any 'scientific' enquiry prefers consistency, precision and repeatability in its data. The records of 'The String Figures of Yirrkala' are subject to contingency, variability and happenstance. A particular finger might catch a loop this time, where a different finger caught it the last time, the return from a particular movement this time produces a different tension on the strings than the last. Then in the laying down of the figures onto the support chance plays a determining role: as figures are collapsed from three dimensions into two, the release from the tensioned frame of the hands, the natural recalcitrance of the string, and just however this time the action happens to be done. This means that even when a pattern is technically 'the same' the visual result may contain enough variation to appear 'different'. Expression is laid down. (See Figs. 9-13)

Conclusion

The mounted figures turn an ephemeral, embodied performance-based cultural practice, into a fixed stable 2-D form. From fieldwork done in Yirrkala, where contrary to the expectations of McCarthy's era string figure making continues, I have observed that a string figure is never still. Even when the final stage in a design is reached and it is held up for display, the hands still

move even if just slightly, to hold the figure tensioned in shape. The oddness of the mounted figures is their frozen de-natured quality: not their stillness as such but the absences that register and are implied in their material form that suggest an 'aliveness' stilled. The loopings, crossings and twists of the string inscribe movement, inferring the process of their physical making. They connect with and activate in the viewer a somatic kinaesthetic sense logic. The scale of the figures and their common bilateral symmetry, make the body that made these, and specifically the person of Ngarrawu, an absent presence in the work. (See Figs. 14 and 15)
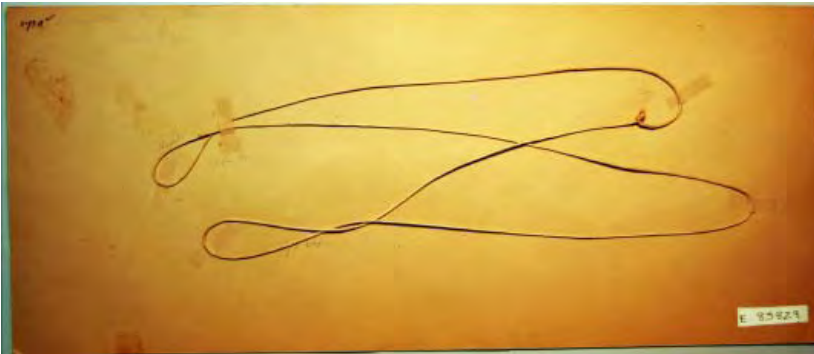

*Figure 14. '*Wawalik *sisters standing up' (also called 'Goanna /* Munungari*') made by Ngarrawu Mununggurr. 1948. E. 83829,*
Cultural Collections & Community Engagement, Australian Museum. Dimensions: mount board 19.0 x 45.5 cm.; figure 10.6 x 33.2 cm. Photo: Stan Florek.

(Note: McCarthy records that this figure of the two *Wagilag* sisters was also known as Goanna.)
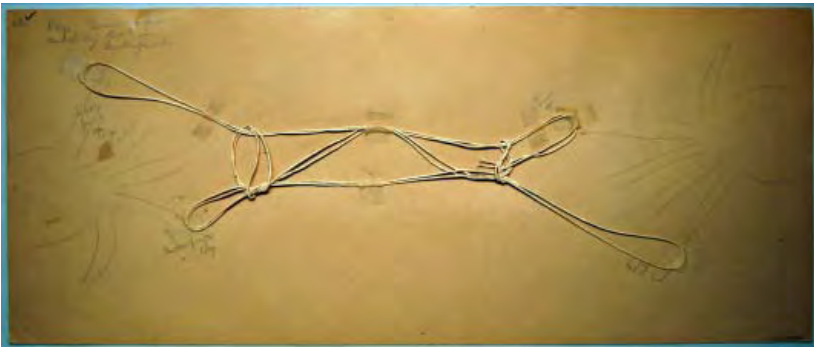

*Figure 15. 'Knife/*Mundjo-ug*' made by Bali. 1948. E. 83740, Cultural Collections & Community Engagement, Australian Museum. Dimensions: mount board 19.0 x 45.5 cm.; figure 11.4 x 34.1 cm. Photo: Stan Florek.*

Notes

In this text I use the accepted contemporary orthography for Yolngu Matha words, personal and place names. Variant original spellings are preserved in quotations from primary sources, such as McCarthy's diaries and published writing. For consistency I have used the names of the figures and spellings (both English and Yolngu Matha titles) given in the 'List of String Figures' in McCarthy's article in the published *Records* of the Expedition. (McCarthy, 1960: 433-438) There is some divergence between this list and the annotations on the mounted figures themselves. Two of the mounted figures illustrated were made by Bali, a woman visiting at the time from the nearby community of Milingimbi, and another was made by Djunbiya, Ngarrawu's co-wife who was also adept at string figure making.

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Geo-archaeological Research: from 'Drawing a Triangle' to Three Dimensions

Tânia da Fonte

Abstract

Geo-archaeological research (GAR) is the creation of a research project, held initially in Weimar (Germany), which has included several phases of work in different areas as fieldwork.

This research aims to understand specific intercontinental displacements, proposing a hypothesis of a geological fault, which took place in Europe and had other repercussions.

Key words: displacement, fiction, wall, Sozialistische Freundschaft (Socialist friendship), 1884/85-1989/91, Estado Novo (New State).

The first headquarters of *GAR* was placed in Weimar and tried to build a "team" that unfolds its work in different languages. The fact that Germany had already demonstrated guidelines as a stage of the present phenomenon and that Weimar, with its historic facade has been denoted as a fruitful field in the discovery of evidences, were the deciding factors directing the choice of this first setting. Although the main disciplines presented in this research are geology and archaeology, these are not the only ones involved.

The interpretation taken by *GAR* from the subject of geo-archaeology has allowed us to escape its probable tetra-dimension (Angelucci, 2003), setting the research, in this first phase, in a bi-dimensional reading. This bi-dimensional approach was developed in allusion to Abbott (1884), who defined the protagonist of his story/investigation as the Flatland man, in a very structured Flatland, where everything is defined by two-dimensional figures. The notion of Space, of Universe to this man is in a flat dimension, before shocking encounters between lands from different dimensions occur.

Therefore, two-dimensional representations clarify the subject of study. In particular, a map published in Portugal in 1934 **(Fig 1)**, where it is possible to observe the territories of Mozambique and Angola on top of Europe. This map illustrates and indicates the goal of our investigation: to understand how the two territories- Angola and Mozambique were once placed on top of Europe.

The collection of other documents and records was made possible through the kind collaboration of the specialists in this research. Through them, it was possible to collect three fundamental traces to illustrate the purpose of our study:

- Structure (NBz1), **(Fig 2)** which was brought back to light through an illustration drawn by our leading specialist A. Silva; This trace was located east of Berlin and tracks the past inhabitation of 33 Angolans. After this first phase of the studies, we realized that this record contained relevant information, however further investigation was needed. New specialists were invited to present proposals for the structure reconstruction, helping the approach to the object. Since this was the only trace, and record in drawn format, there was no access to any representation closer to reality.

- Structure (NWr2), found in Weimar, with similar form and age to the previous trace, but it is located farther south and shows the past presence of between 300 to 400 Mozambicans.

- Document (NWr1), found at a library of Weimar (Rendinha, 1964), whose date of incorporation is the same as NBz1 and NWr2 (this document was classified as a trace by appointment of the specialist A. Silva).

