

Kaisa Mäki-Petäjä

Aesthetic Engagement in Museum Exhibitions



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For
mom and dad,
Taneli
and Alex

ABSTRACT

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First and foremost, this dissertation examines museum exhibitions' potential for encouraging aesthetic engagement in the visitor. The study builds on the concept of aesthetic engagement, as it has been defined by Arnold Berleant in *Art and Engagement* (1991), emphasising aesthetic experience as a situation of continuity, unity, and coherence between the perceiver and the object. Exhibitions are examined as aesthetic fields within which the visitors imaginatively act with the world and the exhibition, creating an aesthetic experience. The study focuses especially on the spatial relationships between an exhibition and its visitors, how these relationships can be created through spatial design, and how they can be used to create a sense of place. In this, the concept of garden is used as an analogy for museum exhibitions. Links are drawn between museum exhibitions and gardens as conscious constructions, purposefully designed and built places, that are representations of the larger world or of specific portions of that world. Attention is especially paid to the gardens' intention to address their visitors as embodied beings. Methodologically this dissertation is a study of descriptive aesthetics as a method of analytical research approach in aesthetics. Because of this, the study approaches its subject phenomenologically, following a narrative, dialogical form where the personal experiences of the researcher are utilised as the seeds of philosophical enquiry. These subjective experiences are compared with theories and writings on aesthetic experience, architecture, and philosophy, representing contemporary thinking in aesthetics, phenomenology, and cognitive sciences. As a result, the study sheds light on the nature of aesthetic experience as action in reciprocal relationship with the world and on museum exhibitions as spaces of human experience.

Keywords: aesthetic experience, aesthetic engagement, descriptive aesthetics, phenomenology, museum exhibition design, reciprocity, *genius loci*.

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My opponent, Prof. Yuriko Saito, was also a member of the group. Although we only met two times over the course of the project, her comments and attitude were an inspiration for my thinking. It is partly her example that encouraged me to follow my instinct when facing harsh criticism. Also, her review comments opened my eyes to themes I had not realised were already present in my writing. The comments of my other reviewer, Anne Aurasmaa, Ph.D., were also most inspiring. Both reviewers made me feel proud of my work.

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also became a crucial part of this thesis, as you will discover when reading the pages that follow. I am proud of your work and you should be too.

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	3
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	5
CONTENTS.....	7
1 INTRODUCTION.....	11
1.1 Intersubjectivity and the Lifeworld.....	15
1.2 Presence.....	20
1.3 Methodology I: Descriptive Aesthetics.....	22
1.4 Methodology II: Embodiment.....	29
1.5 The Museum-goer and the Environment as Habitat.....	35
1.6 Garden as an Analogy.....	37
2 MUSEUM AS A PHENOMENON.....	43
2.1 From Object to	47
2.2 The Authenticity of an Experience and the Two Princely Palaces....	53
2.3 Museums and Rituals.....	72
2.4 Museum Exhibitions as Ritual Routes – Some Examples.....	80
2.5 Rethinking Museums as Ritual Sites.....	89
2.6 The Garden as an Analogy for Exhibitions as Ritual Sites.....	101
3 PRODUCING PRESENCE – LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR A PATH BETWEEN WORLDS.....	109
3.1 The Role and Importance of Haptic Visuality.....	118
3.2 Touch and the Museum Ritual.....	124
3.3 Engagement and Scarcity of the Tactile.....	131
3.4 The Peripheral, Genius Loci and the Thickness of Place.....	139
3.5 The Earth as Path.....	149
3.6 Walking in the Medieval Earth – The Floor of the Museum of Medieval Stockholm.....	159
3.7 On Board – The Floors of Vasa Museum and the Kon-Tiki Museum.....	167
3.6 Creating the Thickness of a Place.....	174
4 COMING INTO THE PRESENCE OF THINGS.....	185
4.1 Depth and Presence.....	191
4.2 Presence of the Absent.....	196
4.3 Entrances to Other Worlds.....	203
4.4 Descents, Ascents, and Thresholds.....	217

	The Bridge over to the Savannah in The Natural History Museum, Helsinki.....	230
	<i>The Story of Bones</i> at The Natural History Museum, Helsinki.....	232
	Fenced-off History in The National Museum of Finland, Helsinki.....	234
	The Exhibition of Ecclesiastical History, The National Museum of Finland, Helsinki.....	235
4.5	Pauses and the Rhythm of Space.....	238
4.6	The Gravitational Pull of Objects.....	245
4.7	Animating Space into a Place.....	259
5	CONCLUSIONS.....	275
5.1	The Aesthetic Nature of the Museum.....	276
5.2	Embodied Experience.....	278
5.3	Descriptive Aesthetics.....	280
5.4	Imagination, Museum Exhibitions and Engagement.....	285
5.5	Paths, Body, Reciprocity, and Engagement in Museum Exhibitions.....	287
5.6	Touch, Layers, and Presence.....	290
5.7	A Change of Pace and Final Thoughts.....	291
	ILLUSTRATIONS.....	295
	REFERENCES.....	299

1 INTRODUCTION

For myself, I always write about Dublin, because if I can get to the heart of Dublin I can get to the heart of all the cities of the world. In the particular is contained the universal.

James Joyce

It all culminated in the frustration I felt while visiting museum exhibitions. I had gradually grown tired of them. Too often I found myself having to work hard in order to maintain my interest and attention throughout an entire exhibition. This did not seem to have anything to do with the type of the exhibition I was visiting. I found myself getting mentally tired of looking at paintings and just glancing the vitrines of ancient ceramics. The excitement and intrigue I had discovered in museums as a child had been almost completely lost somewhere along the way. I found myself getting frustrated and even bored – both feelings that seemed improper to be felt in museums which are, after all, special places that deserve special attention. They are places that provide me with knowledge by giving me an opportunity to encounter objects, cultures and so on in a material form – not just in words or pictures printed in books but as actual, substantial things. Museum objects are placed there for this specific purpose. I am supposed to encounter them in this light, to actively negotiate and form a relationship with the other that these objects represent. Museum exhibitions are environments that facilitate this meeting as a bodily engagement in its entirety and not just as an imaginative, conceptual experience.

I, of course, blamed myself. It must have been my lack of determination that caused the problem; I was failing the educational endeavours of museum exhibitions everywhere. But every now and again I ran into (forgive the pun) an exhibition that rejuvenated the excitement and intrigue I was missing, and I began to think that maybe the boredom and annoyance had something to do with the exhibitions themselves, and not solely with me. I made an effort to ask *why*

more often and to be more precise about it. What had I felt prior to the frustration? I had felt disconnected with the exhibition. Why did I feel disconnected? Was it because I did not find the subject matter particularly interesting? Was I simply tired? I was often interested in the subject and the objects present, but I found it difficult to connect with them.

As I gave myself the permission to be more critical of the exhibits I was visiting, I began to question what I actually wanted and expected from the different kinds of museums and exhibitions. I decided not to automatically assume that the fault was mine but, borrowing some inspiration from the principles of interface design, recognised the responsibility of the designer to do everything in their power to facilitate an effortless user experience; a perfect user interface is one you do not notice at all. Incidentally, as I later found out, Stephen T. Asma had already made a similar observation: ‘the art of museum presentation, if it is to be effective rather than distracting, *should* be invisible.’¹ I am greatly in debt to Steward Brand’s book, *How Buildings Learn – What Happens After They’re Built* (published in 1994) and the TV-series based on it. It was his insight that gave me the confidence to expect and demand comfortable usability from buildings and surroundings. Thereafter, finding an exhibition either engaging or tiresome, I tried my best to first question my own mood, attitude and expectations and then pinpoint what it actually was that I found to be either engaging or annoying. What was I experiencing? What were the features in that environment that contributed to that experience? How did they affect me? Was there something I would like to change? What was the ‘something more’ that I was looking for? Was my mind getting distracted because my body grew tired, or was it my body getting weary because my mind kept drifting? In order to find that out, I tried to recollect how and what I had felt and liked in exhibitions that had left a mark on my memories and character. After (quite) awhile, I began to suspect that my annoyance had something to do with lack of participation. What I was missing was something that could be best described as sharing, communing in a sense – though that might be putting it a bit strongly² – with the world of the exhibition in question.

On that note and in the light of what I am about to say next, I believe it is necessary to make a small detour before continuing. I said above that I borrowed the ideas of interface design and user interfaces, and I truly did, but I think this merits a slight clarification. It is definitely uncomfortable to use the word and idea of user(s) in connection to architecture, museums, art and so on.

¹ Asma, Stephen T. (2003) *Stuffed Animals and Pickled Heads – The Culture and Evolution of Natural History Museums*, 1st edit. 2001. Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. xii.

² I am aware of the strong spiritual aspect of the denotation of the word. What I wish to express here with the use of ‘commune’ are the feelings involved and aroused in the formation of a community: empathy, togetherness, participation and contribution, in a way the feelings of a shared existence.

Do I use an art work like I use a knife? Do I use a knife like I use a painting? Stating that I borrow from interface design, I mean that I borrow the idea without adopting it as such. I believe that the idea of a user interface being good enough only when you do not notice it at all is a good general principle in design. A door is usable when you do not have to think whether you need to push or pull in order to open it. There is no difference in sitting in a good chair for 15 minutes or for two hours. A well written text – and I am aware of pushing the concept of design here – is fluent to read. The fundamental experience in all these instances is that the boundary between the user and the object has diminished to such an extent that it has become unnoticeable. You come in instead of opening the door and coming in. You listen to the lecture, the story engrosses you, you slice the bread. The tool, what ever it may be, is used so intuitively that it is almost as if it has become a part of the user; it is as if the mediating object that facilitates an activity has disappeared and you find yourself in direct contact with the actual object. Stephen T. Asma puts it like this in *Stuffed Animals and Pickled Heads*:

Museum presentations are three-dimensional windows into the world of ideas. But while observers successfully perceive and contemplate the factual tidbits that are placed in focus by the “window,” they frequently fail to notice the presentation frame itself. This is not surprising, since the art of museum presentation, if it is to be effective rather than distracting, *should* be invisible.³

Perhaps the best way to describe what I am aiming at is to recount one such experience. What I had cherished the most as a child when visiting a museum was the feeling of an encounter. I still remember vividly the all-embracing sensation of standing next to the vertebra of a whale in the Museum of Natural History in Oulu. The way it lay there on the floor on the same level with me, yet standing almost as tall as me (I really was quite young at the time), I could imagine the texture and the weight of the bone even though I cannot remember ever touching it. I may have, though, for there was nothing to separate us from each other. The significance of this recollection is that even if I do not remember ever touching the bone, I can still clearly remember the feeling of shared bodily presence. I was there with the bone which in size was comparable to me, and yet in reality it was just one small part of a huge animal (I had seen pictures of whales in books and on TV). The living whale, though absent in reality, became present through that realisation and comparison. It was not only me and the vertebra that were there; the diving, surfing whale was there with us too and its existence was equally concrete in an experience of presence. For a moment I felt, or so I imagined, how it felt to be a whale. Somehow I seemed to have succeeded (so it feels even to day) in crossing the boundaries of our species-specific expe-

³ Asma (2003) p. xii.

periences of embodied *being*, on which Thomas Nagel meditated in his famous article on the dilemma of consciousness and the mind-body problem, 'What Is It Like to Be a Bat?'⁴ This dilemma is at the heart of creating museum exhibitions.

The aim of my dissertation is to search for the conditions in which this markedly bodily experience can occur. To narrow down the sphere of my investigation, I will approach the subject of museum exhibitions from within the body, the mind, and the senses; especially from the viewpoint of touch and the tactile, the tangible and the palpable; and I aim to grasp the way embodied experience touches the conscious mind. While museum exhibitions are the field in which my research takes place, many of the elements are excluded from this study. Texts and words are not included other than as visual elements and as a rule I will not be concerned with the informational content or the literary merits of the exhibition texts and writings, although I readily admit that they do have an effect on the experience – when they are read and studied. Similarly I will leave out individual objects, except in cases where, like in the aforementioned example, a single object or a group of objects is elemental for the experience. Even then I will not deal with the issues commonly connected with museum objects to any particular degree. Issues concerning the light in which objects are presented, the museum's power over the objects they own, colonialism, gender and so on have been thoroughly examined by other researchers and philosophers.⁵ These issues have, of course, a bearing on my work, but they are not in focus here, although I will graze the surface of these issues.

