

DEVELOPING IWM NORTH

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ABOUT THE PARTNERS

IWM NORTH: IWM North opened in 2002 and was established to bring IWM's rich collections to a wider audience. Since opening it has received 3.2m visitors and won over 30 awards. IWMN sets out to provide a focus for debate and understanding of conflict, using personal testimonies to convey experiences and utilising digital technology to convey content and meaning.

Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG): As part of the School of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester, RCMG combines academic rigour with practical experience of the museum sector. Research teams are brought together to meet the specific needs and requirements of each project and their work to date has enabled RCMG to develop a unique set of skills, experiences and perspectives in capturing, analysing and interpreting the perspectives, experiences and voices of users, and non-users, of cultural organisations. A list of RCMG research projects is available from <http://www.le.ac.uk/ms/research/rcmg.html>.

Duncan McCauley: Duncan McCauley was founded in Berlin in 2003 by architects Tom Duncan and Noel McCauley in response to the evolving task range needed in museum and exhibition design. The work scope of the studio encompasses masterplanning, architecture, exhibition design and audiovisual production for museums and cultural institutions. Interdisciplinary collaboration and thinking across borders are characteristic for the studio's approach in order to create spaces of communication that make both history and identity visible. Combining architecture and time based media they are presently working for clients such as the Historic Royal Palaces in London and the State Museums of Berlin.

RESEARCH TEAM

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OVERVIEW

IWM North is part of the Imperial War Museum family of five nationally-funded museums which tell stories of conflict and war from the First World War to the present day. IWM North is located in Trafford, close to Manchester in the North of England, where it is housed in an award-winning building designed by Studio Daniel Libeskind. Since opening in 2002, the Museum has offered a new type of museum experience where human stories of the causes, course and consequences of war and conflict are told through a range of media, including architecture, art, authentic objects, photography, film and drama.

The building has been described by Libeskind as a globe, shattered by war, into an earth, air and water shard. Intended to unsettle, disorientate and confuse, the building comprises uneven wall and floor planes, hard, uncompromising materials and a structure which is counter to the usual museum layout. Rather than a progression of gallery spaces behind a grand façade, at IWM North small doorways reveal oddly jagged spaces, a sloping floor and a main exhibition space where individual galleries have been replaced by a large open space containing a series of silos or small rooms. The silos and the surrounding main exhibition spaces contain museum content based, primarily, on provocative juxtapositions of peoples' stories and key objects. The main exhibition space is also used for displaying the Big Picture Show (a series of filmic installations which engulf the space for ten minutes every hour) and for the display of art.

The result is a dramatic and fragmented museum experience that is highly emotive, experiential and cinematic. In addition to the dramatic and highly emotive museum experience, the Museum runs a sector-leading volunteer programme which prioritises local people and skills development. The Museum also runs an active and creative families programme as well as a thoughtful series of temporary art exhibitions.

At the time of writing in May 2014, the Museum is undertaking a series of research projects in order to inform future decision-making. *Developing IWM North* is one of a number of research projects commissioned by the Museum as part of a process of exploring the future re-development of the Museum; at a time of increasing economic pressure senior managers at the Museum are under pressure to increase income generation and repeat visitors. Visitor evaluations show that, overall, visitors are highly satisfied with their experiences at IWM North although, interestingly, a high proportion of visitors are reluctant to return. Based on this and other visitor feedback, a number of concerns have developed at North around the perceived inflexibility of the architecture and the uncompromising nature of elements such as the Big Picture Show. Although visitors are attracted by these features – many cite the building as a main reason for visiting, for example – many visitors also describe the Museum in ways which suggest that the museum is difficult to navigate, impersonal, overpowering and lacking in depth.

For this particular piece of research, RCMG were asked to develop a piece of work which explored the visitor experience in relation to the nature of the subject of war and conflict and the very specific architecture of the Museum. The Museum was particularly interested in what insights existing academic research might offer in relation to the future direction of the Museum. For the research team, the project offered an opportunity to further develop research which combines rigorous academic research with design thinking and which bridges a range of subject areas including visitor studies, museum studies, architecture and design towards a greater understanding of the physical material of museums and heritage sites and its involvement in visitor experience.

This report describes the nature of the research undertaken as well as the very specific research process through which the project was developed. Following this, the report sets out the main findings of the research.

Accepting the givens of IWM North, how might the site, the building, the content and the museum's interpretive strategies, most effectively enable meaningful, engaging, active and ongoing visitor experiences?

DEVELOPING IWM NORTH: THE BRIEF

After some discussion, the research questions were formulated as follows:

- What does the existing visitor research tell us about how visitors experience IWM North?
- How is the building and the interpretation at IWM North implicated in every aspect of the visitor experience?
- What does the current visitor experience comprise and how does this relate to the visitor research and feedback?
- How does the Big Picture Show change the nature of the visitor experience and impact the overall museum experience?
- How does the layout of the museum and the highly interpretive nature of the architecture impact the visitor experience?
- How does the use of contemporary art as an interpretive strategy affect visitors' perceptions of IWM North?
- How might we understand visitors' needs and what additional dimensions of a visitor experience might be required to encourage repeat visitors?
- Accepting the givens of IWM North (the focus on war and conflict/the highly interpretive building/the location/a site that is changing as a result of the development of Media City/that IWMN is a National museum in a regional setting), how might the site, the building, the content and the museum's interpretive strategies, most effectively enable meaningful, engaging, active and ongoing visitor experiences?



DEVELOPING IWM NORTH: THE PROCESS

Following a model of research used in a small number of previous RCMG research projects, a multi-disciplinary, cross-sectoral research team was drawn together which included academic researchers, an architect and museum designer and a small number of senior colleagues from IWM North. Stages 1 and 2 of the research would involve the academic researchers and the architect/designer and Stage 3, where the research would be analysed and explored in relation to IWM North, involved the whole research team.