Adding to this accumulation of traces, there were external references, which were important to define the context of action. These include, the tectonic plates theory that refers to the movement of the African plate up north, colliding with the Eurasian Plate and a geographical event, which took place in Berlin at the end of the nineteenth century. This event was important in defining new borders in Africa.

Figure 1. Indication of the object of study. GALVAO, Henrique, Portugal não é um pais pequeno*, Lisboa: Secretariado da Propaganda Nacional, s.d., http://purl.pt/ 11440/1, source: Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal (National Library of Portugal)*
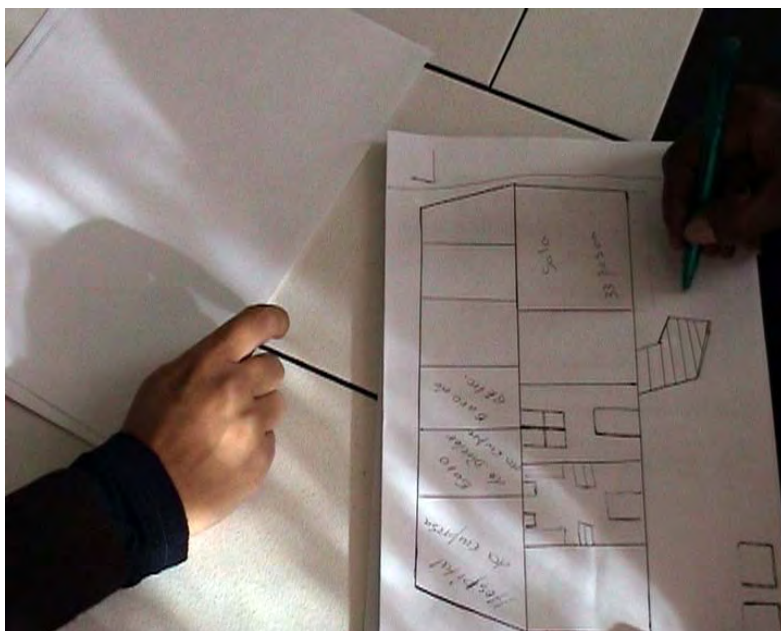
Figure 2. Illustration of the trace NBz1*, video still by the author, 2009.*

Anomaly NAWr1: sampling and methods

During the fieldwork in Weimar, it was important to turn the research more visible/ tangible in the approximation to the object of study. Although this project has a macro scale, in this first phase there was the need to focus on the local scale. In this way, the discovery of the anomaly NAWr1, in the subsoil of a private building site in Weimar was fundamental. **(Fig 3)**

Through the study of its characteristics, NAWr1 became the main evidence that lead us to consider it mandatory to present the research publicly, initially in the Stadtmuseum (City's Museum) of Weimar and later in other contexts. Here we present some of its features and the conclusions drawn from them.

This anomaly can be considered a chamber or a void with about 15 m², the top was about 30 metres deep, the internal walls were covered with crystallized salt and there were two pieces of wood found inside this chamber, also covered with salt.

In terms of procedures, since there was no structure supporting the void, it became impossible to excavate and have direct contact with the chamber; thus access was only possible with remote equipment.

An important procedure to study this anomaly was the capturing of images from the inside of the anomaly with a small size camera that was mechanically guided underground into the interior of the chamber. **(Fig 4)**

The soil and salt were analysed and, for reasons of conservation, replicas have been made of the two pieces of wood found inside the anomaly.

Today, the chamber or void lies buried under a building, which was built just after the development of our studies on the site.

Figure 3. Field Survey of the Anomaly NAWr1 in Weimar*, photo by Thea Miklowski, 2009.*

Results and Considerations

Through the analytical procedures of the anomaly NAWr1, especially the analysis made to the salt and soil, some observations were taken: first, the anomaly was exposed to an excessive amount of salty water; second, the process of crystallization of salt is distinctly different in the walls of the chamber and in the two pieces of wood, showing the existence of two time periods within it, third and the most relevant one, through its characteristics and analyses we would have to place the anomaly in the Southern Atlantic, and in this way the Anomaly should be identified as SAWr1.

Figure 4. Captured images from the Anomaly NAWr1*, video still by the author, 2009.*

This takes us again to the origin of our investigation, and through the observations listed before, some assumptions were built:

First, not only Angola and Mozambique undergo a shift but also the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, which would lead to consider that these two oceans submerged Europe.

Second, the globe suffered a rotation, flipping north to south and vice versa.

These assumptions did not turn into a conclusive hypothesis due to the characteristics of the studied phenomenon since the studied phenomenon requires a plate's shift with very specific borders.

Hypothesis and Evidences

The elements gathered until now, the different traces and records and the analysis of the anomaly NAwr1, demonstrate the displacement, which we identified as the object of study.

To explain such phenomenon we advance with a hypothesis:

A Geological Fault took place in the centre of Europe and this fault (the main one) had other repercussions, more specifically, it created other faults in different points of the southern hemisphere. These secondary faults are generally considered smaller scale ones.

To verify this hypothesis a number of documents were collected, including

satellite images of Berlin that show the obstacle created by the fault with the orientation north/south, creating the blocks east/west, as well as an illustration performed by the specialist A. Silva from a subsequent fault produced further south in Angola, with the orientation east/west, provoking two blocks north/south.

Later, there was the possibility to develop studies in Budapest, where samples were collected, which demonstrate repercussions of the phenomenon in analysis on an island in the Danube. **(Fig.5)** Some of the characteristics found here were similar to the ones in the eastern block formed by the main geological fault; these samples are still under observation.

Figure 5. Records registered in Budapest, *photo by the author.*

Discussion and Future works

With these conclusions, and taking such complex phenomenon that tries to explain the displacement that our specialists witnessed between the territories of Mozambique and Angola and Europe, or more specifically the Eastern part of Europe, there was the need to re-think and reformulate the fieldwork.

The lecture presented on different occasions was called 'Drawing a triangle', showed the bi-dimensional reading done of the phenomenon. The fieldwork

was initially defined through two reversed triangles, considering the three/ four first points on the map related with this displacement.

A re-definition of the fieldwork area was however necessary, creating a more complex figure, giving it perspective and turning it into a three-dimensional one. **(Fig 6)**

It is still impossible to completely define this figure at this moment of the research, although there is the need to investigate other points, even if the direction to take is not completely clear.

Besides the post-studies produced in Budapest and the ones developed on the trace NBz1, there are, for now, two new fields of work that seem critical to the continuation of our studies: the study of the impact that this geological phenomenon had in outer space and in the southern part of American continent. These are two points where the permeability of the studied phenomenon is a strong possibility.

Figure 6. Definitions of the different Fieldworks areas*, drawing by the author.*

Editor's Note:

This paper is based upon a piece of performance art given at the Symposium in the style of an academic paper presentation. The piece questions the boundaries between materiality and intangibility, as well as those between fact and fiction. Building on the rereading of a map where Mozambique and Angola are superimposed upon Europe, this piece explores this paradoxical proposition through the presentation of other traces and the implications of such an occurrence. The video of the performance can be viewed at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y73oXQTOlZM.