Having said that, I go to museums, regardless of their field of expertise, to meet the other – not the mystical, indescribable other or a negation of me, but the other as my counterpart. I go in to be in the presence of a painting, a walrus, a stone ax, or the Earth's rotation around its axis as demonstrated by Foucault's pendulum. Much in the sense of the phenomenological tradition, I go in to contemplate on my identity by mirroring it in contact with these counterparts. When I move and change, my reflection on them changes. When they change, I cast back their changed reflection on me, thereby creating a new reflection on them; it is a dance of action and reaction. I go in to *meet with* the other, not to define something as a distanced, removed, alienated other. In this sense and in the present context, I refer with 'the other' to that which aids me in broadening the scope of my experience in and of the world. Or as Husserl wrote in the *Cartesian Meditations*:

⁴ Nagel, Thomas (1974) 'How Is It Like to Be a Bat?', *Philosophical Review* vol. 83 no. 4/1974, pp. 435-450.

⁵ E.g. Karp, Ivan & Lavine, Steven D. (edit.) (1991) *Exhibiting Cultures – The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington/London; Messias Carbonell, Bettina (edit.) (2004) *Museum Studies – An Anthology of Contexts*, Blackwell Publishing, Malden, MA, USA. Both books contain a broad selection of writers and issues.

The other is a “mirroring” of my own self and yet not a mirroring proper, an analogue of my own self and yet again not an analogue in the usual sense.⁶

1.1 Intersubjectivity and the Lifeworld

I do not know for sure to what extent other museum-goers do this or are aware of experiences similar or comparable to my experiences, but some museums appear to be built on these kind of experiences, namely on the experiences of identification. For example, according to Jeffrey Karl Ochsner, The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, relies heavily on the visitor’s ability and readiness to identify with the people living during the Second World War and the Holocaust.⁷ He concludes that this identification does not necessarily happen consciously, which does seem to be a reasonable conclusion: from the beginning, museums have created impressions of hierarchy and social structure, thereby implying different roles for different viewers – an issue into which I will take a closer look in the next chapter. Ochsner also suggests that it is questionable whether this overcoming of the sense of otherness can be forced upon a visitor. Therefore, throughout this dissertation I will work from the premise that while a museum exhibition can suggest or can try to persuade a visitor to have a certain experience in or attitude towards the exhibition, it is never guaranteed to happen in every or even most cases.

‘Otherness’ appears to be most often identified with the negative in anthropology, sociology and gender studies, but also in museology where it is strongly associated with the colonialist thinking and representation of non-Western cultures. For example, the museum theorist Ivan Karp describes exhibitions as ‘privileged arenas for presenting images of self and “other,”’⁸ which Jane Marstine clarifies by writing that ‘[m]useums construct the “other” to construct and justify the “self.”’⁹ This certainly is a risk in museum and many other

⁶ Husserl, Edmund (1982) *Cartesian Meditations – An Introduction to Phenomenology*, 7th impression, trans. Dorion, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, Cairns Hague/Boston/London, pp. 94.

⁷ Ochsner, Jeffrey Karl (1995) ‘Understanding the Holocaust through The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum’, *Journal of Architectural Education* vol. 48 no. 4, May 1995, pp. 240-249.

⁸ Karp, Ivan (1991). ‘Culture and Representation’, in Karp & Lavine (edit.) (1991), pp. 11-15, quote p. 15.

⁹ Marstine, Jane (2006b) ‘Introduction’, In Marstine, Jane (2006a) *New Museum Theory And Practice – An Introduction*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford/Cambridge, pp. 1-36, quote p. 14.

contexts, but the separation of the self and the other is also an elemental part of our mental development and, in my mind, a crucial constituent of our individual independence and critical thinking. If we do not have a healthy sense of the self as an individual, can we recognise, for example, ethically questionable thinking and oppose it? Though it is absolutely essential to be aware of the dangers that the construction of otherness can create, it should not be considered as an entirely bad thing. Partly because of this persistent belief, I wish in this dissertation to explore the museum as a place where us and the other, that which easily remains distant in our everyday life, can converge. In other words, museums, due to their nature as conservational establishments, do remove or at least distance objects from their original context, thereby creating something that Ochsner describes, with a notable lyrical sense, as 'apartness.'¹⁰ What I am more interested in here are those moments when the sense of distance, or not remoteness but removedness, is replaced by a sense of connection and coming together.

What is it that is expressed as a gap between the visitor and the object and how to close it? Does it need to be closed? It certainly is in one part a physical attribute of the museum exhibition space: the rope that fences out the visitor or the glass that seals off the reaching hand, and it has often been described as something unwanted. But it is not that straightforward: it is that distance that articulates my situation here, in this place, in this spot, in this time, and places the object, or the other, over there. It is the existence of the distance that encourages my imagination to take the leap. Without it, I would not be able to explore myself in the light and shadow of the other.

The second part of its character is the culture and its habits that forbid the touch but also teach that refraining from touching is a way to show respect, 'admiration from distance.' But there is more to it. These are manifestations of something else that underlies them. This underlying level can be seen as being connected to questions concerning Modernity and its dualistic, deterministic world view, but its nature evaded me for quite a while until I began rereading David Abram's *The Spell of the Sensuous*. In it, Abram begins his theoretical contemplation of the human beings' relationship with the natural world, of how we came to see it as 'inanimate' and of the problematics of this relationship through Husserl and other phenomenologists. Abram describes how Husserl's phenomenology was an attempt not to explain the world as the mathematics-based sciences aspire 'but to describe as closely as possible the way the world makes itself evident to awareness, the way things arise in our direct, sensorial experience.'¹¹ Husserl's concern, and that of many other thinkers' since, was that these sciences, while studying the world, consistently overlook not only the

¹⁰ Ochsner (1995) p. 242.

¹¹ Abram, David (1997) *The Spell of the Sensuous*, Vintage Books/Random House, New York/Toronto, p. 35.

fact that we are surrounded by that world but ‘our ordinary, everyday experiences’ of it.¹² In their (understandable) eagerness to distance themselves from the subjective, the scientists had, Husserl argued, reduced the world into a mathematically determined, quantifiable object and consequently had forgotten or had chosen to forget that they too are living in that subjective world and being subsequently affected by it.

Husserl called this immediate, subjective ‘real world’ – the ‘intertwined matrix of sensations and perception, [the] collective field of experience lived through from many different angles’¹³ – the lifeworld. The lifeworld, though immediate and prior to all thoughts, theories and analyses about it, is ‘the vital and dark ground of all our objectivity’ and ‘always already there’ when we turn towards it for the purpose of study.¹⁴ An attempt to be subjective is to try to remove oneself from the lifeworld, a largely futile effort to create a distance between the researcher and the researched which would enable one to be a disinterested observer. But ‘[t]he living world,’ writes Abram,

– this ambiguous realm that we experience in anger and joy, in grief and in love – is both the soil in which all our sciences are rooted and the rich humus into which their results ultimately return, whether as nutrients or as poisons.¹⁵

According to Husserl, it is phenomenology that in turning towards ‘the things themselves’ attempts to articulate this unescapable ground of other sciences.¹⁶

To counter the accusations of solipsism, Husserl described the phenomenal world as the phenomenal field which is shared by subjective bodies, as the loci of individual awarenesses within the field of appearances.¹⁷ Although we can experience our own body only from the inside and the bodies of others from the outside, we can still empathise with them. In Abrams’ words:

...Husserl discerned that there was an inescapable affinity, or affiliation, between these other bodies and one’s own. The gestures and expressions of these other bodies, viewed from without, echo and resonate one’s own bodily movements and gestures, experienced from within. By an associative “empathy,” the embodied subject comes to recognize these other bodies as other centers of experience, other subjects.¹⁸

¹² Ibid., p. 32.

¹³ Ibid., p. 39.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 40.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 34.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 35.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 37.

¹⁸ Ibid. Abram refers to Husserl’s *Cartesian Meditations – An Introduction to Phenomenology* (1960).

Thus the phenomenal field is not solely subjective but ‘inhabited by *multiple* subjectivities,’ not an ‘isolated haunt of a solitary ego, but a collective landscape, constituted by other experiencing subjects as well as by oneself.’¹⁹ We are surrounded by this field and as we move and function within it, we are not only affected by it but also affect it. We can see how our actions touch other subjects and the things of the world and how they in turn touch us. ‘The world and I reciprocate one another,’ writes Abram.²⁰ As I very carefully walk down a narrow flight of stairs and see others move in same manner, I know (subconsciously) that we inhabit the same lifeworld; we are joined through intersubjectivity. Intersubjectivity also helps stabilise and solidify the phenomenal world: ‘This experienced solidity is precisely sustained by the continual encounter with others, with other embodied subjects, other centers of experience.’²¹

The solidifying effect of intersubjectivity resonates with the ability of touch to solidify visual experiences as both material objects and perceptions. Even more, it underlines the importance of embodied experiences. I look more closely into the importance of touch in our lives and for learning in chapter 2, but the reason behind the importance of touch in museum exhibitions is more wide-reaching than that: our body and self-image. If we take it to be, as the contemporary museum ideology does, the purpose of museums to support their visitors in finding their roots, in broadening their horizons, in exercising self-reflection, or in other words, in helping them move towards self-realisation, then they must address their visitors as embodied entities. A museum exhibition should therefore be a phenomenal field within which the visitors could encounter other embodied subjects and, more precisely, it should be an aesthetic field enticing engagement.

The distance created by the emphasis on the visual can therefore be described, in some cases, as a separation of the lifeworlds of the visitor and the objects. In other cases, it seems as if the object has become disconnected from the visitor’s lifeworld. In other words, like in the sea and islands metaphor used in the next chapter, the object is no longer fully situated within the visitor’s phenomenal field: the immediacy of the visitor’s world does not continue to include the object. The continuation of this immediacy does not take place in the field of direct vision but in the periphery of experience. ‘The life-world is (...) peripherally present in any thought or activity we undertake,’ explains Abram.²² It is an assumed condition, ‘the world we count on without necessarily paying it much attention.’ We also assume it to be a field we share with others, and we are sensitive, although unconsciously, to it. Therefore we experience a discontinuity in it as a separating, not traversable distance that hinders our

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 37.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 33.

²¹ Ibid., p. 39.

²² Ibid., p. 40.

ability to associate and form affinities with what ever exists on the opposite side of the rift. Reciprocation is no longer possible, and this creates a feeling of isolation.

Describing Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, Abram calls this reciprocation 'the body's silent conversation with things.'²³ Abram gives an agreeable description of this reciprocating conversation:

By this process my sensing body gradually attunes itself to the style of this other presence – to the *way* of this stone, or tree, or table – as the other seems to adjust itself to my own style and sensitivity. In this manner the simplest thing may become a world for me, as conversely, the thing or being comes to take its place more deeply in *my* world.²⁴

There is the constant murmur of the lifeworld around us. An acquaintance of mine, who has through his whole life lived by the riverside, next to rapids, once explained how travelling made him discover the importance of the sound of the river in his life. On a trip long ago he felt growing uneasiness and noticed that something was missing. He could not explain the persistent feeling which disappeared the minute he arrived home. That moment, he understood it: he had been missing the sound of the river, its constant thrumming. And this is what I believe happens when we are not able to engage with an object, or even with an entire exhibition: it is this attuning that fails to take place. For some reason the silent conversation of our bodies has lost some of its fluency. The constant dialogue between the embodied us and the readily, unfailingly present lifeworld and its things has suffered a loss of continuity. Things do not become a world for us; they do not take their place in our world. Things remain observable but inevitably withdrawn from us.

²³ Ibid., p. 49.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 52.

1.2 Presence

The feelings of presence in experiences such as the one described above share a trait of character or a quality which, if not truly unique, has a flavour of its own. It is an experience in which usually non-presentational qualities, or qualities that are not present readily in the material, become describable and experienceable.²⁵ For example, in the case of the whale bone, it became, in a way, possible for me to share the bodily experience of the whale. Of course it must be assumed that my experience had nothing in common with the true and actual experience of being a whale, but instead of being accurate, the power of such experiences lies in their ability to enable one to “‘imagine’ and ‘feel’ how it is to be”²⁶ a whale-like creature of the sea, and in so doing being able to gain a deeper understanding not only of the whale but of the world and oneself’s place in it.

As said, my main interest is in that experience of connection or connectedness, in that moment of presence the literary theorist Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht describes as moment of intensity, where the state of being-in-the-world suddenly appears to us.²⁷ A poet might pronounce those experiences as revelations, and there does exist a quality of disclosure in those moments. Something has just become discernible, an intuitive comprehension of the world seems suddenly possible. How do these experiences come to be? What generates them and what kind of experiences they actually are?