Stage 1 of the research was designed to include a review of existing research and documentation relating to visitors to IWM North as a route to identifying their perceptions of and responses to the Museum. The critical review incorporated approximately 10 years' worth of visitor research commissioned by IWM North.

Stage 1 would also involve the production of a series of working papers ('quick and dirty' reviews of existing research) drawing together a body of academic research considered to be of direct use to the project. Three working papers were developed including: 1) a paper on museum learning and visitor engagement; 2) a paper on the physicality of the museum experience and the role of built forms in shaping experience; and 3) a paper on the interpretation of difficult and challenging histories.

Stage 2 of the research involved a series of site visits and analysis of the current provision in light of the findings from the research undertaken at Stage 1. A series of ideas were developed at this stage and worked up in a visual format, in order to further explore the physical structure of the building and its interpretive potential and begin to explore a whole range of possibilities for the Museum.

Finally, **Stage 3** of the research would draw the wider research team together in order to explore the findings to date and begin to work through the implications for IWM North in detail. The research team also began to explore possible alternative approaches to interpretation at IWM North at this stage not as a route to redesigning the Museum, but as a route towards identifying a set of core principles or values and a framework within which future decision making might take place.



KEY FINDINGS

'A new kind of museum': the brilliant peculiarities of IWM North

- IWM North is a new kind of museum and it sits alongside other examples of leading-edge approaches to museum making internationally. It is a highly interpretive and affective environment where the physical material of the museum is put to work in engaging visitors' senses, feelings and emotions. To think about developing IWM North is, necessarily, to think about the curation of a 'total visitor experience' comprising site, architecture, space, objects, art and a range of media, including first person interpretation and witness testimony.
- IWM North can be understood as part of a particular Museum movement (in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's words, part of a 'new honesty'¹) where glorifying or triumphant narratives of war have been replaced with people-centred stories which draw attention to individual experiences of war. Like other museums and exhibitions identified as part of this 'new honesty', IWM North prioritises sensory experience and emotion. The intention here is to create the potential for a museum experience and a form of sensory knowledge which generates in visitors what is sometimes referred to as 'critical historical consciousness' – an ability to reflect on the past, draw parallels to the present, and consider other peoples' stories in relation to one's own.
- The affective and counter-intuitive architecture of the Museum is part of this approach. The architecture of the Museum is intended to disorientate, confuse and create the sense of disruption and lack of control. Interestingly, academic research has argued that emptiness, disorientation and the simultaneous multi-sensory stimulation of imagination alongside the communication of historical content is the route to more affective forms of experience and a more active generation of historical consciousness.² The building is a great asset for the Museum but needs to be curated and embedded into a structured visitor experience which recognises the demands that this new form of museum places on visitors.
- Other features of the Museum also fragment experience and confuse visitors. The Big Picture Show purposefully interrupts visitors' abilities to engage cognitively with the content of the Main Exhibition Space, demanding from them, instead, a primarily physical and emotional response.³ The Big Picture Show is impressively large and spectacular, but it does overwhelm and, at present, disempower visitors. To enable visitors to engage with a total experience, the Museum needs to offer more support, more choice, more depth, increased opportunities for dialogue and exchange and more opportunities for reflecting upon and understanding the content of the Museum and the experience it provides as well as the values and work of the organisation.



- The identity and mission of IWM North can be read off from an analysis of its approach to history, interpretation, programming and projects. The identity of the Museum is not, however, evident to visitors. Indeed, the Museum's programming and its impressive work locally, such as its sector-leading volunteer programme, is invisible to many visitors. Visitors would leave the IWM North with a greater sense of the identity and breadth of work of the Museum as well as the sense that there was more to see, if these areas of activity were visible in the Museum experience.

- As a new kind of Museum which delivers very particular kinds of messages, the Museum needs to develop a confident voice and clarity about its mission, core values and the opportunities it offers. Further, the identity of the Museum needs to be consistent. For example, at present the shop encourages a sense of nostalgia - the opposite perhaps of a critical historical consciousness – at the very start of the visitor experience, an arrangement that disrupts and confuses the messages of the Museum and appears to contradict the politics and values evident in the temporary exhibitions and MES.

- IWM North is also a different kind of national museum because it is a national museum in a regional setting which draws a large number of its visitors from the locality.⁴ Placing the same demands and expectations on the Museum to those placed on its London sister museums is problematic. Income generation will always be lower than the London museums and the museum will need to work harder to build loyal local audiences as it can rely less on tourism than its London counterparts. Specific programmes at IWM North are working to embed the Museum in its location and build vital family and other audiences. Similarly, content focused on the North West is increasingly being woven throughout the visitor experience, acknowledging the location and identity of the majority of IWM North visitors. Learning from other national museums in regional settings and developing an identity for the Museum that is rooted in its locality will build loyalty.

1. B. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2000) 'The Museum as Catalyst,' Keynote Address, Museums 2000: Confirmation or Challenge, ICOM Sweden, the Swedish Museum Association and Swedish Travelling Exhibitions/Riksställningar, 29 September 2000, Vadstena, Sweden.

2. A. Witcomb (2013) 'Understanding the role of affect in producing a critical pedagogy for history museums', *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 28 (3), p.265.

3. Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, *Informing the Development of a New Big Picture Show*, 2004 highlights the primary visitor response as emotional.

4. Visitor demographics: 55% Male, 45% Female; 56% from the North West, 13% overseas and the rest the UK; 27% repeat visitors (down by 6% since 2007/8); 40% with children; 55% are between 25-59 years (27% under eighteen years); 76% ABC1 socio-economic classification.

What do we ask of visitors to IWM North?