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The Material in the Immaterial – The Powell-Cotton Oukwanyama Film Archive and some Contemporary Material Responses among the Community it Depicts

Catherine Moore

Abstract

This article seeks to explore the perhaps paradoxical 'materiality' of archive film footage through the responses of contemporary viewers. Much attention is paid to films power to evoke personal memories and mental images, but what is the role of bodily memory and material expressions of knowledge in the process of watching? In 2008-9 parts of the Powell-Cotton Angolan film archive were returned to the region in Southern Africa were they were filmed 70 years before. It became clear that actions, gestures, and the skills involved in the creation of new artefacts were significant elements of collective and personal memory that were drawn upon when the films were watched. This has possible implications for the consideration of the reception of films in the museum setting in particular in relation to issues of haptic perception, tactility and interaction.

Key Words: film, archive, haptic, gesture, Angola, Namibia, bodily memory, materiality, spectatorship

The medium of film is commonly classified as intangible, perhaps its greatest claim to intangibility rests in the manner of its consumption. While it may have physical form as a DVD or canister of 16mm film before it is seen, in the moment of watching it is without mass. Unlike a book or a photograph, it cannot be held and unlike a dance performance or play, its' actors are not present to the audience in physical form. Yet it is, I argue, a medium that can have important 'material' qualities for the viewer. The 'haptic' or 'tactile' potential of film has been alluded to by many writers notably Taussig (1993), Marks (2000), Sobchack (2004) and Buck-Morss (1991). An important influence on much of this writing was Walter Benjamin, whose essay "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" includes this provocative quote,

> 'Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its image or, rather, its copy.' (1969:223)

It is how this materiality, the physicality of film becomes or is manifested that I will explore here, within the specific context of a museum archive of ethnographic film and a project to return it to the community it depicts. During the project, viewers of the films made diverse and sometimes dramatic responses from singing, re-enactment and verbal descriptions to semi-trance states. In this article I will focus on one of the most common responses

- the gesture - which I will suggest is a profitable route to thinking about the haptic qualities of film; a form of filmic materiality, if you will. I will then ask the question; having recorded and analysed some of these responses, how might they inform the use of ethnographic film in a UK museum setting?

The archive and the research project

Figure1: A selection of stills from the Powell-Cotton Oukwanyama film archive filmed by Diana and Antoinette Powell-Cotton 1936 & '3, copyright Powell-Cotton Museum. The stills show from left to right starting on the top row a young woman's hair being plaited during Efundula, the tanning of cow hide, boys practicing archery, young women transformed into 'boys' during Efundula, the smithing of a hoe blade and young women processing to the Efundula ceremony.

The Powell-Cotton Oukwanyama[1] film archive, on which this research is based, is a series of seven films made in 1936 and 1937 in Angola and Northern Namibia and now housed in the Powell-Cotton Museum, Birchington, Kent. The films were made by two women, Antoinette and Diana Powell-Cotton the daughters of a British Edwardian explorer, natural history collector and museum founder Major P.G. Powell-Cotton. While their father had a passion for shooting animals, they stuck to people and made ethnographic film-making a central part of their collecting practice.

Antoinette Powell-Cotton was trained by Henry Balfour at the Pitt-Rivers Museum in Oxford so it perhaps not surprising that the films she made with her sister place a particular emphasis on the 'technological' (Gosden and Knowles, 2001:140). The seven films show the processes necessary for the manufacture of items such as clothing made from cow hide, pottery and iron tools. These activities are shown in some detail; for instance, the film depicting the manufacture of iron tools shows the family setting out for the mines, the building of temporary accommodation at the mines, the trading of iron ore, the necessary rituals associated with this highly prescribed activity, the smelting of the ore and the subsequent forging and smithing of the tools. There are also films that show ceremonies, such as the female coming-of-age ceremony 'Efundula' and the initiation of a female healer, yet these also

have a technological aesthetic and there is a real concern with the required clothing, hair decorations and instruments necessary for these ceremonies. Therefore, while this is an archive of the intangible it has a particular interest in the material.

During 2008 and 2009, the films were taken to the region on the Namibian and Angolan border where they were made and permission was sought of the Oukwanyama community to show the films and record peoples' responses. The Oukwanyama Traditional Authority, who were a primary point of contact for the community, were largely happy to agree as they were in the process of creating a museum and saw that the film archive and the associated photographs might be a useful resource. After a period of consultation the films were shown to over 500 people and where appropriate, video recordings made of what people said and did in response to the films. Video rather than audio recording was chosen because during early screenings it was noted that people reacted with much more than just words. As the screenings progressed, objects were fetched, techniques enacted, dances performed, games demonstrated and in every screening gestures seemed to echo movements in the film and suggested a tactile element present in the process of watching. This embodied response, and in particular, these 'gestures of watching' became one of the areas the research focused on.

Archive film and gesture as memory – ways that watching film can be physical

A gesture of memory first appeared when showing the film 'Oukwanyama Day' (Diana and Antoinette Powell-Cotton, 1937) which features at some length boys playing 'eengobe' (cattle), a game that involves, usually male cattle herds mimicking a bull fight using extremely sharp forked sticks (see illustration).

Figure 2: A sequence of stills from the film 'Kwanyama Day' (Diana and Antoinette Powell-Cotton 1937) which shows two boys playing 'eengobe'.
Copyright Powell-Cotton Museum

Mekulu Shelongo[2], a university lecturer, who as a child had been given the job of caring for the cattle, experienced a vivid, even visceral memory while watching the film. She turned to me and said 'see, see I still have the scars from those sticks... we didn't mess around when we played that game'. This

was perhaps a particularly significant memory for her because being a female cattle herd was rare and she was proud that she had been entrusted with the task. There was a clear physical quality to the memory of that game for her, a quality which she expressed to me through the gesture of rubbing the scars as if it was only minutes, not years ago that the sharpened wood had torn her skin.

One way of thinking about how such a response might be a creating a form of materiality is what David MacDougall, a veteran ethnographic filmmaker calls 'enactive memory' (1998:236). Drawing on the work of the psychologist Horowitz, MacDougall describes enactive memory as the process by which images become laden with the physical memories we have of the things we recognise in the image flow. According to this idea , a gesture such as rubbing the scars on the arm is an expression of the enactive memory that Mekulu Shelongo attached to the images of the boys playing 'eengobe'; it is a form of physical memory evoked by film. The film in this way becomes more than a 'thin' experience of watching, here watching is accompanied by strong recollections of physical and material experience. But it is not only physical *memory* that film can evoke. In the next example, I will suggest that it has the potential to connect with broader physical ways of understanding and coming to know the world.

Figure 3: The left still is from video of Meme Hashila as she watched and mimicked the making of pot stands in the film 'Efundula' (Diana and Antoinette Powell-Cotton, 1937) what she is watched is shown in the still on the right. Black and white still copyright of the Powell-Cotton Museum.

In a second gesture of watching and memory Meme Hashila watched as pot stands for cooking are made for a female coming of age ceremony in the film 'Efundula' (Diana and Antoinette Powell-Cotton, 1937). As she watched she was not quite sure what was happening on the screen. At first, she thought they may have been making clay pots, but she was also aware it didn't look quite like pots being made; 'perhaps', she asked, 'it was pot stands?' (see illustration). Both processes involve kneading clay or earth, but of slightly different types, and the film began too early in the process for Meme Hashila to be sure. As she watched, she echoed the action of kneading the clay, following the rhythm of the women on the film. She recalled in a physical

sense her own experience of kneading and through this combined process of watching and miming she came to recognise what was on the screen.

Finally, she said, 'Ah its "omafia" (pot stands)'. In Meme Hashila's case, in addition to recall or memory there was a process of understanding, of coming to know, and this involved watching, remembering and doing. Therefore, I would suggest that this gesture hints at the way we experience the world when we see or watch – we do not 'see' with our eyes alone. Meme Hashila's gesture shows the importance of the intertwining of the physical and the visual in knowing the world. As Merleau Ponty writes,

'Since vision is a palpitation with the look, it must also be inscribed in the order of being that it discloses to us; he who looks must not himself be foreign to the world he looks at' (1968:134).