I will look more closely into the concept of presence in the third chapter, but here I will stick to describing these experiences as aesthetic in the sense of Arnold Berleant’s aesthetic engagement. In *Art and Engagement*, Berleant presented his theory of aesthetic field and aesthetic engagement as a replacement for older conceptions of art, the aesthetic, and experience – a subject to which he returned in *The Aesthetics of Environment* (1992) and *Re-thinking Aesthetics* (2004). While he was interested in renewing the field of aesthetics and particularly in formulating a concept that would be able to accommodate the way new art forms especially relate to their audiences and to the idea of the object of art it-

²⁵ Not everything can be described or represented directly. Sometimes things can be present through absence, a state of affairs that Alva Noë examines in, *Varieties of Presence* (2012), Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA. I return to this in more detail in chapter 3.

²⁶ Mordhorst, Camilla (2009) ‘The Power of Presence: The ‘Cradle to Grave’ Installation at the British Museum’, in *Museum and Society* Nov. 2009 7/3, pp. 194-205, quote p. 203.

²⁷ Gumbrecht, Hans Ulrich (2004) *Production of Presence – What Meaning and Can Not Convey*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, pp. 97-99.

self, his ideas are applicable to museum experiences too (he has devoted a chapter to museums as participatory environments in *The Aesthetics of Environment*).

Throughout *Art and Engagement*, Berleant underlines the notions of unity and continuity as opposed to separation and detachment. He describes aesthetic engagement as something that ‘joins the perceiver and object into a perceptual unity’ and establishes a coherence between them.²⁸ Contrary to the idea of a disinterested attitude towards art, Berleant demonstrates how ‘art does not consist of objects but of situations in which experiences occur.’²⁹ This ‘integrated and unified experience’ happens in the aesthetic field that consists of four equal dimensions – the creative, the appreciative, the objective, and the performative – and their four equal representatives – the creator, the perceiver, the object, and the performer.³⁰ As these are experiences that occur in specific situations, Berleant writes, they do ‘not rest on the separation of an art object from the appreciator and on its isolation in a sacred space.’³¹ Quite the contrary: ‘Most important for us as creators and appreciators of arts is the contribution we ourselves make, a contribution that is active and constitutive. That is why I call this an aesthetics of engagement, a participatory aesthetics.’³² In other words, aesthetic engagement and experience take place when the four dimensions are present and work in unison, and this experience has a marked feeling of inclusiveness.³³

The experiences I will be looking into over the course of this dissertation are akin to this. They take place in a specific situation, the museum exhibition. They are created by the museum³⁴ for the visitor to appreciate. This creator has produced the object in a manner that allows, encourages, and requires the appreciators’ active participation without which the actual objective cannot be realised. Thus Berleant’s description of the aesthetic field is comparable with a museum experience and vice versa, especially when considering contemporary thinking in museum education and exhibition design, where active visitor participation – often described as engagement, although it does not have the same

²⁸ Berleant, Arnold (1991) *Art and Engagement*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, p. 46. He extended the idea continuity and unity to include experiences of nature in *The Aesthetics of Environment*.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 4, 49.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 4.

³³ ‘Art is a state of encounter,’ writes Nicolas Bourriaud in *Relational Aesthetics*. 2002, p. 18. Trans. by Simon Pleasance & Fronza Woods with Mathieu Copleand from the French *Esthétique relationnelle* (1998), Les presses du réel, France.

³⁴ Or whoever designed and put up the exhibition in the museum. Not all museum exhibitions are created by the museums that displays them. They may be produced by, for example, another museum or by an agency specialising in exhibition design.

meaning given to the term by Berleant – is a central theme. Today museums, ideally at least, seek to form what could be called a partnership with their visitors. Like many artists who require their audience’s collaboration in order to realise the actual art work³⁵, museums seek to enlist their visitors much to the same end. This, of course, is not an entirely new aspect of museum exhibitions. Like statues, that have always had a three dimensional quality in both form and in the way they are meant to be appreciated, museum exhibitions too have always required a degree of bodily participation from their visitors, just as art, according to Nicolas Bourriaud, has always been about relations³⁶. Like a statue should be seen from several directions in order to be fully appreciated, to properly visit an exhibition the visitor must move around the museum space. It is prudent to notice that although ‘participation,’ ‘engagement,’ ‘visitor experience,’ and such are subjects now much talked about in the museum world, they are hardly a new invention. Also, although it is, perhaps, easy to conclude so, I am not suggesting that museums have necessarily changed in some radical, profound sense. Those aspects of art that led Berleant to write his book have always been a part of art, but become increasingly prominent over the last century or so. In like manner have comparable aspects gained more weight within museums.

1.3 Methodology I: Descriptive Aesthetics

The comparability of aesthetic engagement and those museum experiences I am interested in is one reason for choosing aesthetics as the framework for this study. My interest here is experience as an event that has the capability to leave a mark or an impression on us who are in its presence, not the experience of acquiring a skill or becoming more skilful. Experiencing in this sense of the word has a somewhat fleeting character.³⁷ Not only in the sense that many, especially

³⁵ This aspect of modern and contemporary art inspired Berleant to form his theory of aesthetic field. As examples of art works that require the viewer’s participation he gives ‘[t]he patterns and colors of Yaacov Agam’s corrugated paintings change as the viewer walks by, and the paintings are entirely different when seen from the right or the left, the transformation itself becoming part of the experience of the work. Appreciating certain sculptures requires walking into or through them, climbing upon them, or repositioning their parts.’ Berleant, A. 1991, pp. 26-27. Also, Bourriaud’s *Relational Aesthetics* deals with such artworks.

³⁶ Bourriaud (2002), see e.g. pp. 22 & 27.

³⁷ The Buddhist tradition describes experience as a river that is always in motion, changing and unstoppable, and unescapable, which I find a fitting metaphor. Also, Heraclitus expressed similar sentiments when he stated that one cannot step twice into the same river. (Plato quotes him in *Cratylus*, 402a.)

everyday experiences often flee past us without getting actively noticed, but also in the sense that it is often regretfully difficult to relay our experiences to someone afterwards. In *Everyday Aesthetics*, Yuriko Saito notes ‘that an aesthetic reaction can also be a seemingly insignificant, and sometimes almost automatic, response we form in our everyday life.’³⁸ It is far easier to enjoy the sunset and point out to your fellow observer how beautiful it is, just now, than it is to try to describe it to someone at work on the following day. It is often difficult to describe such experiences even to ourselves, to say how it felt, to verbalise the experience that was expressively *felt*. The human experience appears as endlessly complex with countless variables contributing to each instance of it, and to make the matters even worse for a researcher, many of these variables – previous experiences, hopes, fears, likes and dislikes, the constructed-ness of sense perceptions – are situated within each individual experiencer. So it is not simply a question of the instance and the environment that contribute to the character of an experience, but also of the individual and her prior experiences.

It is therefore understandable and legitimate to doubt the validity of personal experiences and impressions for science and study, but how then to address them in cases where they cannot or, at least, should not be ignored or waved aside? How to lay them out for an examination and how to make sure that the evidence found in them is legitimate and not a matter of wishful thinking, of personal hopes or preferences? The task of choosing a philosophical framework that would meet these requirements is not an easy one.

Aesthetics in general suits rather well as ‘a searchlight’³⁹ when exploring the world, both the concrete and the imaginary, and us within it. Pauline von Bonsdorff explains in *The Human Habitat – Aesthetic and Axiological Perspectives* her choice of aesthetics ‘as my general frame, for it is my belief that the environment as a whole, its overall significance and potential value in human life, is better understood in a framework of aesthetics than in the more specialised discourses of semiotics, communication or design which certainly have virtues of their own.’⁴⁰ I find her standpoint convincing, for when we concern ourselves with surroundings or environments, the aesthetic approach allows room for the various elements of experience: moods, feelings, impressions; colours, contours, textures; values and beliefs; intellect and intuition. Different modes of experience can be explored separately, just as they can be tackled as a whole. Aesthetics as a framework is well suited for the museum too. The attributes of a museum visit, or the frame of mind with which we enter, shares traits with the aes-

³⁸ Saito, Yuriko (2007) *Everyday Aesthetics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford/New York, p. 10.

³⁹ Bonsdorff, Pauline von (1998) *The Human Habitat – Aesthetic and Axiological Perspectives*, International Institute of Applied Aesthetic Series vol 5., Gummerus, Jyväskylä, p. 12.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

thetic frame of mind even when the museum in question is not an art museum. We enter with an active, conscious knowledge that we are about to encounter things both new and already familiar to us. We might have hopes and wishes of enjoyment, discovery, and new encounters. We are more focused on the experience, more sensitive towards it. We are ready to learn, to receive, or to acquire and reflect; more willing to respond to what we are encountering – or at least until our feet grow tired and our backs start to hurt and it feels like our minds are about to burst. Nevertheless, even then we are appreciative of the museum café's fresh brew and tasty Danish pastries.

Berleant's aesthetic field also accommodates these variables. He writes that the four factors of the aesthetic field – the object, the creator, the perceiver, and the performer – are 'affected by social institutions, historical traditions, cultural forms and practices, technological developments in materials and techniques, and other such contextual conditions.' Furthermore, '[a]ll are essential to a descriptive rendering of aesthetic experience because they have a constitutive effect on such experiences.'⁴¹

How then to conduct this research? How to move towards this experience? How to know what to ask? Visitor surveys are done more or less constantly in museums. They could provide a truckload of material for a researcher, but those surveys come with a catch: they are generally done with a very specific goal in mind, often to find out if a specific exhibition has done what it was designed to do. Typical questions include, what visitors think about a certain issue or about the museum or how long did they spend studying specific exhibits. In a word, visitor surveys often have to do with statistics and numbers, and this is one reason why I decided not to use them. Since I am interested in a specific kind of experience, I need to use as my material those exhibitions or parts of exhibitions where that experience is prominent, or where there is potential for those experiences to occur but where they for some reason do not. For a suitable survey to exist, the staff behind that exhibition should have had to work for the same goal as I am here; the questions they would have asked should have been ones aiming to reveal (preferably) exactly what I am trying to reveal. In a word, they should have been interested in the same questions as I am. There is also the question of language and culture: for example, 'engagement' and 'engaging' are common phrases in contemporary museum jargon, but their meanings are not exactly compatible with their usage here. Of course, there probably are surveys that I could use, but the amount of material is such that it would take an enormous effort to find them. At least in 2002 Ted Ansbacher, an American expert on experience-based museum education, remarked that to his knowledge there had not 'been a detailed analysis at the level of primary sensory input, and how

⁴¹ Berleant, (1991), p. 49.

that is processed mentally to yield outcomes.⁴² Granted, what he was then after was more scientifically quantifiable information on the visitor's actions – a listing of actions a visitor conducts, starting with shifting their eyes from one part of a picture to another – than the aesthetic or phenomenological information that I am after in this study, but fundamentally we seek to answer the same question: How do aspects of an exhibition arouse experiences?

The question of what to ask would still remain. While I am interested in a specific experience, I am even more interested in those circumstances under which this experience occurs. If the big question is whether or not the museum-goers have similar or corresponding experiences in exhibitions and how would they describe these experiences, I would need to know when and where to ask them. There would be little point in asking about the experiences if the exhibition did not arouse them at all, or if only a few visitors would report having them. In order to conduct a survey, I need to be able to identify instances that are most likely to provide me with material. Equally, if I were to study what kind of circumstances evoke these experiences by staging an exhibition, I would need to have a theory of pertinent variables and of their scope of influence, for that exhibition would be like a laboratory experiment. Although any such experiment allows room for unknown variables, they are designed to test precise hypotheses about how, or if at all, a specific variable works in a certain situation. Experiments test theories, but I do not have a theory yet, at least not one that would be precise enough to be tested. And then again, would this kind of research catch the intensity of the experiences of engagement at the moment they are experienced? Perhaps not. Could the long course of life of museum experiences be examined through existing surveys? The entirety of a museum experience expands over a long period, beginning well before the visit and evolving for long, even years after the visit. If I were to ask a visitor the same questions at the exit and a month after the visit, I might get completely different answers. Could the complexity of the experience, to which Berleant often refers, be appreciated in such a survey? Possibly, through extensive interviews and conversations; there are methods for this in, for example, sociology and cultural anthropology, but by employing the scope of personal experiences as the material of the research, I have a unique access to the contextual meanings of these experiences. This enables a more fluent change of perspective, reflection and reassessment. And after all, although we, as human beings, are not identical, although our experiences are individual, we are connected to each other. We share a biological foundation: our brains, bodies, the whole human sensorium. We are connected through language, culture, and music, which according to re-

⁴² Ansbacher, Ted (2002) 'On Making Exhibits Engaging and Interesting', *Curator: The Museum Journal* vol. 45, no. 3, July 2002, p. 169.

cent research⁴³ seems to hold in its core a universal language for the expression of emotions.