- Concepts such as Bonnell and Simon's 'terrible gift' can be highly productive for thinking about visitor experience at North.⁵ Understanding the experience that the Museum might provoke as a 'terrible gift' is helpful in reminding us that we ask a lot of visitors to engage with content related to war and suffering. It also reminds us that the 'difficulty' lies between the visitor and the content, not in the objects or stories themselves.
- The notion of difficult exhibitions as a 'terrible gift' is also useful in understanding the way in which the interpretive approaches developed at North are implicated in the creation of difficulty; the way that they add layers of additional complexity to content that is already difficult and challenging. At North, the emphasis on human stories of suffering delivered as a highly emotive visitor experience, in a highly affective and challenging environment, and using provocative juxtapositions of object and story as well as highly impactful artworks to deliver its messages, increases the demands placed on visitors.
- For example, visitors move around the internal spaces in non-linear ways. This has made it very hard to construct 'typical' visitor trails around the museum. Whilst this is certainly a deliberate outcome of the building's design, visitors are having trouble finding what they are looking for, and knowing what is on offer.⁶
- The Big Picture Show works to heighten emotion and, for many, fragment the museum visit.⁷ Taking control away from visitors,⁸ the Big Picture Show utilises scale and space to envelop visitors in a bodily, highly impactful experience. How might IWM North signal to visitors the affordances for action available to them during the BPS? Rather than verbal instructions, how might IWM North enhance the physical environment to offer clues to visitors?
- Visitors stay for extended period of time in the MES.⁹ It is clearly holding people's attention and is a great credit to the IWM North team. However, they leave feeling as though they don't necessarily want to come back. The visitor research offers up clues about what is missing in relation to content.¹⁰ We ask visitors to make sense of the visit based on a primarily emotional experience, without necessarily giving them the levels of understanding needed to process thoughts and feelings. How might we weave in additional narratives about the museum and about the ways in which war shapes lives? How might we add layers of content and enhance visitor's ability to make meaning?
- The MES is difficult to navigate – the silos are not intuitive – it is the polar opposite of the traditional museum arrangement (almost an inside out version) of the enfilade of galleries. What strategies might we use to draw visitors into the silos? What strategies might we use to make the conceptual framework more evident to visitors?



- Space carries content and the visitor research shows that visitors feel lost and unable to navigate the space and content. How might the space and narrative work together to pull visitors through the experience? What more could be done to harness space and narrative to support visitors in making sense of their journey? Over time and as a result of changes to the site around the Museum as well as incremental changes to the physical museum, the original intention of the architecture as unsettling, disorientating and confusing, has been complicated by elements such as the growth of the shop and the introduction of nostalgia into a phase of the visit which should be about orientation and preparation for the experiences ahead. Similarly, the small charge for access to the air shard gives out confusing signals to visitors – is this part of the experience or something different?

- The contemporary art approach preferred by the IWM North where high quality, demanding artworks, are presented as a route to suggesting – rather than explicitly detailing - the horrors and impact of war and where art is utilised as an affective alternative to a text-based, didactic explanation, places, intentionally, further demands on visitors. How might IWM North support visitors in building new skills in the interpretation of art?

- Conceptualising IWM North as a 'terrible gift' and thinking deeply about what we ask of visitors to the Museum confirms that North has an ethical responsibility to provide the structures that can support processes of visitor engagement and reflection, towards the creation of a critical historical consciousness. At North, this would mean providing opportunities for more detailed engagements with specific stories, curated opportunities for reflection and meaning-making, increased orientation and structure throughout the visit and a greater sense of a curated beginning, middle and end to the visitor's emotional, cognitive and physical journey.

5. J. Bonnell and R. I. Simon, 'Difficult exhibitions and intimate encounters', *Museum and Society*, July 2007, 5(2) pp. 65-85.

6. Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, *Managing behaviour: increasing engagement. An analysis of visitor use and meaning making at Imperial War Museum North*, 2006.

7. Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, *Informing the Development of a New Big Picture Show*, 2004, p. 7.

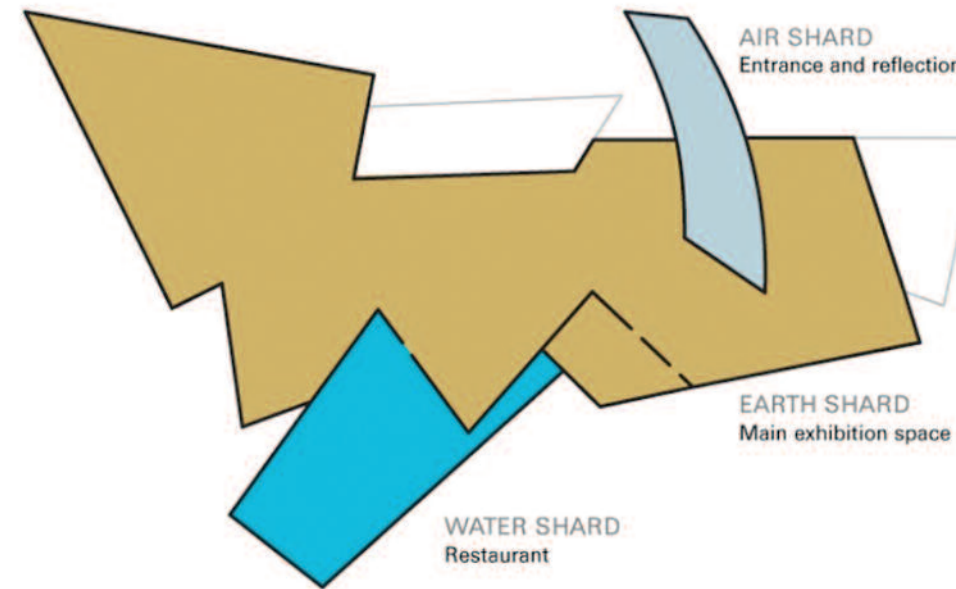
8. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

9. Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, *Managing Behaviour*, 2006. The study showed that visitors spend an average of 87 minutes in the Museum, 47 minutes of which are spent