Figure 4: Tatekulu Nampala's gesture indicating the horned nature of the Efundula headdress. Still from video taken as group watched the film.

The gesture may be one of memory, an indication of not being 'foreign', but it may also be a form of reaching out and knowing, a bodily projection back into the world of a particular incorporated order. The responses I was seeing as gestures of watching, or gestures of memory were indicators of particular knowledge that each individual brought to the viewing of the film. This particularity meant that each viewer would have their own experience of watching the film dependent on the kind of knowledge they had of the things shown in the film, in other words their own experience of materiality[3].

Gestures of watching as icon – ways that film can work beyond the lexical or verbal

There is another way I would suggest that gesture helps us think about the tangible elements of film. Often, gesture has been thought of as in some way subservient to speech, a mere secondary illustration of the lexical elements of language. However, sociolinguists such as David McNeill have shown that while its relationship to language is crucial, it also functions in its own sphere as an image, sometimes iconic, sometimes metaphoric (McNeill, 2005). In a sense, people were creating their own image flows in response to the things they were seeing on the film. But, the images were created by the hand, the focus of much tactile knowledge in the body. This could be seen in Tatekulu Nampala's response to the film of 'Efundula', the female coming of age ceremony once common in this area (see illustration). In this instance Tatekulu Nampala had no direct bodily memory of the thing he was watching as the headdress he mimicked is worn exclusively by women, but he created an icon or image to express to the group the symbolic importance of the headdress. There is something in the manner of his gesture which expresses the horned nature of the headdress that is not present in his words. This is not a gesture that just adds actions to what it being expressed verbally, it generates its own meaning independent of spoken language.

Such manual image-making demonstrates that, in discussion of the things shown in the film, while verbal expression of meaning was important, there was also a set of meanings rooted in the material, the non-verbal, that were equally significant. Gestures in this instance would seem to be a form of what Gell calls 'concepts', forms of thought that exist prior to language and are,

> 'networks of exemplary instances and practical routines connected with them...concepts do not come from language learning but from experience and practice' (Gell in Ingold 1996:164).

I do not think it a step too far to say that 'practical routines' inevitably bring us to some sort of materiality, some bodily knowledge of the objects that the concept describes or is associated with.

The gesture of Tatekulu Nampala also demonstrates that just as the gesture should not be thought of as subservient to speech, it should also not be thought of as limited to times when people are speaking. His gesture connected just as strongly to a shared 'language' of dance as it did to a shared language of words. Therefore, it is necessary to place it within a much larger field of embodied images, those of performance, ritual and after Bourdieu everyday hexis and habitus (1995:87). I would argue that the gesture cannot be fully conceived in isolation, as a simple momentary movement of the hand and body. It is part of a much larger visual and physical economy, an aesthetic in the fullest sense of the word. The gesture is at once individual and collective, concrete and abstract.

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Gestures of watching show that when people respond to film they do so in a way that is much more than just verbal or cerebral. Watchers ground their responses in a world of meaning that is formed from the physical experience of objects, actions, ceremonies, feeling and 'intercorporeality' (Csordas, 2008). This embodied world has significant material qualities and these material qualities continually inform the practices of seeing, watching and understanding. When a film is shown, through various mimetic processes it recreates elements of a world and in part depends on the watchers material understanding to be recognisable and understood. Furthermore film makers, because they share this practice of seeing, implicitly understand films relationship to the materiality of knowledge and use this relationship to make their films meaningful. But what happens if a viewer has no material knowledge of the things they are watching, as is the case for many potential viewers of the archive in a UK museum setting? This is the question which I turn to next.

Watching without knowledge – why a lack of enactive memory might be a problem and how could it be addressed

These gestures of watching as expressions of physical memory and knowledge of a particular material life led to a consideration of the inverse situation. For example, the experience of watching a film like 'Kwanyama Day' (Diana and Antoinette Powell-Cotton, 1937) from a position of extremely limited material knowledge or bodily memory of the things represented. This would, after all, be the position of many people seeing the films if they were to be exhibited in the Powell-Cotton Museum in Kent. Could this lack of experience in fact be what creates the thrill of exoticism so often associated with watching ethnographic film? Perhaps it was the absence of 'enactive memory' that leads to the 'pornography of distance' that Susan Stewart (2008) labels so eloquently and which is perhaps at the root of many of the problems associated with the display of ethnographic film within exhibitions. As Fatimha Tobing Rony writes in her biting critique of ethnographic film,

'The people depicted in an "ethnographic film" are meant to be seen as exotic, as people who until only too recently were categorised by science as Savage and Primitive of an earlier evolutionary stage in the overall history of humankind: people without history, without writing, without civilization...' (1996:7)

As Rony goes on to write, ethnographic film has the potential to create a continual 'othering' or distancing, where those in the films are seen as not like 'us' (the viewers). It is often this very strangeness that entices people to watch, but this can, of course, be highly problematic. As the Powell-Cotton museum proposes to create an exhibition with the Oukwanyama film archive as its main focus, addressing these problems is necessary for many reasons; most importantly ethical and moral concerns, but also because of the potential for a simple lack of engagement from visitors to the museum who would see the seventy year-old black-and-white imagery and feel it had nothing to do with them.

Ideas of 'haptic' visuality and bodily memory when applied to the viewing of film within the exhibition setting might provide some answers to these issues. Was it possible to tackle the 'exotic' nature of ethnographic film, the undeniable distance between subject and viewer through shared material experience and memory? One way to address these gaps in experience presents itself through the ubiquitous nature of the wedding video, through which there might be a means of gently challenging a British audience's, potentially negative perception of black-and-white ethnographic film.

Figure 5: Proposed 3 way 'Efundula' projection at the Powell-Cotton Museum. Black and white stills copyright Powell-Cotton Museum.

The film most requested during research in Nambia was 'Efundula' (Diana and Antoinette Powell-Cotton, 1937) which shows a female coming-of-age ceremony now specific to the Ohangwena region in Northern Namibia, but which was once practiced more widely. It is however, still famous throughout the country. The ceremony was already being actively discouraged by Lutheran missionaries when the Powell-Cottons made their filmic salvage seventy years ago, and many people thought it had disappeared completely after years of armed struggle and the extreme cruelties of apartheid. However, it is still practiced today (c.f.: Becker, 2004) and some suggest it is actually growing in popularity. The word 'Efundula' has now also come to mean a Christian marriage, so when people were told there was a film of 'Efundula' they often thought it would be a contemporary wedding video. This conflation of terms and ceremonies led the research to a point where the seventy year-old ethnographic film of ritual also became somebody's 'wedding video'.

From thinking of the ethnographic film as a wedding video it seemed that if others could also see it as such, some of the distance between the museum viewer and the subject of the film could be closed. Moreover, that this closing of the gap might be particularly effective when using the genre of wedding video, as this is a form of domestic film strongly associated with personal experience and memory, of which a large number of visitors to a UK museum might have direct knowledge. Therefore, it seemed that to play upon this effectively, a film montage for exhibition should contain the following elements: the 1937 'Efundula' film, footage of a contemporary 'Efundula' ceremony, modern wedding videos from the region shot by Namibian professional videographers and 1930's footage of a Powell-Cotton wedding (see illustration below). The montage would be projected so the figures are life-size over three screens and the viewer is therefore surrounded on three sides. It is

hoped that the ubiquity of the wedding video will mean that local visitors to the museum will no longer feel that the 'Efundula' film is just a representation of a long-lost African oddity, as the familiarity of the contemporary films showing white weddings will play on their own 'enactive' memory of marriage celebrations and create new ways for them to access the older ethnographic film.