I wish to bridge the realms of science and art and to put on paper the feel of the experience; how it feels like to be a museum visitor. I do not have another person as a subject; I am much more like an autobiographer who hopes to succeed in relating her own experiences to others. Therefore my own experiences are given ample room in this dissertation. They will act as a point of origin, as the beginnings for theoretical and philosophical thinking, in a manner similar to the role the body has in Henri Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis as 'the first point of analysis, the tool for subsequent investigations.'⁴⁴ I will seek to describe those experiences as faithfully as I possibly can in order to see what contributing factors become visible in those situations. These will then be compared with the existing theories and philosophies of (aesthetic) experience, embodiment, and architecture as a discussion on the nature of these experiences; of how these experiences come to be; of what factors in the surroundings affect them and how; and so on. Occasionally my experiences will also be juxtaposed with extracts from literature and films, both fictional and biographical, that offer a different or complementary view. Furthermore, this and several other reasons soon to be presented have led me to adopt an essayistic style of writing, which I personally find most suitable.

Since I have chosen to use my own experiences, one more thing must be brought forth. The experiences I have had in museums, and especially the way I see them in retrospect, has all taken place in my own horizon. This horizon is not only coloured by my expectations and my life history in general, but I have also been sensitised to such experiences by this dissertation and by my thinking, or in other words, by my intentions and objectives. Other museum-goers, researchers, museum professionals, and so on will have their own agendas, their own horizons, and we all comprehend or make sense of what I am about to write from our own perspectives. Therefore an aura of a hermeneutic circle surrounds not only this dissertation, but also museum exhibitions at large, insofar as museum exhibitions are attempts to bring together various horizons so that their individual significance can become mutually perceivable and recognisable. This dissertation is not just an exercise in phenomenological description of ex-

⁴³ E.g., Fritz, Thomas et al. (2009) 'Universal Recognition of Three Basic Emotions in Music', *Current Biology* vol. 19, is. 7, pp. 573-576; Balkwill, Laura-Lee & Ford Thompson, William (1999) 'A Cross-Cultural Investigation of the Perception of Emotion in Music: Psychological and Cultural Cues', *Music Perception* vol. 17, no. 1, pp. 43-64.

⁴⁴ Elden, Stuart (2004) 'Introduction: Rhythmanalysis' in Lefebvre, Henri (2004) *Rhythmanalysis – Space, Time and Everyday Life*, Continuum International Publishing, London/New York, p. xii

perience but also in hermeneutical problematics – both within this text and in museum exhibitions.

Is there a way other than portraiture to study these personal, bodily experiences of and within a specific environment? How can its multifaceted and layered nature be explored and analysed? In *The Aesthetics of Environment*, Berleant presents descriptive aesthetics as a tool or a method of relating the aesthetic experience of an environment. What Berleant suggests is that when artistic modes of expression – such as poetry, nature writing, or novels – are used to describe an aesthetic experience or encounter, they ‘are not merely self-indulgent effusions but serious attempts to enlarge the understanding of the aesthetic domain by guiding our perception through it.’⁴⁵ As a further explanation he writes: ‘Descriptive aesthetics combines acute observation with compelling language to encourage the reader towards vivid aesthetic encounters.’⁴⁶ If one wants to create such a compelling text that it succeeds in leading its reader through the described experience, it is, as every experience exists in an environment consisting of numerous details, paramount to have the ability to discern the crucial ones. There might be hundreds of items in a room, without counting in the lighting, colours, temperature, directions and so forth, and it is essential to be able to determine which ones are in fact the key contributors. By attempting to write an account in the form of descriptive aesthetics, one is compelled to think which of the details to include and which ones to leave out. Which ones enable the atmosphere, which ones are the cornerstones on which the description can be build? Does the omission of this change the outcome or is it the juxtaposition of these two? Thus, through observant, thoughtful writing, the layers of an experience can be opened, and through an attempt to describe them vividly, examined. This is not, it must be kept in mind, a new approach. Berleant’s examples of poetry and so on indicate this. Artists and scientists have often gravitated between these modes through dialogue and collaboration.

This examination takes place in co-operation with the reader, for what the writer writes are her own subjective experiences. They may and, in the case of a formal study, must be properly thought out and well supported by the theories of and evidence provided by other writers, but even in the absence of such evidence, it is the reader who fulfils the work. In descriptive aesthetics, the study takes place in the field of the aesthetic. A body of text describing an aesthetic experience may not be exact in a scientific sense. Such a text is not based on empirical evidence and it is not necessarily backed up by citations and references to other studies, but just like a work of any other art requires the participation of an appreciator, so does a descriptive text. While a scientific text tries to prove a point through logic, evidence, and argument and so add to our knowl-

⁴⁵ Berleant, Arnold (1992) *The Aesthetics of Environment*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, p. 26.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

edge, descriptive aesthetics seeks to do the same by guiding the reader to identify with the expressed experience, to compare it with her own memories, and to decide whether she agrees or disagrees with it and on what grounds. In contrast to a scientific exposition, in which the reader only sees the results, descriptive aesthetics takes the reader along with the researcher. In the end, the result is if not the same then at least comparable to scientific writing: if it is successful, the reader's, and eventually our, understanding of the subject at hand has been not only enlarged but deepened.

Because of this and because of the essayistic style, this dissertation has a highly narrative form. Narratives relate subjective horizons and the presence of both the subject and the narrator. A narrative reveals how things appear to someone, not just how things objectively are; a narrative reveals the subjectivity of the situation, the subjectivity as a point of view, as Nagel describes it in the aforementioned, 'How It Feels to Be a Bat?' It also invites the audience to participate in the unfurling of the narrative. As Mary Kay Kramps states, '[t]he object of narrative inquiry is understanding (...) rather than explanation,' and '[i]t is both the process (...) and the product.'⁴⁷ Also, narration is not only a way of structuring experiences, it is also a way of relating tacit knowledge⁴⁸, the form of knowledge that plays a significant part in museum exhibitions. Because of the subjectivity of the experience and the character of narrativity as a method, this dissertation has a strong sense of dialogue between myself and the different thinkers and researchers. This narrative and its dialogue are cyclical in their form, causing some issues to be repeatedly returned to over the course of the text. The point has been to build on the previous observations and conclusions in a way that enables the deepening of the understanding of the subject and the viewpoint of my subjective experiences, as the reader proceeds with the text and new aspects gradually come to light. This can also be seen as an expression of the hermeneutic circle surrounding the experiences of museum exhibitions.

⁴⁷ Kramp, M. K. (2003) 'Exploring life and experience through narrative inquiry' in de-Marra, Kathleen B. & Lapan, Stephen D. (edit.), *Foundations for Research – Methods of Inquiry in Education and the Social Sciences*, Routledge, London, pp. 103-122. Accessed 13.1.2014 online at http://www4.nau.edu/cee/ci_doc/current/resources/6_kramp.pdf. Quotes p. 1 & 2 respectively.

⁴⁸ Mitchell, M. & Egudo, M. (2003) 'A review of narrative methodology', Systems Sciences Laboratory, Land Operations Division, Defence Science and Technology Organisation, Department of Defence, Australian Government, p. 1. Read online 12.1.2014 <http://www.webpages.uidaho.edu/css506/506%20readings/review%20of%20narrative%20methodology%20australian%20gov.pdf>. The paper has a comprehensive bibliography of narrative methodology on various fields of research from social sciences to philosophy and history. According to the writers, '[t]his method is said to be well suited to study subjectivity and the influence of culture and identity on the human condition,' p. 3.

There are other reasons for choosing this approach, which at least I find compelling. First of all, I believe that to study human experience without beginning with a scrutiny of my own experience would be misguided. Almost half of my master's degree was done in ecology and I have a strong liking for the biosciences and for a certain degree of empiricism, but I am also inclined to support a rather romantic and old-fashioned idea of an observer armed with highly schooled powers of perception.⁴⁹ My main concern is that if I am to study human experience, I must begin with a particular experience, my own. As a citizen of the postmodern era, I believe that my expectations, preconceptions, and prejudices are present in me, colouring my experiences, and if I am not aware of them, they will distort everything. I can never escape them, I can only resort, in a manner of speaking, to damage control by trying to name them as accurately as possible. To prove them false or mistaken or true (to the best of my ability) I need to observe them, question them, and compare them. Presenting the results of these processes in public is an attempt to partake in a larger discussion. It is an illusion to think, although we are tempted to do so, that a dissertation or any other type of text would be a finished product, ready and complete; one can only hope to receive replies and an opportunity to carry on that conversation. Therefore it is, I believe, essential to share the original, personal and partial (in both senses of the word) experiences, for they do not only illustrate the point of departure, but give material for comparison and debate. In this sense, my work is more open-ended than result-driven. 'It's not about goals, it's about pushing the boundaries and discovering something.'⁵⁰

1.4 Methodology II: Embodiment

This is also an expedition to the outskirts of environmental aesthetics, a study of the aesthetics of an environment as well as of the aesthetics of the everyday. As was already said, aesthetic engagement is born out of and influenced by multiple factors or variables – previous experiences, expectations, knowledge, likes and dislikes, etc. – and in this context I will approach it as an upshot of a sensory experience of an environment or a situation, and my focus will first and foremost be on one specific aspect of that experience: the body, bodily, and embodiment. There are several reasons for this. First of all, there has been a long

⁴⁹ The empirical experiments Charles Darwin devised to scrutinise his field (quite literally) and the observations and ideas based on them are elegant in the best sense of the word and a good example of the kind of an observer I have in mind.

⁵⁰ Joe Wilcox, toy designer at IDEO, former circus performer and kinetic sculptor. Interviewed by Jake Cook, 'IDEO: Big Innovation Lives Right on the Edge of Ridiculous Ideas' for the 99Percent.com.

history in Western culture⁵¹ of preferring vision and mind to the sense of touch and the body. Over the last hundred years or so, however, the dimension of the body and the bodily has gained more and more attention, to the point that today the body is a legitimate perspective for philosophical pondering.⁵² Museums have for the most part of their history been an environment of the visual, partly because they have reflected the general attitude towards the senses and partly because their nature as preservers of objects imposes, and rightly so, certain restrictions (i.e., no handling of the objects by visitors). Over the last century, however, the actual experience that visitors have in museums has become the flagship of museum education and this in turn has led the museums to embrace and utilise a multi-sensory approach in their exhibitions. And, since touch has been a taboo, exhibits enabling touching and handling have become particularly popular along with multimedia devices such as computer terminals. Sound and soundscapes have also made their appearance, though they are still not that common if we consider the museum world as a whole.

The incorporation of interactive, participatory, and multi-sensory devices is usually done using puzzle-type exhibits that need to be assembled, put in right order or into right slots, and with materials such as fabrics or wood that can be touched and handled. For example The Kilmartin Museum in Kilmartin, Argyll, Scotland (1.1) has exhibits where the visitor can try out the way stone tools were polished thousands of years ago and play ancient stone instruments. Many museums have workshops where the visitors can attend all kinds of activities based on present exhibitions. This kind of bodily participation, however, is not part of my topic, although these hands-on exhibits could be an interesting subject from the point of view of descriptive aesthetics. In addition, while I do leave out the examination of soundscapes and such as objects of study, I will

⁵¹ I am not implying that non-Western cultures have no such histories or trends. While my thinking has certainly been influenced by non-Western philosophies, especially the Chinese and Japanese traditions, here, in this context, I am approaching aesthetic engagement as an experience taking place in the Western cultural context.

⁵² See e.g., Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (1989, Routledge, London); John Dewey's writings on experience e.g., *Experience and Nature* (1st publ. 1925); Mark Johnson's *The Meaning of the Body – Aesthetics of Human Understanding* (2007, Chicago University Press, Chicago) and *Philosophy in the Flesh – The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* with George Lakoff (1999, Basic Books, New York); Richard Shusterman's work, particularly *Body Consciousness – A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics* (2008, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge); Alva Noë's work, such as *Out of Our Heads – Why You Are Not Your Brain and Other Lessons from the Biology of Consciousness* (2009, Hill & Wang, New York). In architecture, Juhani Pallasmaa's writings including *The Eyes of the Skin – Architecture and the Senses* (2005, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., Chichester, UK); *Corpus – The Bodily Turn: Gesture, Gender and Sensation of Art*, an interdisciplinary cross-media network active between 2006-2010, <http://corpus-aesthetics.net/info.php> (visited 22.2.2012).



PIC 1.1

A) A device to demonstrate the formation of mountains. Museums of Scotland, Edinburgh.

B) Two ways of grinding grain. Kilmartin Museum, Scotland.

C) Following page. How to polish a stone tool. Kilmartin Museum, Scotland.





include some instances of sounds as experience-enticing elements of the exhibition environment. In other words, in those cases sounds will be addressed as environmental elements.