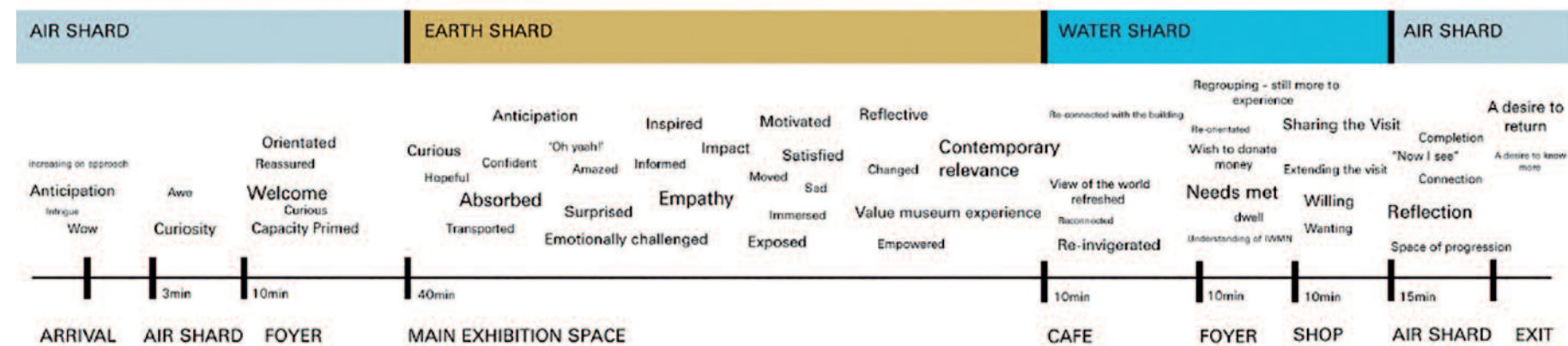
10. Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, *Informing the Development of a New Big Picture Show*, 2004, p. 2.

Orientation and the visitor experience

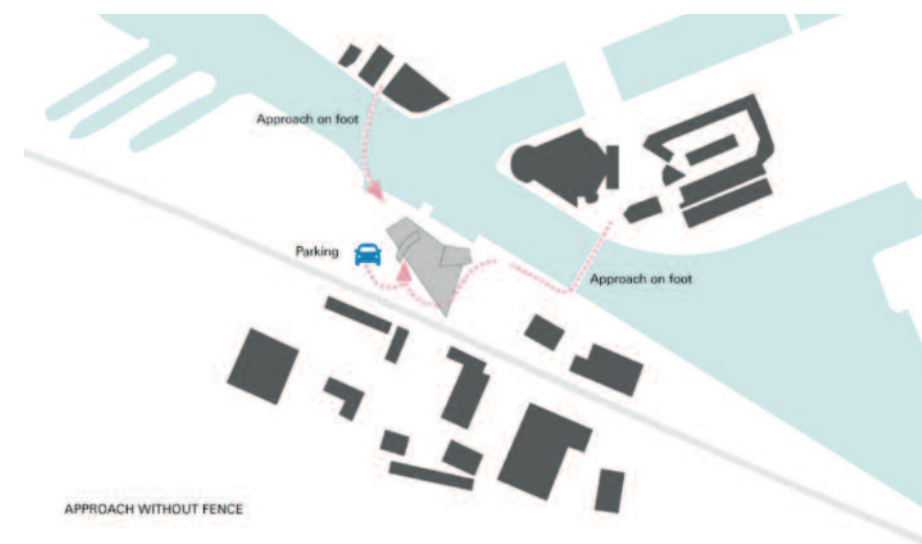
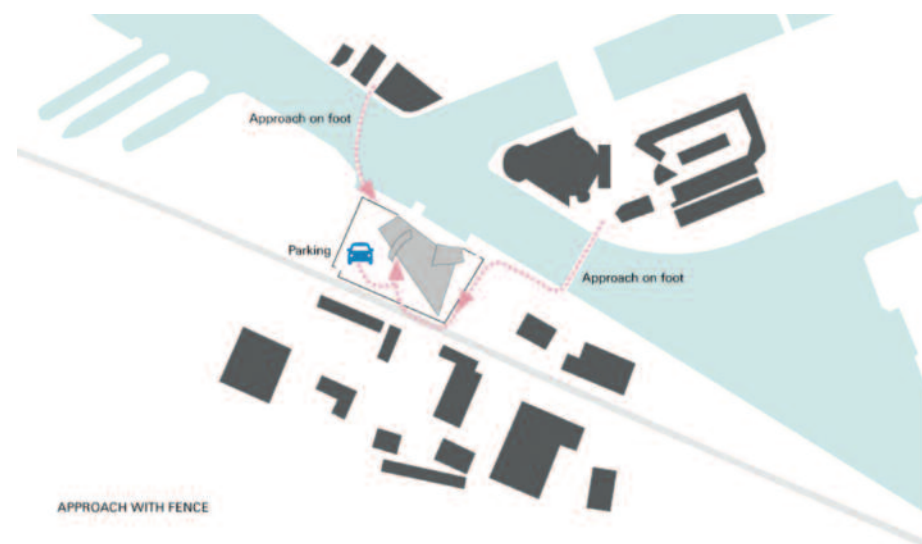
- A key strand to emerge from the research process is orientation and the need to provide visitors with the physical and conceptual knowledge necessary to navigate a complex site, brilliantly challenging architecture and a new kind of museum. This requires the development of an overarching and idealised visitor route and experience which can then be utilised to generate increased clarity and communication about what IWM North is, why it is the way it is, how visitors can navigate the museum, and the full extent of the experience they can access. These messages should be meshed into the experience itself utilising the Museum’s key orientation tool – the building.
- The building has the potential to become a key feature of the Museum’s orientation, rather than a problem to be overcome. The building can both disorientate and unsettle but, if utilised effectively on the website, in printed material, in the signage and as part of the experience itself, it can also be active in supporting the visitor experience. The three shards (Air, Earth and Water) can be harnessed as the focus for the various stages of the visitor journey from approach and anticipation, through arrival and orientation, into focused attention and the gradual experiencing of the stories the Museum has to tell, through to the reflection and processing of thoughts and feelings and, finally, towards the exit, shopping, experiencing the view from the air shard and providing an opportunity to donate.