The choice of three screens in the design is significant. With an archive such as this, which has recently been returned to the region and 'updated', it is tempting to make simplistic before-and-after comparisons. For example, if we accept that Efundula in contemporary Oshiwambo now also means a Christian wedding, in a simple two-screen setting, the screen on the left may be showing a scene from the 1937 'Efundula' and the screen on the right may be showing a 2009 Christian wedding or 'Efundula' ceremony. For a viewer who does not know Northern Namibia, there may be a temptation to read this as a narrative of cultural loss caused by modernisation. The addition of a third screen allows this over-simplistic dichotomy to be destabilised and another image to be introduced, that perhaps shows the contemporary Efundula ceremony, now in vibrant colour and attended by even more people than the archive film. This challenge to common assumptions of cultural loss goes some way to representing the many possible options for young women who want to celebrate their passage to womanhood in Namibia today. Similarly, to avoid the classic reading of history running along a time-line from left to right, and the subsequent simplistic comparisons of then and now, images representing different eras will shift around the screens, sometimes showing connections and similarity through movement, action and gesture, sometimes emphasising difference. The footage of the Powell-Cotton wedding is introduced to show connections between the films and their subjects, through cultural tropes such as the white wedding, but also because of specific historical links. Diana and Antoinette are shown as bridesmaids in the 1930's Powell-Cotton family film and it is they who seven years later attended and filmed the 'wedding' or 'Efundula' which now forms the focus of the exhibition. Sound will enhance this shifting diorama[4] drawing the viewer's attention to different screens where sound at times is synchronous and at others is juxtaposed with the image.

Conclusion

It must be emphasised that an actual gesture does not have to be present for a physical response to film to be manifest. The gesture is more like an intermittent marker of a process that that may be going on all the time: it is a convenient means of observing the 'enactive' response to moving images, but its absence does not indicate an absence of physical or material response to the images being watched. If, then, enactive embodied responses to the moving image are potentially present during the viewing of a wide range of films, one would hope that this would mean that the use of the moving image in the museum has the potential to create real physical response, even if the visitor does not feel the need to gesture or perform while they are watching.

This creates new subtleties when thinking about the tired phrase 'interactivity'. Perhaps there has always been physical activity in the form of enactive memory during exhibition-going; but without observing people turning a handle or pressing a button we could not be sure it was there.

While there has been much theoretical work outlining the tactile and haptic qualities of immaterial media such as film, little ethnographic research has been done into how these qualities might manifest themselves during the viewing of film (cf Tikka 2008). I hope in this article to have provided some instances that might act as concrete and tangible examples of the haptic at work. Gesture offers a compelling area for thinking in a non-dualistic way about the non-lexical and non-verbal responses that film can evoke, removing gesture from the sometimes over-simplistic realm of "body language". If we can think instead of gesture as image with all of the philosophical and theoretical richness that the concept of image brings, and add to that the idea of it being an image that is formed with the hand and the body, with all the sensory potential that that brings, we can perhaps see a route to understanding at least part of the intense physical response that film can evoke. I use the term diorama playing upon the older sense of the word as meaning a large scale projection of a particular place with the aim of making the viewer feel as if they were there, as coined by Daguerre in the 19th century (Sternberger, 1977) but the form also has a certain relevance for the Powell-Cotton Museum which is famous for its natural history dioramas.

Notes

[1] I use Oukwanyama to refer to those who define themselves as Ovakwanyama and live largely in Namibia and Angola. The Oukwanyama are one of the largest groups in Namibia but see their home region as an area that straddles the Namibian/Angolan border. Earlier orthographies used the term Kwanyama or Kuyanyama without the indicative 'Ou' and where this is the case in the archive, especially in the titles of films, I have maintained this usage to avoid confusion when referencing the archive.

[2] All names of those who were consulted for this research have been changed and contemporary pictures anonymised.

[3] This is not to imply that these experiences of watching were highly individualised, the shared nature of much of this material knowledge was very important as was the shared nature of watching.

[4] I use the term diorama playing upon the older sense of the word as meaning a large scale projection of a particular place with the aim of making the viewer feel as if they were there, as coined by Daguerre in the nineteenth century (Sternberger, 1977) but the form also has a certain relevance for the Powell-Cotton Museum which is famous for its natural history dioramas.

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The Boundaries of Knowability: Using the Archive to Reconstruct the 1839 Leeds Public Exhibition

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Abstract

The Leeds Public Exhibition of 1839 can only be known through its archive, which in turn delimits what can be known of this event. The material traces that stand in for this historical event are inherently fragmentary and temporal distance adds layers of historiographic complexity. Moreover, the archive is not singular; it exists in multiple sites, each with its own discrete institutional particularities. The objects displayed at this Exhibition are recorded in some detail; the catalogue provides us with description, authorship and the identity of the lender. However, these categories are subject to a certain amount of semiotic slippage, as ideas of provenance, authenticity and ownership do not remain static. Given these limitations, this paper considers the archive in relation to the production of knowledge and traces some of the agents, objects and spaces of the exhibition, setting them in a socio-economic and cultural context in order to form a partial reconstruction.

Key words: Leeds, nineteenth century exhibitions, historiography, archives, voluntary societies

'The historical record is both too full and too sparse' (White, 1978).

The Leeds Public Exhibition of Works of Art, Science, Natural History, and Manufacturing Skill took place between the ninth of July and the fifth of October 1839 at the Albion Street Music Hall.[1] It deserves investigation both as a discrete event and as a product of a wider set of socio-political and economic conditions, which allow for the exploration of the intersections between art and industry, taste and morality, commerce and culture, civic identity and social space. As an event with a restricted archive, this exhibition can also be used a means of thinking through a set of historiographic and methodological questions concerning the efficacy of reconstructing a particular historical occurrence from partial and incomplete documents. The existing scholarship on the Leeds Public Exhibition has taken the form of cursory references in journal articles and fleeting appearances in edited volumes. For example, articles by R.J. Morris (1970: 282-300) and Toshio Kusamitsu (1980: 70-89) have made brief references to the Leeds Public Exhibition alongside comparable polytechnic displays in Manchester, Birmingham, Newcastle and Sheffield, which have themselves been figured as a set of generalised regional precedents of the Great Exhibition of 1851. The construction of this lineage, although recognising the significance of cultural manoeuvres taking place outside the capital, has to some degree denied the Leeds Public Exhibition

its specificity. Caroline Arscott (1988: 135-158) has perhaps offered the most sustained critical and contextualised analysis of this event and the subsequent exhibitions of 1843 and 1845. However, as with the account of the 1843 Exhibition by James Lomax (1997: 275-285), there has been a tendency to oscillate between conflating this set of three exhibitions and regarding them as singular and particular occurrences. Although there are legitimate and interesting comparisons to be drawn, this latter approach enables and informs a more comprehensive archaeology of the Exhibition of 1839.