Another aspect of touch and body is present in every single exhibition, even when no specific attention has been given to physically interactive participation: the bodily presence of the visitor within the exhibition space. Our surroundings have a constant effect on us. On a very basic level, they guide our movement and enable or restrict our activities; I am more likely to sit where there is seating available, although often I could sit, just as well, on the floor or on the ground. Surroundings affect us also in more subtle ways that are not always immediately clear to us. They create moods, atmospheres, expectations; sensations and impressions of nobleness, grandeur, divine, of danger and safety; they create hierarchies.⁵³ The effects our surroundings may have on us are one cornerstone of this dissertation, and I will look in this in more detail later on, but at this point the nature of these effects is more important. Although many such effects are well known – lighting something from directly above creates an atmosphere of other-worldliness and divine power, for example – and we may be acutely aware of them, they are nevertheless more like sensations

⁵³ See e.g., Hall, Edvard T. (1969) *The Hidden Dimension*, Anchor Books/Doubleday & Co., New York, and Bachelard, Gaston (1969) *Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas, Beacon Press., Boston.

and impressions working in the fringes of our minds, affecting our judgements, associations, attitudes and actions mostly indirectly. The ability to create and manipulate these atmospheric qualities is an essential part of the aesthetic competence of skilled exhibition designers – and architects and interior designers – being often a skill or a craft or an art founded on tacit knowledge.⁵⁴ I hope my work here will contribute to the understanding of such ability.

But while our surroundings have an effect on us, our bodies also affect the environment. How we move within a space has a profound effect on how we see it as an environment; movement of the perceiver has the power to energise the environment.⁵⁵ Both movement and the quality of movement open up new possibilities; possible and alternative views, routes and hierarchies. Movement may guide consciousness forward, just as consciousness may guide movement through space or towards the completion of a task. I will return to the aspect and pivotal importance of movement and motion throughout this dissertation. I will strive to maintain the position of Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis with my 'body, not in the abstract, but in lived temporality,' trying to 'arrive at the concrete through experience.'⁵⁶

For further justification for my choice of method, I must revisit my aforementioned statement of not suggesting that museums have changed radically, that museums of today are something considerably different from the ones of yesterday. While I still hold this to be true, I also believe that museums are undergoing a paradigm shift. I will look into this in more detail in the next chapter and will only offer the beginning here. Museums are and have always been in a constant shift as they are, after all, reflections of the prevalent society and culture surrounding them. Sociologist Nick Prior argues for this perspective in his *Museums and Modernity – Art Galleries and the Making of Modern Culture*:

History does not unfold as a series of packaged moments (...). Cultural forms and institutions are always pervaded by configurations of a past time as well as a present time (...). In Williams' sense (1981), aspects which were once dominant are thrown into relief but retain a residual effect, emergent tendencies flower into dominance and so on.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Michel Polanyi introduced the term in *Personal Knowledge* (1958) and *The Tacit Dimension* (1966). It seems possible that descriptive aesthetics could offer one way of relating tacit knowledge. At least it seems suitable for examining and sharing experiences in which tacit knowledge is at play.

⁵⁵ Compare with Lefebvre: 'The body and its rhythms remain no less a resource of music (...)' (2004), p. 65. See also p. 60 for the inseparability of space, time, and energy.

⁵⁶ Lefebvre (2004), p. 21.

⁵⁷ Prior, Nick (2002) *Museums and Modernity – Art Galleries and the Making of Modern Culture*, Berg, Oxford/New York, p. 21. Refers to Williams, R. (1981) *Culture*, Fontana, London.

In other words, museums are changing as the world around them changes. As a concept, museum is today something different from what it was only two hundred years ago. The context in which they exist has unhurriedly shifted from modern to postmodern worldview, and the museums of the present day reflect and represent this reorganisation. The philosopher and museologist Hilde S. Hein depicts this in *The Museum in Transition – A Philosophical Perspective* (2000) as a shift of focus from the object to the experience expressing sentiments. This shift is comparable to Wolfgang Iser's thoughts on the aestheticization of and the orientation towards the experience in contemporary culture in his book *Undoing Aesthetics* (1997). In essence, this shift illustrates the movement away from the dualistic attitude of modernism, a movement that has been advocated by Hegel, Bergson, Dewey, and Merleau-Ponty, but which still persists, as Berleant notes in *Art and Engagement*.⁵⁸ 'Aesthetic engagement challenges this tradition,' he writes, and continues:

It claims continuity rather than separation, contextual relevance rather than objectivity, historical pluralism rather than certainty, ontological parity rather than priority.⁵⁹

These are very much the same observations, the same pairings that Hein notes in her book, as we shall see later on, and since Berleant presented his concept of aesthetic engagement as a theory that would embrace these transformations, his descriptive aesthetics does present itself as a method for the study of the aesthetic engagement and the situation in which it occurs. Berleant also states that

...since the arts are always individual and our experiences with them more particular still, my argument does not pursue a primarily dialectical course, even though it rests on a general conceptual structure. Instead I weave a net of instances that I hope grasp the participatory quality of our experiences in the arts and display the capacity of the concept of engagement to liberate and illuminate those experiences.⁶⁰

Though he speaks here about arts and our experiences with them in particular, I too wish to work from the same foundation.

The final reason to opt for descriptive aesthetics is the interest in seeing how it could and will work as a method. It is a radical concept, as I have found out in many conversations regarding the nature of my research. Likewise, equally many interlocutors have expressed their interest in such an approach. I am equally interested in founding out how it will work. What problems and difficulties will rise with this method? What will it reveal? What will be left in the dark? Though we can to some extent envision these, it is quite different to turn words into action.

⁵⁸ Berleant (1991), p. xiii.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. xiii.

1.5 The Museum-goer and the Environment as Habitat

The focus of my dissertation is on the exhibition space and on the ways it contributes to the experiences of engagement. I am interested in how the characteristics of a given space affect our experiences, how the space may engage our mind as a whole through our bodies and senses instead of through direct intellectual discourse as in, for example, words and informative graphics. In this space the museum visitor moves as an active contributor. She is in connection with her surroundings through all her senses, of which the sense of touch will be emphasised here.

Although 'environment' is a word often used to describe various kinds of spaces, such as 'school environment', 'learning environment', and 'political environment', and although it is an ordinary expression also used to describe museum exhibitions, I have some misgivings about its usage. 'Environment' is an expression that could often be replaced with words such as 'atmosphere', 'conditions', or 'surroundings', and it is an expression that is able to include a variety of aspects that are present in those environments. But if 'environment' is examined in its biological and ecological meaning, the possibility of an attitude is revealed. *Encyclopedia Britannica* describes 'environment' in its biological sense as 'the complex of physical, chemical, and biotic factors that act upon an organism or an ecological community and ultimately determine its form and survival.'⁶¹ The role of a single organism or even a particular species in this determination is ultimately passive: it is the environment that acts upon them, and they have very little say on the process: even their physical form is dictated by the environment.

This is not an understanding of 'environment' that suits the concepts of aesthetic engagement and aesthetic field. Even in the biological reality, organisms do have and can affect their immediate surroundings – through both intentionality and cause-and-effect. Birds build nests to have better nesting success. We build houses and lay pipes to bring water to where it does not naturally exist. We create paths just by moving about in the environment to which we belong. We even affect the weather, albeit not intentionally (although we do try to achieve that). This part of the environment is a habitat, a 'place where an organism or a community of organisms lives, including all living and nonliving factors or conditions of the surrounding environment.'⁶² The habitat is the locality in which we exist. It is 'an area which is *actively inhabited* by an individual or a

⁶¹ <http://www.encyclopediabritannica.com>

⁶² Ibid.

group and also *transformed by* its inhabitants.⁶³ Thus the connotations of 'habitat' are more active and allowing; the 'organism' has become the 'individual' who is perceived to have freedom of choice, even if the freedom is a limited one. 'Habitat' could therefore be a term more fitting to describe a museum exhibition, for it shares the attributes with both aesthetic engagement and the contemporary view of what a museum ideally would be. The concept of 'habitat' will therefore be the leading ideal in my work and the lens through which I will interpret the works on environment by other writers and thinkers. It must be noted, though, that not all museum exhibitions are automatically habitats. What I am interested in are those exhibitions that have the feeling of a habitat.

Considering exhibition spaces in this manner, as resembling habitats more than environments, also leads one to see the museum-goer in a certain manner. Habitats have inhabitants and visitors. Yi-Fu Tuan described the difference between visitors and natives in *Topophilia* as a difference in their attitude and view towards the environment in question. According to him, a visitor's viewpoint of the environment is simple and easily stated.⁶⁴ A visitor evaluates the environment essentially aesthetically, which in this case means judging according to a formal canon of beauty. She is an outsider, and it requires a special effort from her to empathise or to sympathise with the inhabitants' lives as she uses first and foremost her eyes to comprehend the environment which is foreign to her. The inhabitant, or the native in Tuan's words, 'has a complex attitude derived from his immersion in the totality of his environment. [This attitude] can be expressed by him only with difficulty and indirectly through behaviour, local tradition, lore and myth.'⁶⁵ If aesthetic engagement is understood as the immersion of the viewer as an active participant into the aesthetic field, then she has become less like a visitor and more like a native in the given situation. This can be taken as grounds for descriptive aesthetics, but it can also be taken to suggest that 'visitor' might not be the best word to describe a person experiencing aesthetic engagement in a museum exhibition. Hein used 'museum-goer(s)' in *The Museum in Transition* and I find it a good expression to describe regular museum visitors and people with a participatory outlook, but it is still lacking. Museum-goers are people who hold within them a potential for the act of visiting a museum, but once inside a museum, their potential has been acted out. Then again, although they stay in the museum for only a certain period of time, 'visitor' feels too detached an expression. If museum exhibitions are to be taken here as habitats, then persons visiting a museum are inhabitants, not outsiders. They may visit this particular part of their total territory or habitat only occasionally – they do not make it their home, after all – but they are not strangers

⁶³ Bonsdorff (1998), p. 14. My emphasis.

⁶⁴ Tuan, Yi-Fu (1990) *Topophilia*, Columbia University Press, New York, pp. 63-63.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

to it; in a way they could be considered as nomads⁶⁶. Certainly some people visit museums only once or very rarely, but here I wish to consider every visitor as a native, just like one may be a native of a big city. It also seems that many museums do encourage their visitors to feel more at home, more immersed when they include participation-enticing components, multimedia, sounds, and such in their exhibitions. Despite this ambivalence, I will continue to use the term 'visitors' in this dissertation, in lack of a better expression. Yet it should be noted that in doing so, I consider them as inhabitants native to the habitat. Museum-goers will be used to indicate a tribe to which the visitors belong. This tribe consists of overlapping circles of members: the museum professionals; the frequent visitors or the museum enthusiasts who may form the inner circle of friends of a particular museum; schools; families; groups of friends who come in for a coffee; single individuals who get their Christmas cards from the museum shop; those who may, perhaps, one day pop in after all. The more frequent their visits are and the more affiliated they feel, the more local their status as inhabitants is, or, to borrow the language of ecology, the more centrally situated the museum is in their habitat. Their frequent visits increase the thickness of the place.

1.6 Garden as an Analogy

Another significant influence for my way of comprehending both museum exhibitions and their space is David Lowenthal's seminal book, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, in which he describes our obsession with the past, our insatiable thirst for it.⁶⁷ 'The past is a foreign country whose features are shaped by today's predilections, its strangeness domesticated by our own preservation of its vestiges.'⁶⁸ Obviously, museums are very much the epitome of this thirst; they are its tools. Lowenthal also notes that '(...) the Renaissance was the first epoch to see itself as 'modern', as distinct from both the immediate past it discredited and the remote past it idolized.'⁶⁹ Therefore, in the light of his statement, the

⁶⁶ I thank my supervisor Pauline von Bonsdorff for pointing out the suitability of the term 'nomad' in this connection. It sums up my thinking beautifully.

⁶⁷ Lowenthal, David (2009) *The Past is a Foreign Country*, 14th printing, 1st 1985, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

birth of the museum coincides with the birth of the concepts of the modern⁷⁰ and the past. While museums appeared simultaneously with the concepts of the modern and the past, they also helped and help to create and maintain these distinctions. Think how strange it feels to see an object of your past, for example your first mobile phone, put on display in a museum: your personal memories have suddenly become the official past!