3 EXPERIENTIAL ELEMENTS OF THE MUSEUM ARCHITECTURE

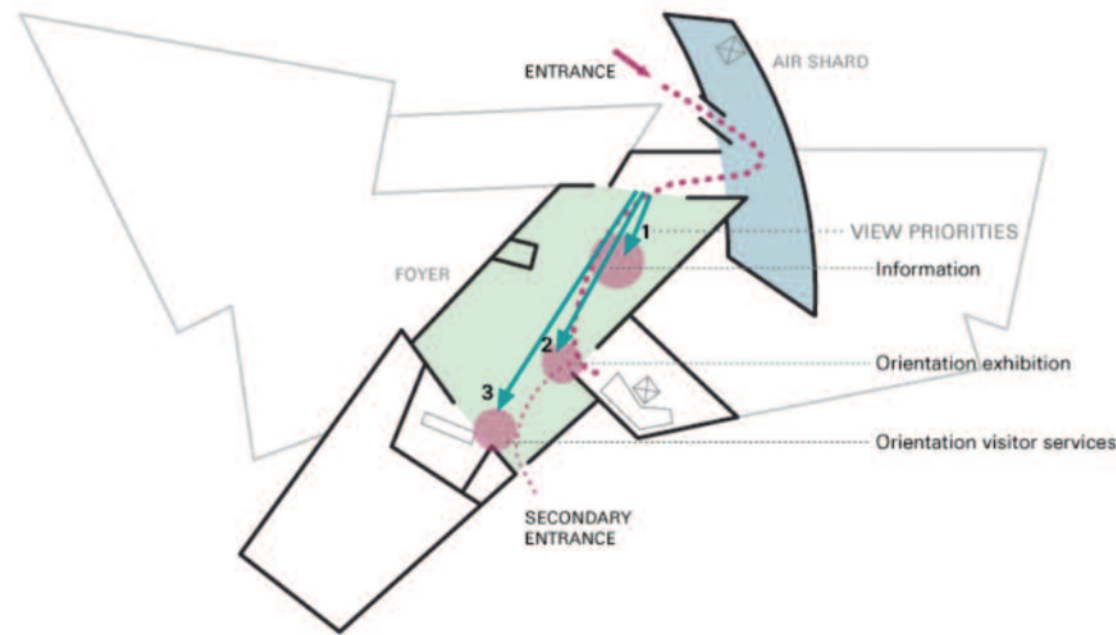


- The on-going changes to the area around the Museum continue to impact the visitor experience and to complicate issues of access and orientation. The growth of Media City means that the canal side of the Museum is increasingly populated and visitors increasingly arrive on foot. The addition of a second entrance on the canal side has helped here – though does cut across the original, highly choreographed sequence of spaces intended to structure the visitor experience. Any new plans for the entrances need to be developed with a total visitor experience in mind.
- At present, the fence around IWMN – a legacy of the original state of general dereliction in the surrounding area at the time of construction - is also adding to the confusion surrounding the approach to the Museum and is perhaps also constraining the ability of staff to choreograph the total visitor experience. If the fence was removed, the Museum would sit more confidently in its surroundings and visitors could orientate themselves in direct relation to the physical building. Indeed, rather than having to walk along the fence to approach the air shard and the original entrance, visitors could walk close to and around the building, experiencing its scale and dynamism. The architecture of IWM North is clearly exceptional compared to the buildings that surround it and those being developed in Media City. Releasing the building and allowing it to project out into its surroundings, would enable visitors to engage with it more directly.
- The approach to the Museum and the area in front of the original entrance, offers considerable scope for some level of interpretation of the building and the museum prior to the visit. In addition to a clear articulation of the visitor experience utilising the physical structure of the building, the open air site could be utilised to reveal key features of the Museum or reflections on the museum experience.

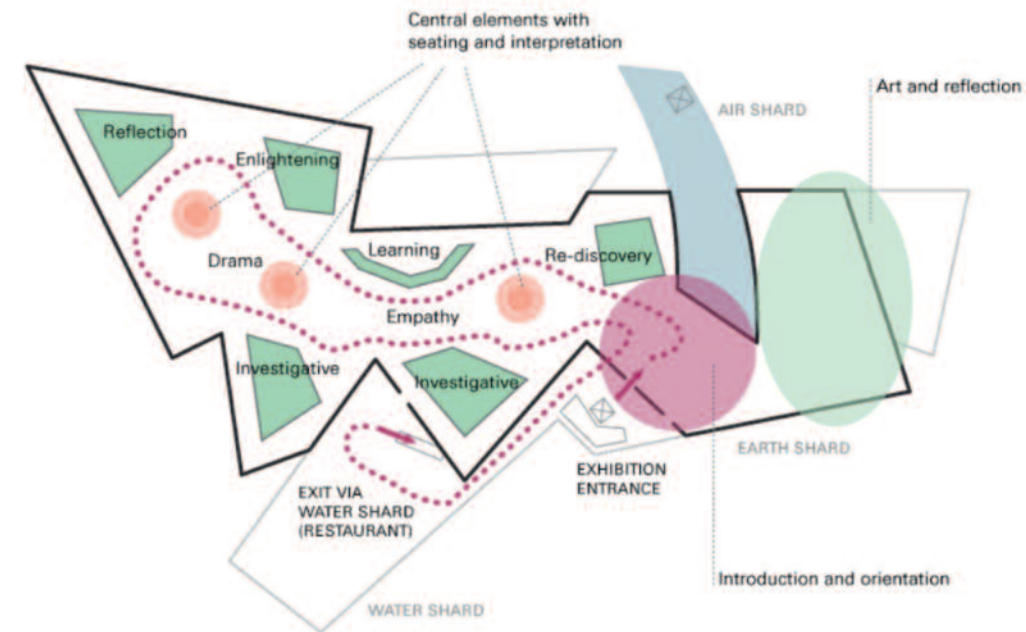


- Once inside the building, the foyer should involve a simple focus on providing information, orientating the visitor in relation to the exhibition experience, orientating the visitor in relation to the visitor services and, as discussed below, orientating the visitor in relation to the values and priorities of the Museum. The foyer is a preparation space and thus the feel of the foyer needs to be aligned with the content of the Museum. How might we use art or film or more traditional kinds of museum display here to inspire visitors, to help them understand IWMN as an organisation and to prepare them for the journey ahead?