The archive of the Leeds Public Exhibition is neither complete nor representative; it cannot be deployed as a surrogate for its temporal, spatial and material existence. The traces that have persisted in the historical record are dispersed, fragmentary and uneven. In this case, the primary material has been distributed between local and national collections including the National Art Library in London and the West Yorkshire Archive Service, the Library of the Thoresby Society and the University of Leeds Special Collections, each with its own institutional and historical particularities. In addition to these physical sites, the digitisation of the Leeds Mercury alongside other nineteenth century periodicals by the British Library has created a very different structure and relation to the document than either the original printed version or its later incarnation as microfilm. Similarly, the digital diffusion of archival images through Leodis, a project managed by Leeds Library and Information Services, a department of Leeds City Council, might be considered as a mechanism that both enables and restricts research by constructing an apparently definitive and beneficent archive, liberated from closed classificatory systems and the process of manual sifting. This negation of totality has been articulated as an intrinsic characteristic of the archive as an apparatus which selects, discards and fragments (Foucault, 1972). More than the accumulation of material traces, archives form the boundary of knowability and their mnemonic use value, alongside the process of acquisition, storage and retrieval, continue to inform the practice of history. The rejection of the archival object as direct, neutral and unmediated evidence, as the uncontested material proof of history, leads us to reconsider how archives might contribute to the recovery of a set of historical occurrences without recourse to disproportionate reduction and assumption. Perhaps the most significant development has been in the discipline of semiotics. In referring to the objects of the archive as fragments and traces we begin to recognise their partial, contingent and arbitrary character without absolutely discarding their role in the production of knowledge.

The Archive of the Leeds Public Exhibition

The primary physical and textual material that has come to stand for the Leeds Public Exhibition are a catalogue of its contents, a descriptive guide to its objects and the contemporary coverage in the local periodical press (Baines & West, 1839). The price of the descriptive guide was one shilling against the much lower cost of admission at sixpence, which seemed to perpetuate

Fig 1. The former Hall of the Leeds Mechanics' Institution, photograph, (c. 1900), by kind permission of Leeds Library and Information Services

social stratification by delimiting what should have been known by whom. The content of the guide did have a marginally extended distribution in that much of it was serialised in the *Leeds Mercury* newspaper during the run of the Exhibition, although this periodical was largely directed towards the middle class in its composition, politics and readership (Fraser, 1980). When the descriptive guide was published two months after the opening of the Exhibition, it was heavily advertised in the *Leeds Mercury* as both an educative tool and an object for posterity. The introduction to the guide sets out its aims (Baines & West, 1839: 1):

> It is hoped that unavoidably imperfect as they are, the descriptions will be a help to those who are desirous of deriving profit as well as intelligent pleasure from the objects displayed. They may afford information which few perhaps would otherwise obtain, and give a meaning to the articles of which they might otherwise be in great measure destitute. And long after the present Exhibition shall have been closed, and its contents again dispersed, these memoranda may retain an agreeable memorial to the visit to it, and an useful hand-book for future reference on various occasions.

The shared interests held by the publishers, the exhibition committee, the lenders of objects and those who ultimately benefited from the profit made by the exhibition are significant: in some cases they are even the same

individuals in different guises. For example, Edward Baines Junior was at once the editor of the Leeds Mercury, the vice-president of the Leeds Mechanics' Institution, which was to benefit from the purchase of new premises from the proceeds of the Exhibition (Fig 1.), a donor of objects and the co-author of the descriptive guide to the Exhibition. As such, the material of the archive has a uniformity which at once reveals and conceals. However, this embedded bias does not discount the use and usefulness of the archive in the construction of a historical discourse; according to Hayden White (1987: 187), 'considered as historical evidence, all texts are regarded as being equally shot through with ideological elements or, what amounts to the same thing, as being equally transparent, reliable, or evidential'. More specifically, it has been argued that the periodical press should be interpreted with caution and not taken to be reflective of general historical conditions, but firmly embedded within the wider context of their production and reception (Pykett, 1990).

These preliminary attempts to contextualise the primary material relating to the Leeds Public Exhibition remain mediated by successive layers of subjective interpretation. For White, even the attempt to construct, or reconstruct a context for the text, as Pykett has advocated, is subject to the distancing mechanism inherent to language (1987: 191). The primary discourse surrounding the Exhibition can therefore be considered as a means of constructing the appearance of consensus, rather than reflecting a consensus that pre-exists the text. This relationship between what can be tentatively thought of as real or actual and the subsequent layers of interpretation, projection and elaboration constructed by the historian is perhaps the crux of the problem. If we consider historical truth to have become an epistemological impossibility, what exactly can be drawn from the archive of the Exhibition? The proximity of the imaginative and the fictive to the writing of history was explored by White in The Fictions of Factual Representation, in which it is stated that, 'although historians and writers of fiction may be interested in different kinds of events, both the forms of their respective discourses and their aims in writing are often the same […] history is no less a form of fiction that the novel is a form of historical representation' (1978: 121-122). Roland Barthes expressed a similar conclusion from a different perspective, arguing that, 'historical discourse is in its essence a form of ideological elaboration, or to put it more precisely, an imaginary elaboration' (1981: 16). This is not to suggest that archives should be subject to unrestricted speculative licence in the context of academic research, rather, it is an attempt to self-consciously recognise the complexities and complicity of actively constructing history. Far from limiting the discipline, White argues that this loss of certainty necessitates 'a posture before the archive of history more dialogistic than analytic, more conversational than assertive and judgmental' (1987: 186). White's position has informed the methodology of this study, as I intend to enter into a dialogue with the archive that allows, as far as possible, for both its complexities and the multiplicity of meanings it has the capacity to generate.

The Objects of the Leeds Public Exhibition

The extent to which we can know the objects of the exhibition apart from descriptive textual accounts continues to be largely determined by authorship, as defined by the maker, lender or sitter. For example, the canonical paintings were most easily traced, especially when they have remained in the same private collections or entered public museums and galleries. The Picture Gallery of the Music Hall contained some of the most highly regarded paintings, including works attributed to Peter Paul Rubens, Rembrandt van Rijn, Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, Antonio da Correggio, Anthony van Dyck and Nicolas Poussin. For example, the descriptive guide (West & Baines, 1839: 5) states that:

> Her Majesty the Queen has been graciously pleased to lend a small but faithful full-length portrait of herself, by Hayter. One gentleman, Francis Hawksworth Fawkes, Esq. Of Farnley hall, has lent upwards of fifty pictures to the Exhibition, including his entire series of water-colour drawings by Turner, forty in number – a unique and most valuable collection, besides the Fairfaxiana and other interesting curiosities.

Fawkes' inherited collection of Fairfaxiana relating to the English Civil War is particularly well documented, as J.M.W. Turner had been commissioned to illustrate these objects in around 1815. Interestingly, the catalogue of the exhibition records instances where both object and its illustration were displayed, which seems to indicate the differentiation of instructive and mimetic value. Representational objects were generally preferred as both their subject and means of execution could provide practical and moral instruction (Altick, 1978; Arscott, 1988). The educative value of painting was reinforced by the descriptive companion to the Exhibition, which reflected the prevailing belief that the imitation of works displaying correct and true principles represented the most appropriate method of training for both the artist and the public (West & Baines, 1839).

Another prolific lender to the exhibition was George Lane Fox of Bramham, whose estate lay to the northeast of Leeds. Lane Fox is listed as having lent The Death of Germanicus by Poussin, a work currently held by the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. However, the provenance of what is though to be the authentic work does not match the biography of the work lent to the exhibition, leading us to question the attribution of the painting displayed in Leeds. Further complications arise in the identification of works since the medium is not specified and the titles are subject to degrees of variation. For example, the catalogue lists a work by William Hogarth referred to as *Scene in Covent Garden, Morning*, which perhaps corresponds with one of a series of engravings entitled *Morning: Four Times of the Day*, made in 1738 and published in a Heath Edition in 1822.