But it was the title of his book that gave the form for the way I had become to think of museums and especially museum exhibitions. The past truly is a foreign country. We are unfamiliar with its customs. Even the awareness of them or the ability to recognise them does not necessarily mean that we can comprehend and internalise them, at least not truly, as Lowenthal demonstrated in his book. We have only a crude understanding of its geography. We may long to visit that distant land, but we can never become its true inhabitants. And even if we could, who would really want to live in the true reality of, let us say medieval Europe? What many of us wish instead, is to have a glimpse of that distant land – and that is what a museum can offer. What if we, therefore, view museum exhibitions as maps of that land, or as succinct representations that correspond in their configurations with that land? We cannot ever travel to that distant past, but we can enter its landscape as it is re-enacted in a museum exhibition. We can gain a comprehension of its dimension through the model that is the exhibition. And although Lowenthal's book speaks exclusively about the past, a similar attitude can be adopted to suit all museums. They all are, or we may think them to be, according to Hein, encapsulations of various portions of the world.⁷¹

How to combine this philosophical concept of the nature of a museum with the reality of museum exhibitions and the aesthetic field? How to approach the spaces museum exhibitions create and within which they are created? Is there a mindset, a frame of thinking that could allow for the concept and the practice to meet? Perhaps one that would allow us to see a museum exhibition as a habitat? Is there a concept for a space that addresses its visitors wholly? A space that is built both for the senses and the body as well as for the mind? A space that is both present and conceptual, encouraging both the aesthetic engagement and intellectual contemplation? Does such a space of world-making already exist?

A garden is a space like that. It is a constructed representation of a world, a constructed microcosmos. In many cultures, gardens have been constructed as

⁷⁰ I use the concept 'modern' in this context more like it is used in everyday speech than the way it is used in philosophy or history. In this sense, 'modern' is often used more as a reference to the contemporary, to the present times in order to discern what was from what is now.

⁷¹ Hein, Hilde S. (2000) *The Museum in Transition – A Philosophical Perspective*, Smithsonian Books, Washington, p. viii.

representations of a heavenly paradise or of divine cosmology. The formal French Baroque gardens were a physical expression of the Cartesian cosmology, a tradition that is today followed by the American architect and garden designer Charles Jencks in his metaphorical gardens that depict, for example, cosmic patterns and the molecular structures of cells.⁷² Common to all gardens is that they, from the most magnificent palatial extravaganzas to humble cottage gardens, reflect and express the attitudes and world views of their designers. The difference is that some gardens are more articulated and conscious in their depiction of the ideas behind them, like Jencks' garden designs, while others, such as our backyard gardens, are less prominent in this regard: we all put in them what we consider to be beautiful, important, meaningful, and practical. They are our collections and displays, organisations of our worlds. When we visit gardens and even public parks, we are literally walking within representational worlds; new and alternative views are presented to us as we move in the landscape. Orchards and kitchen gardens may have less metaphysical aspirations but they too are set apart from the world surrounding them as they are set against the wild nature and the spaces beyond them. All in all, gardens are by nature more or less set apart from the world beyond them.

The visitor is always part of the garden. Different textures, shades, and colours are used to engage the senses. Different parts of a garden may fill the air with different fragrances, inviting the visitor to lean over and search for their source. Sounds may be introduced with the use of running water, and certain plants produce quite distinctive sounds when moved by the wind; wind chimes, rough gravel on the pathway, or even silence may become features. Many characteristics of a garden become fully experienceable only through the active engagement of the body: by walking, touching, smelling, listening, and by watching the events and time unfold at length.

Besides being places of embodied experience, gardens are places of appreciation, but by choice. You can choose to sit in the shade and enjoy your book, largely ignoring what is happening around you. In such case, the garden is more like a state of mind, a conceptual garden as a context for detachment and contemplation. Or perhaps you want to wander around thinking about your day or counting all the different birds you are able to hear. Or maybe you come across a pond and pause to look at the reflections on the surface, to listen to the little stream and find yourself lost in thoughts. Or maybe you come in to see the perfect rose in bloom and nothing else; just its beauty which is more than

⁷² One of Jencks designs, The Garden of Cosmic Speculation in Dumfries, Scotland, includes the DNA Garden that has much in common with the classical formal garden thus being an illuminating example of his role within the tradition. Pictures of the Garden of Cosmic Speculation can be found online at <http://www.charlesjencks.com/#!/the-garden-of-cosmic-speculation> (most recently viewed 8.3.2012).

enough for the moment. A garden, though constructed, allows room for roaming and exploring.⁷³

In *The Aesthetics of Environment*, Berleant writes that when the aesthetics of an environment start to become more apparent to us, '[o]ur sense of the environment begins to deepen...'⁷⁴ The integrated-ness of our environment becomes discernible as we move beyond the surface of our surroundings. This deepening is what I believe is needed in museums today. If we as museum professionals were able to create exhibitions that would transcend both the museum walls and the materiality of the objects and thus convey the interconnectedness or the integrated-ness of our world, we might be able to meet the needs expressed in the critique. I hold it to be virtually impossible to truthfully represent any culture or even an aspect of one within the limits of a museum; the others never see us the way we do. Should and could we, instead of exactness, try to convey the interconnectedness and parallelism of cultures and individuals through our shared existence? Would a success in this demonstrate a feeling of presence, a moment when a space is genuinely shared? Could this require a moment of aesthetic engagement, a moment of involvement of both the visitor and the exhibition as a habitat? In the world of garden design, the means of embodied engagement are already familiar and documented, so perhaps we should juxtapose gardens and museum exhibitions in order to discover new ways to apply this knowledge.

In chapter one, I endeavour to draw a picture of the museum as a phenomenon seen from the visitor's perspective, not as the institution itself. While I do not mean to seek for a definition for 'museum', I still find it necessary to get my bearings in the diverse, intricate environment of the museum world, and precisely as a visitor, I will still ask, 'What is it?' The institutional history and theory of museums can be obtained from elsewhere and from varied viewpoints, but the question of the evolution of the visitor experience as an embodied, human experience and not so much as a question of delivering the message or of the visitor satisfaction has not got as much focused attention. In an attempt to answer this question of what is museum as an aesthetic, embodied experience I will take a closer look into the museum, outlining in more detail my perspective into the purpose and function of museums, and the circumstance and consequences of the shift from object-oriented towards experience-oriented exhibitions. I will also discuss meaning-making and world-making, and endeavour to describe the museum exhibition as a space for these ends. Furthermore, I will

⁷³ In aesthetics, the garden has been examined by such writers as Mara Miller, *The Garden as an Art* (1993) and David Cooper, *A Philosophy of Gardens* (2006) the work of whom I will refer to in later chapters.

⁷⁴ Berleant (1992), p. 35.

reflect on museum exhibitions as ritual spaces or sites that may offer the museum-goers a place of contemplation and of aesthetic engagement.

Chapter two begins with the sense of touch and the tactile in museum exhibitions. How can the intersubjectivity between the visitor, the museum objects and the world the exhibition depicts be strengthened? At the beginning of the chapter, I will examine the character of touch and the tactile before proceeding to describe how the lifeworld of the visitor and the lifeworld of the subject, or the world of an exhibition, can be interconnected. The body and the embodied experience are approached in this chapter through the thinking of the philosopher Alva Noë, whose writings deal with embodied cognition; the architect Juhani Pallasmaa, who is an ardent critic of the Cartesian tradition; and the concepts of space and place as they are defined by Yi-Fu Tuan. Philosopher and social ecologist David Abram's thinking on embodied experiences and especially his idea of our reciprocal connection with the world are put at the centre of this dissertation with the phenomenological concepts of lifeworld and the earth. In short, the second chapter seeks to map out the lie of the land of museum exhibitions.

The third and final chapter before the conclusion determines the cardinal directions of the landscape that is the museum exhibition. I will consider entering exhibitions, the ascending and descending movements, and most importantly the coming into the presence of things of that landscape. Here the concepts of path and axes become the central organising theme of both the text and the exhibitions, and how we connect bodily with our environment in a meaningful engagement. The chapter begins with Noë's concept of presence and the presence of the absent and availability, which are followed with thoughts of coming into that presence. In the last part of the chapter, I consider our silent, reciprocal conversation with our surroundings through Japanese dry gardens and their design principles and the experiences they arouse in us. The chapter ends with thoughts on the ways to represent exhibitions, namely reconstructed interiors, with a sense of lived spaces, as places with meaning.

2 MUSEUM AS A PHENOMENON

Aquariums, arboretums, art museums, botanical gardens, children's museums, computer museums, craft and folklife centers, discovery centers, ethnic museums, historic houses and monuments, libraries, military and maritime museums, natural history museums, outdoor living history reconstructions, museums of science and technology, science centers, wildlife reservations, university museums and galleries, and zoos (...).¹

Some institutions and organisations that qualify as museums under the U.S. law.

The St. Louis City Museum² (from now on the City Museum) is a private museum that takes up seven floors in an old shoe factory and the open space surrounding it. It is not what many expect a museum to be like. There are lofts to be rented out as apartments and the basement is converted into Enchanted Caves with dragon sculptures. Several independent companies have found home within the museum, for example The Shoelace Factory that manufactures shoelaces with old machines and the World Aquarium with its sharks and stingrays who share the second floor with the museum's collection of antique opera posters. Various spaces can be rented for private functions, and in the yard visitors can challenge themselves by scaling the twisting, high-rising sculpture-like MonstroCity, a welded maze of pathways, a jet plane, a stone

¹ Hein, Hilde S. (2000) *The Museum in Transition – A Philosophical Perspective*, p. 158.

² <http://www.citymuseum.org> Museum's webpages have been redesigned during the summer of 2011 and were not working properly on 12.9.2011. The previous version included numerous photos, some of which were 360° panoramas, and video footage of the museum's interiors. The webpage online at the time of the writing was considerably less informative and therefore notes based on the older site, still active during the spring of 2011, were used as reference.

tower, and other structures. Inside the museum, one can marvel the world's largest pair of men's briefs and the world's largest pencil together with a collection of architectural fragments salvaged from various demolished buildings around the city of St. Louis. A lot of fun, no doubt, but one cannot help but wonder what kind of a place is this?

Andrew J. Pekarik, Smithsonian Institute's program analyst, was also initially perplexed by the City Museum:

Just what kind of museum is this? It has artifacts, primarily architectural fragments, like a design museum might have, but it's not about design. It has art, mostly sculptures, installations, and mosaics, but it is not an art museum. It has play areas like a children's museum might have, but it is as much for adults as children. It has restored, working machinery like a technology museum might have, but it's not about history.³

I gave Pekarik's article for the students of my museum pedagogy class to read and asked them what they thought about the City Museum. Two groups of answers stood out. One viewed the museum as very interesting, as something exciting that encourages discovery and exploration of both the self and the world. They expressed a wish to visit the City Museum in order to share this experience. The second group shared this vision, although their enthusiasm to visit the place was less obvious, but they also expressed serious concerns over the nature of the museum. Whereas Pekarik asks what kind of a museum the City Museum is, these students asked if the City Museum is a museum at all.

What made them, and probably many others, doubt the museum-ness of the City Museum? Why would it not be a museum? Students in the second group focused on the fact that the establishment in question called itself a museum while lacking the visual and physical traits of a museum. Although, as Pekarik's lines imply, the City Museum has collections which it displays, traits that most definitions for a museum would hold as elementary. Granted, the students only had access to the City Museum's website which offered little visual information on those parts of the museum that house the collections, so their opinions regarding how the collections are presented was, and in my case still is, ill-informed. However, the most strongly felt objections did not concern the collections, but the overall feeling and attitude of the place. The concern was supported by Pekarik's article, in which he approaches the museum as a site for play and encourages other museums to embrace play in their pedagogic strategies and exhibition design. This led some students to wonder whether the City Museum was too much fun or – even more disconcertingly – just fun: 'Where is the learning in this?' When the question was replied by pointing out that people

³ Pekarik, Andrew J. (2002a) 'The Spirit of St. Louis' *Curator – The Museum Journal*, 45/3 July 2002, p. 179.

do learn stuff through play all the time, the questioners, being forced to rethink their concern, countered with new questions: 'But who directs the play here? Who makes sure that the visitors learn what they are supposed to learn? Who makes sure they learn correctly?' Suddenly the argument was no longer about whether or not the City Museum is a museum but how it goes about the business of being a museum.

Before going further into the question of how to be a museum, I wish to make one point. Like Pekarik in his article, I will not concern myself directly with the question of whether something is or is not a museum or what a museum is. Pekarik stated his question with beautiful ambiguity: 'What kind of a museum is this?' He apparently recognised that there could be reasons to question the City Museum's status as a museum. I wish to be more straightforward. For the sake of argument, I will assume that the question of whether or not something is a museum is an administrative issue in the sense that an institution or organisation is recognised as a museum mainly because it fulfils certain criteria defined by a pertinent legislative body such as the International Council of Museums (ICOM), which describes a museum as 'a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, and open to public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates, and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of man and his environment.'⁴ These criteria naturally concern only those museums that wish to be legally recognised as such in order to gain whatever rights may come attached to that status. The word 'museum' may, however, be freely used by any agent as a modifier in its name to gain what ever prestige the act of adding that word may produce, for 'museum' is a powerful word filled to the brim with meanings and symbols. But this too is, in my mind, more a problem regarding the process of being a museum than one pointing at the difficulty of defining what a museum is. I shall return to this later on in this chapter.