- The desire to support visitors with clear orientation and explanations of the work of the Museum can also be extended to the Main Exhibition Space (MES). At present, visitors are thrown straight into a challenging and dark environment comprising art, artefacts, graphic interpretation and, every hour, the Big Picture Show (BPS). The MES should include some level of welcome as well as physical and conceptual orientation.



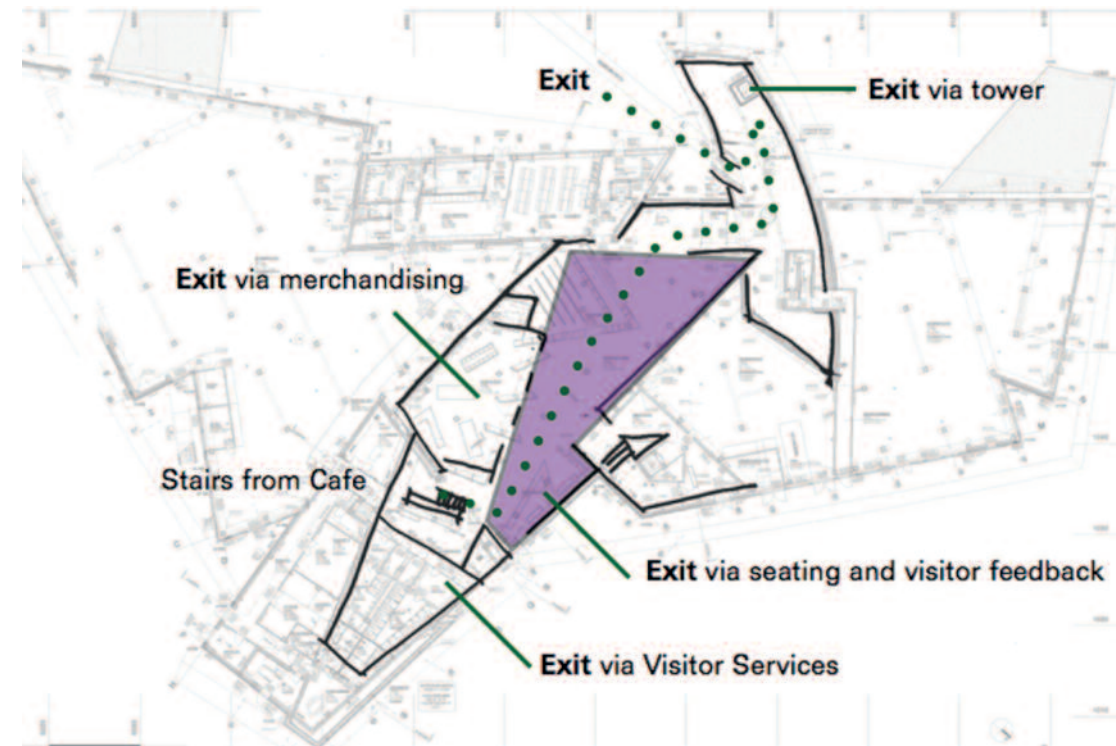
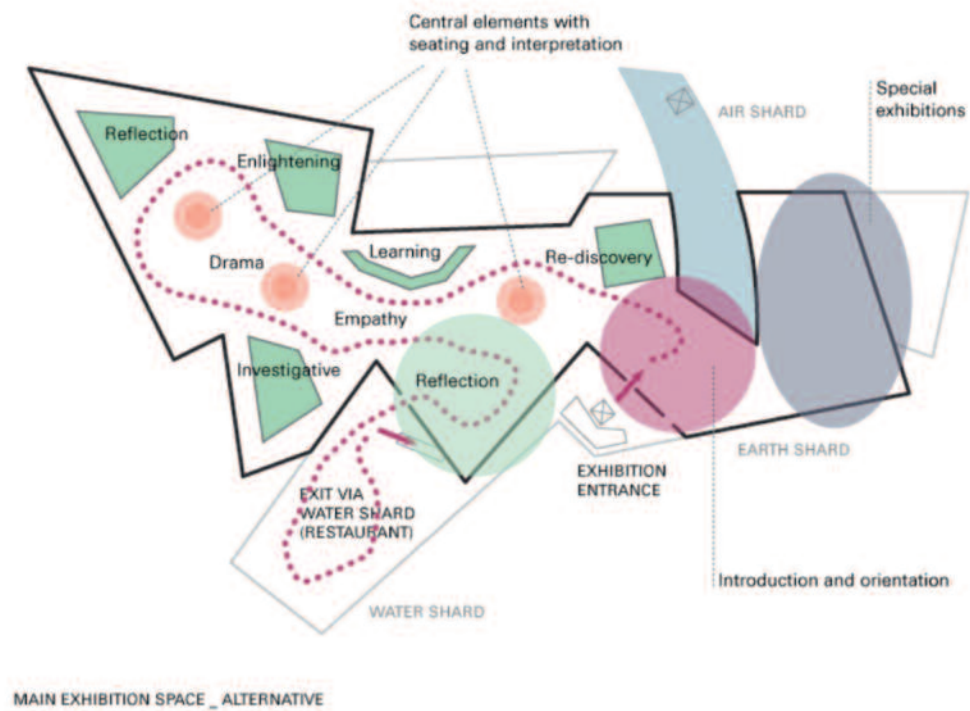
VIEW PRIORITIES FOYER



MAIN EXHIBITION SPACE

• The route around the building would work most effectively for visitors if it followed a single path – with room for deviation. Asking visitors to follow a route through the Water Shard would enable visitors to sense a progression in their visit and open up possibilities of utilising a range of techniques to exploit the relationship between water and a more reflective mode of experience.