The catalogue of the Exhibition distinguished between painting and works of art, the latter included objects closer to the applied or decorative arts. This conflation between what was considered to be the work of genius and the

work of ingenuity was a prevalent feature of the early nineteenth century exhibition (Altick, 1978). Furthermore, it was possible for the definitions of the art object and the curio to intersect; the gender or ethnicity of the maker could also determine the classification of the object. For example, the work of women, where it could be identified as such, was principally characterised by its association with femininity as opposed to its artistic or instructive merit: 'the admirers of female ingenuity may compare the pursuits of modern ladies with those of a former period by an inspection of the Wax flowers in the Ante-Room' (West & Baines: 25). The 'miscellaneous curiosities' on display were instead more easily categorised as their heterogeneity prevents them from entering other taxonomies. Numerous examples of this type of object could be cited from the catalogue, perhaps the most intriguing is item number 249 in the Picture Gallery: 'cinders from the combustion of 500,000 bank notes' (West & Baines: 27).

Although today the philosophical, chemical and electrical apparatus displayed at the Exhibition would be defined as more generalised scientific or technical instruments, during the nineteenth century they represented distinct forms of knowledge and technology. However, the visual and sensory delineation between the arts and the sciences was, perhaps, less sharply defined then, as Arscott has suggested, 'it should not be thought that the art was pleasant or dazzling while the science provided the instruction. Science was presented in as spectacular way as possible' (1988: 148). Philosophical Apparatus included telescopes, orreries, surveying instruments and compasses. The majority of these objects were to be found on the central tables in the Picture Gallery, although the Oxy-Hydrogen Microscope was presented on its own in the Tuning Room and it's use was demonstrated at regular intervals. The microscope's slide preparations of 'insects, leaves, and other objects, among the most minute which the glass can reach, and also among the most wonderful and beautiful in their conformation, as well as living animalculæ in the most rapid motion, are shown prodigiously magnified' (*Leeds Public Exhibition,* 1839: 5). According to Altick this technology, 'contributed little to material progress but was well suited for show business' (1978: 369).

From the available descriptions, it appears that the Saloon was the site of some of the more spectacular aspects of the Exhibition; 'the Saloon or Concert-room, resounds with the noise of engines, machines, and scientific processes' (*Leeds Public Exhibition*, 1839: 5). Many of the experiments seem to have been conceived for performative, participatory and scientific interest. For example, balloons were used to demonstrate the relative densities of air and gas: 'those exhibited are formed of animal membrane […] some are globular, others in the form of a fish. While new they ascend readily when filled with coal gas. One may frequently be seen floating near the ceiling of the Saloon' (West & Baines: 45). The Electrical Apparatus on display was similarly theatrical, promising 'Electric Shocks at intervals' and 'a Thunder House, for illustrating the effects of electricity upon conductors to buildings, showing what would take place if struck by lightning when such a conductor was broken or damaged' (West & Baines: 46). How far these

experiments communicated their scientific principles is subject to discussing, Altick (1978) having concluded that their primary function was amusement.

The Social and Architectural Space of the Leeds Public Exhibition

If the objects of the Exhibition are only partially or indirectly knowable, information about the space of the Exhibition relies largely upon description and comparison with similar displays. As the architectural vehicle for the Exhibition, the Albion Street Music Hall cannot be considered an ideologically neutral space. A brief historical description of the building is necessary to draw out the particular ways in which this space mediated between objects and publics. The Music Hall was built between 1792 and 1794, closed in 1870, acquired by the furnishers Denby and Spinks in 1876 (Fig 2.) and was finally demolished in 1973. In a contemporary description, Edward Parsons (1834: 136) detailed its various uses:

Fig 2. The former Albion Street Music Hall, photograph, (c. 1900), by kind permission of Leeds Library and Information Services

> The ground floor was for some years occupied as a hall for woollen manufacturers, especially for blankets, and afforded accommodation to those clothiers who were excluded from the Cloth Halls. It received, and for some time retained, the ignominious appellation of Tom Paine's Hall. It is now appropriated to other purposes. The Leeds Concerts have long been conducted with great spirit and considerable success; the hall however has frequently witnessed exhibitions of a far more impressive character than its musical assemblies; it has often formed the scene in which the claims of the noblest institutions of British Christianity and benevolence have been presented to the consideration and the ever ready liberality of the inhabitants of the town.

As this quote illustrates, the Music Hall was a site of overlapping and interpenetrating layers of architectural, commercial, cultural and religious meaning. Perhaps the most significant precedent for the Exhibition was set by the Northern Society for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts, who held an annual exhibition at the Music Hall between 1808 and 1833 in a set of three interconnecting rooms on the first floor.[2] Although broadly comparable polytechnic exhibitions had been staged in Birmingham and Manchester in 1838, it has been argued that the exhibitions of painting held by the Northern Society provided a model that was more specific to the locality (Morris, 1970).

The polytechnic exhibition became increasingly established as a form of knowledge production and distribution in the early nineteenth century. In addition to the regional precursors of the Leeds Exhibition, comparisons can be drawn with the more permanent institutions established in London. The National Gallery of Practical Science, also known as the Adelaide Gallery, was established in 1831 and the Polytechnic Institution in 1838 (Altick, 1978). Although further research would be required to determine the extent to which the organisers of the Leeds Public Exhibition were cognisant of and influenced by these constuctions in the capital, there are compelling similarities between the range of objects displayed, their perceived pedagogic value and their arrangement in space. Arscott (1988: 139) suggests a visit to London was made as part of the preparations for the Exhibition, although the details are not specific: 'on at least one occasion a member of the organising committee made a special trip to London to solicit contributions, and met with some success'. One reference is made in the coverage of the Exhibition in the Leeds Mercury (Leeds Public Exhibition, 1839: 5) relating to one of several popular demonstrations: 'in London, we believe the mice in the Adelaide Gallery appear to suffer considerably; but if this be so, it must be from a defect in the Diving Bell or the manner of using it'. This live experiment, along with other events, took place in a large model canal in the Saloon of the Music Hall, which was also a central feature of the Adelaide Gallery.

Recalling the performances given by the Italian violinist Paganini on the 17th and 18th of January 1832, the musician George Haddock described the internal space of the Music Hall (1906: 37-38):

Fig 3. Paganini at the Albion Street Music Hall, engraving, (1832),
by kind permission of Leeds Library and Information Services

The Music Hall itself was unpretentious in the way of architecture, the entrance being in Albion Street. This opened into a moderately-sized vestibule, with a flight of broad stone steps on either side leading into the concert-room entrances. The hall itself, simple in decoration, was furnished with rows of seats, with a fixed platform of two or three tiers at one end and a small gallery at the other. From the roof, slightly arched, hung a number of chandeliers suspended by long chains, each chandelier containing 20 or 30 wax candles, by which means the hall was lighted. The body of the hall would seat about 700 or 800, and the gallery possibly 150 more. A very comfortable artists' room and a tuning room for the orchestra had an entrance at the side of the building (Fig 3.).