While being a good definition full of active verbs and thus focusing on the functions of a museum, ICOM's definition doesn't say anything about the physical side of things, for instance about what kind of a building a museum should be. Nor does it say how a museum should go about these activities (obviously there are professional practices and standards for conservation and such). Many of us envision a museum as a place. Many of us probably envision a museum as a very specific kind of a place, but in reality the concept of 'museum' is much more about certain activities and functions than about physical existence. And although museums shelter an abundance of literally priceless artefacts, some of the 'material evidence of man and his environment,' the main trove is an intellectual one.

⁴ ICOM Statutes, sec. 2, art. 3.

This trope, however, does have a form, a configuration, though it is markedly mutable. While it is 'a reasonable ambition to provide' a definition of a museum, it is not necessary for the discussion, as David E. Coopers points out in a Wittgensteinian manner in relation to gardens:⁵

'We possess the knowledge that enables us to – and indeed, largely consist in the capacity to – distinguish gardens from those bits of the world that are not gardens. 'Garden' is an entirely familiar term, and nearly every English speaker knows what it means. Pressed to say what I mean by the term, my response would be 'The same as you who are pressing me means by it – so you already know what I mean'.⁶

Although Cooper's disposition may seem straightforward, it is valid. As said, the intention here is not to define 'museum' while this study still is, in part, about what a museum is it approaches this question indirectly. If I am to study museums as aesthetic fields, then I must form some sort of a theoretical framework for this particular aesthetic field – even more so if I am to describe how these fields are formed. But it must be pointed out that I am not talking about museums as institutions in their entirety: what I am interested in is the physical space of museum exhibitions and the various experiences within them. Other aspects of museums, such as the collections and the actual exhibition design process, will be left out. Therefore in this chapter, I will endeavour to describe a conceptual perception of 'museum exhibition', a mental image or a way of thinking about it – the conceptual landscape that is 'museum exhibition', if you will. I will first deliberate over how museum exhibitions have become more concerned with the experience than the objects. Hilde S. Hein's book *Museums in Transition – A Philosophical Perspective* plays a significant role in my presentation. Experience is, in my view, still a surprisingly vague concept in museum world, and the first part of this chapter is an attempt to find a more solid foundation for it. After that, I will consider – with the help of Carol Duncan's *Civilizing Rituals – Inside Public Art Museums* and Catherine Bell's *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* – the often made argument that museums are ritualistic or ritual sites, temples or memorials, before rethinking this ritual character of museums. After proposing that museums have strong ritual-like character and that this is, in fact, perhaps their strength, I will put forward the concept of garden as a conceptual framework that may help to grasp the nebulous character of museum exhibitions.

One more thing before moving on: from now on I will use 'museum' and 'museum exhibition' interchangeably, unless otherwise mentioned. This is because, firstly, to most visitors and the majority of the public, I presume, a mu-

⁵ Cooper, David E. (2006) *The Philosophy of Gardens*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. 12-13.

⁶ Ibid.

seum equals its exhibitions, and secondly, it is the only part of museum institutions that will be addressed here. Although, as was already said, it should not be forgotten that museum exhibitions are both physical and mental constructs.

2.1 From Object to Experience

Let us accept, perhaps bluntly, that the City Museum is a museum because it is officially recognised as such and move on. Why then were the students so baffled by the way the City Museum goes about its business? I believe it was because the City Museum is an exceptional example of the new type of museum Hilde S. Hein describes in her book, *The Museum in Transition – A Philosophical Perspective*, claiming that museums have changed from being object-oriented to experience-oriented.⁷ With this she means that museums no longer focus first and foremost on showing or displaying objects but instead on what experiences these objects may arouse in their visitors. This current museum trend sees, as she asserts,⁸ objects as evidence⁹ of the past, of different cultures et cetera. Objects have become tools of recollection by their presence, implements for thinking that link their modern day viewer to the past (or to the distant) by association and their material presence: they were there then, they are here now. ‘These exhibitions are not about the objects they include, but they use historic items (...) in the service of a story, which is elicited rather than told.’¹⁰ In exhibitions, these stories are narrated not only through objects but by theatrical, even dramatic means of lighting, sounds, and staging in hope that it all would trigger an experience in visitors and that this experience would animate the object.

In his *Stuffed Animals and Pickled Heads*, Stephen T. Asma relates an example of these experience-inducing powers through the story of the Field Museum’s ‘jewel’, Sue, the biggest and one of the most complete fossilised skeletons of a *Tyrannosaurus rex* ever discovered.

(...) Sue represents the best and the worst of edutainment. Sue is the very embodiment of good museum drama. She is ancient in the way that gives visitors a brush with human fragility and infinitude. She is dangerous and imposing (...) in the way that simultaneously repels and attracts visitors. She’s rare and strange, and she kindles a bonfire of imagination and research. Her bones tell many tales that researchers and visitors will be trying to decode for years to come. For example, the fact that she broke her leg (usually an instant death for a predator) and that it was partially healed

⁷ Hein (2000), p. 65-68.

⁸ Ibid., p. 66.

⁹ Ibid., p. 65.

¹⁰ Ibid.

suggest that *T. rex* may have had continuous mates (a male that brought food, in this case.) Sue will be a prism for many such issues of ethology, physiology, morphology, and so on. Besides all that, she's just plain cool.¹¹

The appropriate presentation and use of exhibition elements¹² but also the lore surrounding dinosaurs have produced a dramatic figure, Sue, as something with whom the visitors can identify, something that ignites the imagination to conjure up scenes of the Jurassic with Sue alive and active. More than just a specimen, Sue has been enlarged into a manifestation or embodiment of the whole concept of the Jurassic. Instead of being just a generic specimen of *Tyrannosaurus rex* skeletons representing such paleontological notions as 'dinosaurs', 'fossils', '*Tyrannosaurus rex*', and 'skeleton', we have an individual known as Sue. What has happened, following Hein's reasoning, is that the fossil, the object, 'has been reconstructed [by the museum] as a site(s) of experience'¹³ known as Sue. Somehow this constructed animation has transcended the original object, the skeleton fossil, giving it a transparent feel. Hein describes this as if the object, in some sense, is 'not really there.'¹⁴ As a clarifying example she mentions science centres, where the objects and gadgets rarely are the true exhibited object. The true object is instead the natural phenomena that can be observed and experienced only through the use of these objects.¹⁵ While Sue is not a hands-on gadget that helps the visitor produce an event that makes a phenomena perceptible, it is nevertheless a tool to produce an experience of something that is not really there to be observed directly, namely the world of the Jurassic. According to Hein, in instances like this the museums focal interest has been displaced from the object to the conjunction of the object and subject in experience.¹⁶ The object 'Sue' does not offer the visitor a chance to observe a fossilised skeleton of a specific dinosaur species but a chance to experience a reality known as the Jurassic; Sue is a synecdoche for the Jurassic.

How does Sue transcend the object it originally is? What enlarges it to embody the Jurassic? Hein says that it is the experience, that Sue has become a site of experience, but what does that actually mean? The humongous skeleton, especially with the dramatic lighting and other features of staging, is bound to create emotionally charged experiences: wonder, awe, even fear at the sight of the towering predator as you realise how its size and strength dwarfs you. It is

¹¹ Asma, Stephen T. (2003) *Stuffed Animals and Pickled Heads*, p. 269-272, quote p. 270.

¹² With exhibition elements I refer to both the museum objects themselves and other objects that are used in exhibitions, such as vitrines, furniture, pictures, diagrams, and texts but also sounds, lighting, and the spatial arrangements of these.

¹³ Hein (2000), p. 5.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 26 & 66.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

a site: a particular experience you can have only in this specific place, for it requires your physical presence *at the feet* of the skeleton. But the experience could stop there; there is no necessary reason for it to become anything more than an experience of awe. But like Asma writes in the preceding quote, Sue ‘kindles a bonfire of *imagination*’ and it is the human imagination, the ability to imagine, that allows Sue to transcend the object. The experience-oriented approach sets objects up as situations, not merely as sites, that are more suitable for particular kinds of – especially affective – experiences that in turn feed and entice the visitor’s power of imagination. It is this imagined Jurassic that the visitor then experiences with the help of further acts of imagination; the reality of the Jurassic she experiences is the one she imagined. In this respect, as a place suitable for particular kinds of experiences, museum exhibitions and gardens are quite alike. Gardens are, in many cultures, considered to be especially suited to philosophical, emotional, and poetic contemplation. Some gardens, for example the traditional Japanese gardens, are allegorical to the extent that experiencing them demands spiritual contemplation. A garden does not, however, need to go to such extremes in order to be more than a patch of land. According to Cooper, many gardens and especially garden practices induce virtues¹⁷ – patience, humility, hope – and they manage this ‘by providing especially appropriate opportunities for their exercise.’¹⁸ In a similar fashion, museum exhibitions provide opportunities for imagination.

The theory of the object to experience shift can be criticised first of all for the claim that in experience-centred approach, museum objects are seen as evidence which implies that in object-centred approach they are not. However, as a museum professional could observe, museum objects, that is to say objects that have value within the museum world, are usually seen as having little value without provenance, without the history or context. Throughout history, objects have been more interesting, more important, and more valuable in monetary, museological, and sociological terms when it has been possible to ascribe them with a story. A spoon used by Napoleon on the evening of the battle of Waterloo has more value than a similar spoon found in someone’s attic. A spoon found during the renovation of the oldest building in town is more valuable than an identical spoon bought from a drift store. The skeleton known as Sue is extremely valuable because it is an almost complete skeleton, thus giving its observer a chance to construct an understanding of a *T. rex* skeleton without the

¹⁷ Cooper (2009), p. 90. Cooper’s idea about gardens providing appropriate opportunities for exercising virtues shares something with James J. Gibson’s idea of affordances, possibilities of action, provided by the environment. Gibson first introduced the idea in 1977 in his ‘The Theory of Affordances’ published in *Perceiving, Acting, and Knowing – Toward an Ecological Psychology*, edit. by Robert Shaw, Hillside.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

need to resort to guessing where individual bones are missing. Although museum objects are believed to have intrinsic value, even that value can be considered to originate from its undiscovered, untold story. No museum object is in this sense absolutely void or mute, at least not for a museum professional. Also, there is always the possibility that the missing story may someday be rediscovered. Museum objects therefore already are and have always been not only evidence, as duly noted in ICOM's statutes, but also proof. Their existence is enough to confirm or substantiate the existence of something else; they are indexical by nature.

The second point of disapproval is that the experience-centred approach seems to suggest that previously museums did not value the potential of objects to kindle experiences or not even experiences as such. It is true that after a visit to a contemporary museum where considerable effort has been put on the visitor experience, it is easy to compare it to the experiences gained during a museum visit in one's childhood and say that, 'This was much more interesting and fun than when I was a kid. Back then we just stared at the stuff on the shelves.' This, of course, might have been perfectly true, but only as a personal experience. It is possible to argue that museums have throughout their history been about the visitor experience. The Medici palace was all about the visitor experience. It was built to impress the guests of the Medici, to assure who ever visited that they were in the presence of formidable wealth and might.¹⁹ The palace didn't achieve this through direct argument but through indirect, emotional inducement, by inducing an experience of grandeur. The Medici palace was more staged than built to imprint by arousing a very specific experience which, to a certain extent, can be felt even today, and this was done partly through a careful use of art, artefacts and objects of various origin.

In his description of his first visit to the newly opened Dresden Gallery in 1768, Goethe offers a firsthand account of a museum experience that echoes feelings and impressions in many ways compatible with what a guest to the Medici palace might have experienced:

The impatiently awaited hour of opening arrived and my admiration exceeded all my expectations. That *salon* turning in on itself, magnificent and so well kept, the freshly gilded frames, the well-waxed parquetry, the profound silence that reigned, created a solemn and unique impression, akin to the emotion experienced upon entering the House of God, and it deepened as one looked at the ornaments on exhibition which, as much as the temple that housed them, were objects of adoration in that place consecrated to the holy ends of art.²⁰

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 72.

²⁰ Goethe, *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, originally quoted in Bazin (1967), *The Museum Age*, Universe Books, New York, p. 160, translated by J. van Nuis Cahill. To this context from Duncan, Carol (2001), *Civilizing Rituals – Inside Public Art Museums*, Routledge, London/New York, p. 15.