Moving towards the exit via the Water Shard would also mean that the shop could be relocated towards the rear of the foyer and be encountered at the end of the visit along with the seating and other visitor services. Finally, exiting via the Air Shard and taking time to ascend the Tower, would create a 'grand finale' to the experience, generate opportunities for further reflection and dialogue and provide an opportunity to donate.





Structuring the visitor experience

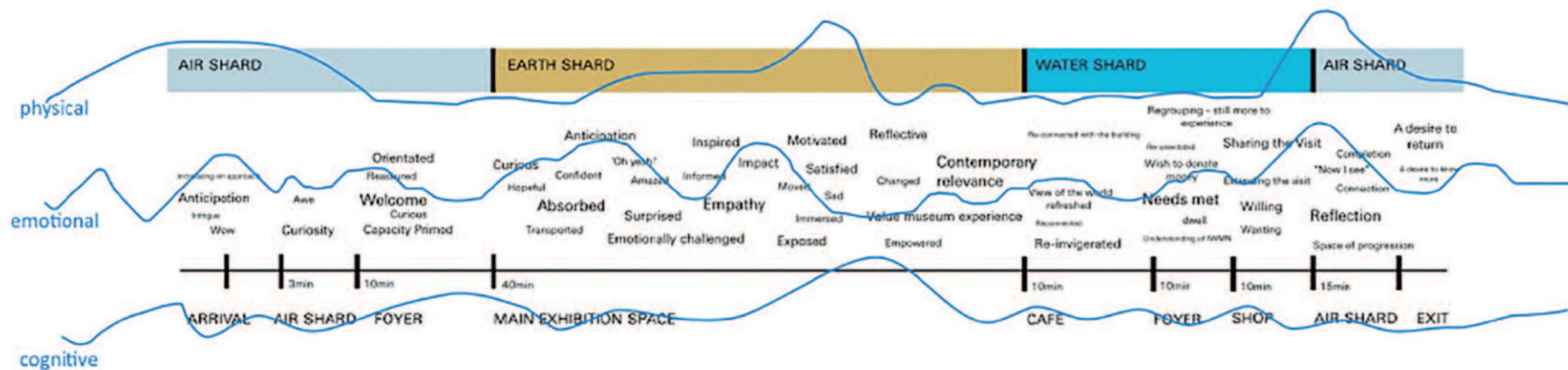
- In addition to providing the large overarching physical and conceptual patterns of understanding before and during the visit as a route to enabling visitors to successfully navigate a purposefully disorientating and disconcerting experience, the difficult content of the Museum demands that care is taken around interpretation and that certain structures are put in place to support visitors to make meaning; to support visitors as they physically, emotionally and cognitively map their experiences. At Imperial War Museum North this would mean offering opportunities for: detailed engagements with specific stories; layers of solid content; dialogue and exchange; curated opportunities for reflection; increased orientation throughout the visit; and a curated beginning, middle and end to the visitor's emotional, cognitive and physical journey.

- Visitors will be attracted to the Museum for a wide variety of reasons but these are likely to include a desire for emotional and/or cognitive engagement with a difficult subject as well as social interaction or entertainment. Providing opportunities for these desires to be met is crucial. The Museum is highly effective at generating emotion, but this needs to be balanced and, to some extent countered, by more concrete content developed for specific audiences and through which visitors can build detailed engagements with specific stories. This will not lessen the emotional effectiveness of the museum but, rather, will make the museum experience deeper and more memorable.

- Routes in to this detailed content for a range of learners will broaden out the attraction of the visitor experience and also enable a wide range of visitors to make choices about their experience and, importantly, engage at a meaningful level with specific stories and with other peoples' experiences. How might additional layers of content be woven into the museum experience? How, for example, might technology such as touch tables or mobile media be utilised to hold and make accessible detailed and multi-layered content? How might the silos be developed to encourage a whole range of forms of engagement from focused investigation to re-discovery and enlightenment?

- The Big Picture Show is a unique and popular aspect of the Museum experience. The majority of visitors stop moving whilst the show is running and seats have been placed around the edges of the space meaning that visitors are pushed to the side as the BPS takes over the space and their experience. Some small changes could dramatically alter the roles accorded to people in the space. For example, moving the seats to the centre of the space will animate the space and open up opportunities for more active viewing from visitors. Similarly, the locating of additional interpretation and resources in these central seating areas could offer groups of visitors an alternative to a purely cinematic experience.

- At present, opportunities for dialogue about specific topics or issues are limited to the few people who interact with the in-gallery explainers. An ethical approach which challenges the idealisation of experience and encourages the raising of questions rather than the forming of answers is more likely to meet IWM North’s values of being courageous, authoritative, relevant, and empathetic. It would also generate increased opportunities for discussion and debate. How could IWM North make more use of questions to enable dialogue and exchange? How could the Earth Shard be enlivened on a more regular basis with discussion and activity? How could new technologies be used to enable visitors to understand their thoughts and feelings in relation to those of others?
- Equally, giving visitors opportunities to reflect on what they have seen and how they have responded is important in supporting visitors to process their feeling and ideas and enabling them to leave the museum feeling complete. How might IWM North build in curated opportunities for reflection throughout the visitor experience? How might IWM North utilise the temporary art exhibitions, the Water Shard and the Air Shard as key focal points for a more reflective form of experience? How might reflection be acknowledged as a major part of the IWM North experience?
- At IWM North, we embark on an emotional, cognitive and physical journey. Presently, North excels at providing highly emotive and suggestive content though does not provide the levels of knowledge and understanding or harness the physical potential of the museum that would enable visitors to make sense of the Museum and the stories they encounter. At North, each stage of the visit – beginning, middle and end – can be planned in relation to the emotional, cognitive and physical journeys of visitors.