The way in which the visitor to the Exhibition traversed this space was tightly controlled and highly prescriptive. It was noted in the *Leeds Mercury* that, 'the arrangements for preserving order are good, and have proved very effectual during the fair days. One of the regulations, which is needful to prevent confusion, is that the visitors shall move onwards through the suite of rooms, and not turn back from one room to another' (*Leeds Public Exhibition,* 1839: 5). This single route of circulation was also reinforced through the Catalogue of the Exhibition, which gave the order of the rooms and also in some cases, the order in which the walls, display cases and individual objects should be viewed. The absence of photographic or printed illustrations of this Exhibition has resulted in recourse to textual accounts and comparable displays. However this need not be a deficiency as it circumvents the construction of a direct indexical relation between space and its representation.

Conclusion

The cumulative result of historiography, deconstruction and semiotics has been to problematise archives and the persistent authority of material evidence. Maintaining a critical position towards the archive is not to disregard its use. Through the fragmentary traces of the Leeds Public Exhibition has been possible to construct knowledge about and around this event, its objects, agents and spatial operation. The Exhibition brought fine and applied art, antiquities, natural history, scientific apparatus, industrial machinery and other curiosities into relation as a polytechnic display. Although eclectic, to suggest that there was no classificatory system at work would be misleading. To the committee, curators, commentators and to a public that shared their cultural capital, the Exhibition formed a coherent programme of didactic lessons, spectacular demonstrations and self-congratulatory examples of cultural and commercial achievement. The rhetoric that was constructed around the Exhibition firmly emphasised its beneficent intention; the young would be steered into appropriate vocations, the working classes elevated in their taste and behaviour, the middle classes assured of their social status, the practices of the manufacturer and merchant were ennobled and the local gentry afforded the opportunity to display their collections to a wider public.

This paper does not represent a singular or definitive reconstruction of the Leeds Public Exhibition. The archive remains open to multiple readings and has the capacity to support diverse and even contradictory statements about its meaning and significance. Moreover, the contents of the archive and their accessibility do not remain static. While general accessibility may have been improved and dispersed collections amalgamated, neither the digital archive nor the physical repository can achieve neutrality or totality. As Derrida has argued, 'what is no longer archived in the same way is no longer lived in the same way. Archivable meaning is also and in advance codetermined by the structure that archives' (1996: 18). As such, the hybridity and discontinuity of the archive cannot but also characterise the uses to which it is put.

Notes

[1] The Exhibition of 1839 is also variously referred to in the literature as The Exhibition of Paintings, Curiosities, Models, Apparatus, and Specimens of Nature and Art and The Leeds Public Exhibition of Works of Art, Science, Natural History, and Manufacturing Skill, alongside other inventive and lengthy variations on the theme. The Committee of the Exhibition and the Leeds Mercury refer to the event as The Leeds Public Exhibition. The term Polytechnic was attached to the subsequent Exhibitions of 1843 and 1845.

[2] The picture gallery was the largest of the three rooms at sixty feet in length, with the cabinet at one end and the ante-room at the other.

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"In the Fold"
Imagining Words and Images
By J²

Fig 1. 'In the Fold'

The Symposium *Materiality and Intangibility* concerned perception, personal imaginings and shared meaning-making. This art piece, called *In the Fold,* (Fig 1.) is an attempt to speak to that concern. It combines images and words generated during the event with the intention to create an entirely new form. If you will allow us a little of your time, we would like to explain a little of the conceptual reasoning that guided our artistic creation.

In the production of *In the Fold,* and its explanation in this article, we wished to problematize the theoretical issues which surround the creation of a set of conference proceedings such as this. This edition of Museological Review purports to be 'Conference Proceedings', but it is true to say that, as with any record, this is only a re-imagining of the actual proceedings, memories and scraps, words and images produced during the conference. Given the nature

of *Materiality and Intangibility,* it seems appropriate that this problematic existence is brought to the fore. In as much as it 'represents the invisible' (Pomian 1990, cited in Evans & Marr, 1990) this journal can be considered a 'semiophore,' (Pomian, 1990) for it is an avatar for that which is no longer there. By creating *In the Fold,* putting words and images together to create a whole which only becomes apparent when you fold the paper into shape, we wanted to highlight the disjunct between 'words and things' (Pearce, 1997), and the effort which the reader must make to associate the two. Extending the semiophore, *In the Fold* can also be said to create dialogue between 'the universe of discourse, and the world of visual perception' (Pomian, 1990).

The images included in the art piece are the manifestations of our immediate reactions to the papers and artistic interventions presented at the Symposium. Whilst the various papers were being presented, the mental visualisations of their concepts were being articulated as quick sketches. Their transformation to more formalised images sought to reflect the transmission of information from an author to their audience, which is subsequently disseminated further. The phasing of this information from a tangible, grasped authorial notion through the intangible ether of exchange to a recipient, where it returns to tangible form, is analogous to the passage of digital information. Today technology is beginning to process information in the same way our brains have always done - transforming material images into intangible 'objects' (Eysenck & Keane, 2005). Like the intangibility of the digital world, the intangibility of thoughts is open to debate, as Sue Pearce commented in her closing address of the Symposium, (2009). The images and compositions that form our artwork are a reflection upon this movement from material to immaterial and back again.

A similar complexity of the material and immaterial influenced the use of haiku as a word based response to the images produced for *In the Fold*. Originating in Japan, they are short poems, classically of a strict 17 syllable count, split into three lines in a pattern of five, seven and five syllables (England, 2010). Originally part of longer verse forms known as renga, they gradually became poems in their own right (Haiku Society, 2010). Yet they still retain a sense of fragmentation. They speak of fleeting moments in time, of seasons, of sensation and emotion. In their classical form, they lack punctuation or titles, framing devices which might be expected in other forms of poetry (British Haiku Society, 2010) and thus their structure is one which speaks to the (im)material world with which we are concerned. They are tangible texts with intangible borders, speaking to something beyond that which is written. And thus, though they are small, they can encompass a vast scape of space and time.

But Haiku are more complex in their (im)material nature. They have changed over time, and their form has been re-appropriated across the world (Haiku Society, 2010). Translation into other languages has made modifications to their structure necessary (Haiku Society, 2010). This means that they are doubly de-contextualized: separated from their renga chains and altered to fit

the needs and desires of practitioners today. They suggest that (im)materiality is always malleable. The borders between the material and immaterial are shifting, fluid. Perhaps they are not there at all (Pearce, 2009). In their changeable and (im)material natures, haiku are a verse form well suited to express the essence of attending the Symposium. By combining these words and images, *In the Fold* allows a multivocal approach to the presentation of this transient experience.

With this artwork, we sought to create a retelling of our own experiences, using both images and words. Each element tells only a part of the multiplicity of tales, each a different 'focalisor' though which to view the Symposium (Potter Abbott, 2002), and when combined together, they form yet another story. But there is a fourth tale here. By using the layout of a paper fortune teller we hope to bring you, the reader, into this ongoing movement of transmission and creation of ideas. If you wish, you can construct the artwork by simply cutting off the conference logo so that the paper is square and then folding the paper with the images on the outside. If you are unfamiliar with this format look here http://www.mathematische-basteleien.de/fortune_teller.htm, or ask a friend. Artworks, images, texts, museums, are always born in the liminal place between the apparent author and the reader who, as Barthes explained, is no simple consumer, but a producer of meaning (Barthes, 1990). If you wish, you can simply look at the page as it is, or you can print it out, and fold it so that the pictures come together with their associated poems, and that the immaterial links become material. Alternatively, you may want to disregard these altogether, and arrange your own poems and images entirely to your heart's content. We do not mind.

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