SHARING THE SECRET: AN ETHICAL APPROACH TO INVOLVING VISITORS IN STORIES OF WAR AND CONFLICT

Curating the physical

Imperial War Museum North is a new kind of museum which challenges our perceptions of what a war museum might be and utilises a whole range of media from architecture to film and from objects to text, to implicate visitors in deeply affective stories of war and conflict. At present, North delivers a highly emotive visitor experience but one which is lacking in intellectual depth and is giving out confused messages about its physical experience. The very specific nature of North – the interpretive architecture, the difficult content and the emphasis on emotion – necessitates the curation of a total visitor experience. From anticipation and approach, through to arrival, immersion, reflection and completion, the peculiarities of IWM North demand that an active and confident approach is taken to the choreographing of the visitor experience, physical, cognitive and emotional.

Visitor research at IWM North has highlighted the need for increased levels of content and opportunities for focus so that visitors can satisfy their cognitive desires and build the levels of understanding necessary to process their thoughts and feelings. This is absolutely valid. The highly emotive approach of the IWM North makes it imperative that North develops multiple and deeper layers of identifiable content and that it thinks deeply about how visitors can focus on and engage in an active way with this content in order to provide structure to the visit and support visitors to progress through the Museum. Providing opportunities for visitors to delve into the detail of specific stories and find intellectual content which helps them make sense of their thoughts and feelings is vital. Linked to this, moments of curated dialogue and reflection – some brief, others more fundamental – will also aid the processing of thoughts and opportunities to develop one's own thinking in relation to the thoughts of others.

But IWM North is also a highly physical experience. Research to date suggests that the physical material of museums and heritage sites is implicated in experience and will, at times, take precedence.¹¹ More research needs to be undertaken. However, it may be that in relation to museums and heritage sites, we need to counter the argument that one often hears in architecture; that is, that architecture is experienced 'in a state of distraction'. It may be that at museums and heritage sites, this is simply not the case. At North, the physicality of the experience is key and demands that the entire experience is approached as a physical and creative project. There is, for example, great scope to develop the open-air space outside the original entrance in order to prepare and inspire visitors. Similarly, the foyer can both orientate visitors and begin to include core content in a way that is reminiscent of spaces such as the Turbine Hall at Tate Modern. At North, the very specific nature of the Museum content and approach demands that all its spaces are curated and that the physical journey is mapped with the same level of care as the emotional journey. For this to work effectively, the building and the potential experience it holds, needs to be released from constraints such as exterior fencing and turnstiles and built more confidently into the overall visitor experience.

If the physicality of IWM North can work to embody and create the content of the Museum, delivering key interpretive messages, so the building can also provide the starting point for increased visitor orientation and mastery of the visit. The three shards can not only provide the starting point for a discussion about the impact of war and the way it shatters and interrupts lives, but it can also provide the physical framework for the visitor's journey. The architecture of the Museum is iconic and it is not a coincidence that the building – developed as a very specific story – comprises 3 very specific chapters and an epilogue. Explaining and visualising the visitor experience in relation to the Air Shard (Chapter 1), the Earth Shard (Chapter 2), the Water Shard (Chapter 3) and the Air Shard tower (Epilogue), is to utilise the building as a powerful memory device. The building can support visitors to map their experience.

The physical experience at North – the dynamic exterior architecture, the disorientating interior spaces, the all-consuming Big Picture Show, the calmness of the Water Shard and the panoramic view over the surrounding area from the Air Shard – is highly affective. If harnessed creatively and woven into an emotional and cognitive experience, it can play a key role in supporting visitors to map their journey towards and through the Museum.

11. See, for example, Bonnell and Simon, 'Difficult exhibitions and intimate encounters'; Witcomb 'Understanding the role of affect'; and G. Bagnall, 'Performance and performativity at heritage sites', *Museum and Society*, 1 (2), 2003, pp. 87-103.

Visiting IWM North was a challenging experience that will stay with me, but I also developed a number of new interests and will follow them up with some research. I hope to go back soon.

The Water Shard was bright and the simple graphics and additions to the space added to its light and reflective feel. Something later, we exited via the shop and also took the journey up the Air Shard to experience the amazing views over Media City. In the Earth Shard I know I will find the centre piece of the Museum, the main displays and the Big Picture Show. It is everything I was prepared for it to be – challenging, disorientating and upsetting where it was possible to read detailed comments from other visitors and to make sense of my own feelings in relation to theirs. I only experienced a small part of the Earth Shard, but intend to return for more. After 50 minutes, we passed into the Water Shard for some refreshments and also found there a whole series of resources in a comfy reflection space. The Water Shard was bright and the simple graphics and additions to the space added to its light and reflective feel. Something later, we exited via the shop and also took the journey up the Air Shard to experience the amazing views over Media City.

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Approach the exterior architecture. Inspired by the use of the Museum. Artworks with fascinating and orientating interpretation points in the foyer – the foyer is dark and suggestive of the rest of the work to particular curators and priorities of the IWM North. In the Earth Shard I know I will find the centre piece of the Museum, the main displays and the Big Picture Show. It is everything I was prepared for it to be – challenging, disorientating and upsetting where it was possible to read detailed comments from other visitors and to make sense of my own feelings in relation to theirs. I only experienced a small part of the Earth Shard, but intend to return for more. After 50 minutes, we passed into the Water Shard for some refreshments and also found there a whole series of resources in a comfy reflection space. The Water Shard was bright and the simple graphics and additions to the space added to its light and reflective feel. Something later, we exited via the shop and also took the journey up the Air Shard to experience the amazing views over Media City.