This experiential potential and effect has not only persisted throughout the history of museums, during which the reality of museum itself has seen numerous changes²¹, but it has been methodically used to achieve the desired effect, not only to arouse a specific experience but to affect the visitors' thoughts, attitudes, values, and the general comprehension of the given subject. Because of this, museums not only resemble churches, temples or other ritual sites aesthetically or architectonically (as described above by Goethe), but are, as Carol Duncan demonstrates in *Civilizing Rituals – Inside Public Art Museums*, sites or settings for rituals.²² All of the many manifestations of museums are and have been purposefully designed, and their ritualistic character has also been subjected to criticism. Even Goethe, who clearly experienced and expressed the church-like feeling of the Dresden Gallery, later criticised displaying Napoleon's spoils of war in the Louvre, arguing that in order to achieve that, something predating it had been destroyed, which in turn changed the way art was made and perceived. He (and some of his contemporaries) saw that the ritualistic framing of the museum may lead to the disintegration or even negation of the earlier, original meaning carried by the objects.²³ In 1936, Walter Benjamin expressed a comparable idea concerning deterioration in his 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', suggesting that the modern means of reproduction destroy the aura of a work of art as it 'detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition.'²⁴ The gravity of this realisation has not diminished over the centuries, quite the contrary. In fact, Goethe's critique could be taken to foreshadow the relativistic standpoint dominant today.

The emergence of the postmodern worldview has caused us to question such notions as objectivity and truth, and because of it, Hein believes, museums have faced a need for a fundamental reconstruction of their identity.²⁵ The world is now envisioned as pluralistic, relative, and interconnected. What previously was called 'truth', is now considered to be something akin to a subjective point of view. Anything and everything can be called into question. The impossibility of a removed, objective standpoint or observer is now taken into

²¹ Hooper-Greenhill (1993) *Museums and Shaping of Knowledge*, Routledge, New York/London, p. 1. About the change of art museums see Barker, Emma (1999b) 'Part 1: The Changing Museum – Introduction'.

²² Duncan (2001), p.10. Though Duncan writes mainly about art museums, many of her examples are such furnished interiors, or what she calls 'the donor memorials' (such as the West Room of the Morgan Library, donor J.P. Morgan's constructed study), which have much in common with cultural history museums.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

²⁴ Benjamin, Walter (2005), 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', transcribed by Andy Blunden, UCLA School of Theatre, Film and Television, <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm>. No page numbers. 1st published in 1936.

²⁵ Hein (2000), p. x.

consideration for example in both physics and psychology as ‘the observer effect’, and museums can no longer claim to own the truth. The objects are still ‘real’, but we can know longer be sure of there is a right or correct way to display, view, and interpret them. We are now aware that as observers, however disinterested we intend to be, we are not free of preconceptions. We have our ingrained biases and partialities. It is also recognised that when we turn our attention *towards* something, we at the same time turn *away* from something else.²⁶ Therefore it has become important to ask not only what is exhibited in a museum but also what is not, including both objects and information. In the museum world, the adoption of this attitude owes much to the post-colonialist critique of various aspects of museum practices, a critique that had begun already with Goethe, and so it is understood today that ‘[t]he very introduction of an object into a museum is not universally seen as a celebration of it. (...) The contemplative gaze prescribed for appreciation of the fine art of the West appears as an act of violence when directed at objects not designed for the same purpose. (...) The eye that appropriates can intrude as much as the hand that steals.’²⁷ These kind of ‘[c]hanges in museological practice reflect both philosophical and practical cultural environments.’²⁸

Though it is seldom clearly mentioned, it is an often implied ideal that it is unethical to place objects on display in a way that does not support the visitor in interpreting the object from her individual standpoint. A more radical thinker, Andrew J. Pekarik, in another article, comes to the conclusion that ‘there needs to be room in museums for people with different preferences to find, uncompromised, the experiences they seek’, suggesting that interpretation is not necessarily needed at all.²⁹ He quotes a teacher he had interviewed who said, ‘I don’t think we necessarily have to have somebody telling us what this signifies, or why it’s important. It may not be important to that person. Their value system may be totally different.’³⁰ This attitude resonates with Benjamin’s observation that in film and sports ‘everybody who witnesses its accomplishments is somewhat of an expert’ which he saw in the case of writing as culmi-

²⁶ For how this comes into play in constructing science exhibitions, see e.g., Jay Rounds’s article ‘Why Are Some Science Museum Exhibits More Interesting Than Others?’ in *Curator: The Museum Journal*, vol. 43, no. 3, July 2000, pp. 188-189.

²⁷ Hein (2000), p. 42.

²⁸ Hein (2000), p. 57.

²⁹ Pekarik (2002b) ‘Feeling or Learning’, *Curator*, vol. 45/4, October 2002, p. 264.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 262-263.

nating in readers gaining an 'access to authorship.'³¹ The change in the mode of participation, which Benjamin saw taking place, is now changing museums. Though it is arguably true that the integrity of knowledge and information exhibited should be maintained as well as possible, there should equally be room for personal, subjective reflection. Following the notion of relativity of truth, every object may have a number of interpretations and meanings – though not an unlimited number as Umberto Eco indicates in *The Limits of Interpretation*. Similarly, every object can have several lives: first, when it is used in its original purpose; second, if it is converted for another use; third, when it is preserved as a heirloom in the family; fourth, when it is forgotten; and fifth, when it is found and preserved in a museum. Between every life, the object is reframed and the previous meaning is unavoidably transformed by the new usage and users. When the object is put on display, it begins yet another life with a meaning and purpose which might be less transfixed or predetermined than any of the earlier ones – this is on condition that this transiency is allowed. For example, the same 19th century spoon can be used as a part of a reconstructed interior where its content depends on whether it is put, for example, in the kitchen or in a glass by the bed in the bedroom. The same spoon may be a part of a display of 19th century kitchen utensils or of the contents of a doctor's bag from the same period. All these frames are equally right. The only case where the spoon could be wrong altogether is if it was put in an 18th century frame where it could not have physically existed.

2.2 The Authenticity of an Experience and the Two Princely Palaces

Why did the students have mixed feelings and views about the City Museum? Many students expressed in their written assignment a conflict between what they expected or envisioned a museum exhibition to be like, a kind of an archetype, and what they saw online, what they read, and how they themselves reacted to both the City Museum and Pekarik's article. These students appeared to have an especially strong idea of what kind of a place a museum exhibition is, and considered the City Museum to have challenged this. But '[t]here is no

³¹ Benjamin (2008) *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, Belknap Press/Harvard University Press, Cambridge. According to him, readers began to turn into writers as newspapers begun to have 'letters to the editor' and as the possibility to publish one's writings opened to a wider audience. Today affordable digital technology and even cheaper means of publishing, especially over the Internet, have opened access to authorship in other forms of art and new levels of authorship in film especially.

essential museum. The museum is not a pre-constituted entity that is produced in the same way at all times.³² Is the conflict articulated by the students an indication of the change from object-oriented to experience-oriented exhibitions? Perhaps the transition is not complete yet, at least not throughout the Western museum world? Is it not likely that the transition is still going on as the title of Hein's book suggests, that the museum is still *in* transition? After all, Hein did not write the book to describe the history of a process, but to contemplate and offer a perspective on a still unfurling trend. Her focus is on a more general or philosophical level of the aesthetification of museums, especially on the way the role of the 'real' world in relation to museums has become more about how museums create reality; how museums have come to mediate reality through experiences and narratives; and how epistemic homogeneity has been replaced by pluralistic relativity.

In *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill suggests, basing her view on Foucault's theories of knowledge and effective history, that it is mistaken to ask what has changed and what has remained the same. Instead we should ask, 'How are things different; how have things changed; and why?'³³ Hooper-Greenhill found in Foucault's effective history a method of thinking that, instead of focusing on the similarities and continued developmental flow, targets the differences, the change, even rupture, and 'those very long-term movements that span the centuries (...).'³⁴ Instead of looking for similarities and continuities between the ancestors of contemporary museums and their visitor-oriented policies, Hooper-Greenhill's approach encourages to find differences. In her book she did this by following the three *epistemes* discovered and described by Foucault in *The Archeology of Knowledge* – the Renaissance, the classical and the modern, which all have their specific characteristics and thus differences.³⁵ Each *episteme* is preceded by a cultural and epistemological disturbance, and each *episteme* ends with a new disruption. Within each *episteme*, the elements that contribute to its form and which are in constant flux are connected through a congruence of intellectual activity, and this congruence acts as 'the basis for the identification of the *episteme*,' Hooper-Greenhill concludes.³⁶ Here the basis for her research is based on selecting specific representatives from each *episteme* to act as examples of how the way museums shape knowledge has changed over time.

Before explaining why I bring up Hooper-Greenhill's work, I must call attention to a contrasting opinion on the nature of history. In *Museums and Moder-*

³² Hooper-Greenhill (1993), p. 191.

³³ Ibid., p. 10. For effective history, ruptures, change, similarities and differences see Foucault, Michel (2005) *Tiedon arkeologia*, pp. 12-14.

³⁴ Hooper-Greenhill (1993), p. 11.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 12. For Foucault's description of *episteme* Foucault (2005), pp. 248-249.

³⁶ Hooper-Greenhill (1993), p.12.

nity, Nick Prior examines the role art galleries and museums have played in the development of modernity. He observes that it is tempting to envision the history of (art) museums as ‘a tidy disjuncture’ from the princely gallery to the national art museum and that this route leads from fixed points of departure to two profiles that are characterised by ‘polar opposites – aesthetic, temporal, political, cultural, sociological’ and so on.³⁷ He warns that ‘[h]istory does not unfold as in a series of packaged moments and [that] to characterise the different traditions according to ready-made conceptual spans is to replace classification with caricature.’³⁸ I must agree with him that princely palaces and public museums are not antithetical, not separated by an iron curtain as he puts it, but have connecting traits. Looking either for change and differences or continuity and similarities alone produces an incomplete picture. Equally so, it is difficult to pay attention to both approaches at once – especially if the subject in question is particularly complex or substantial in some other way. Foucault’s *epistemes* can be viewed, after all, as hermeneutic tools, as platforms opening new views on history, as means of understanding. The reality of any period far exceeds the confines of its categorisation. Here I am content with keeping in mind that history is made of both continuities and ruptures, of similarities and differences.

Other writers have already discussed the history of museums, especially their history as institutions, in numerous accomplished books, but what has been said about the history of the visitor? Hooper-Greenhill, for example, opened an interesting view to the history of the representation and production of knowledge and to the function of the museum in society. In these histories, the visitor is often discussed as an object of action, as a citizen in need of education. Visitors are also presented as individuals driven by nostalgia, intrigue, and thirst for knowledge and experience. All in all, the visitor is often spoken of as a mind. Pekarik’s article, however, does break this generalisation. He draws a picture of a bodily active visitor who engages with her surroundings, producing meaning not only with her mind but also with her body.

How has the visitor been bodily present in museums? How has the subject position of the visitor been expressed through space and through her bodily presence within that space? How, if the aspect of experience has been always present, has there been a shift from object to experience? I do not intend to give here a complete, exhausted description or discussion but to meditate and speculate on these questions briefly. Having said that, I do recognise that this is a subject that would merit a more thorough inspection.

As said, in *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, Hooper-Greenhill proceeds through the history of museums through examples or case studies from

³⁷ Prior, Nick (2002), *Museums & Modernity – Art Galleries and the Making of Modern Culture*, p. 21.

³⁸ Ibid.

each *episteme*. One that receives a thorough examination is the Palazzo Medici in Florence, the origin of European museums³⁹. The Palazzo Medici was conceived and built, as was already mentioned, to impress its visitors and to establish and reinforce the might of the Medici. This was done by representing the hierarchical structure of a feudal society in an architectural form.⁴⁰ All the objects, all curiosities, art and craftsmanship, were signs of the might and status of the current merchant prince and his family. But how, amongst this display of power, did the visitor move? How was her experience constructed bodily? It was, as Hooper-Greenhill says, essential for the success of the palace to have visitors,⁴¹ to have someone to walk through its iconographic program, through the hierarchy of its spaces. Hooper-Greenhill approaches this act, an act that is easily comparable with ritualistic acts, as an exercise in gaze: how the visitor assumes a specific subject position from which she sees, reads, and interprets the palace. Although 'gaze' is a valid and established notion for this act, it also, because of its etymology, puts emphasis on the sense of vision, which I find misleading. Most descriptions I have come across of the Palazzo and of its influence are descriptions of its visual grandeur and power, but vision seldom, if ever, works alone. Usually it collaborates with other senses and, indeed, with the whole body, an aspect that I will take in account in the next chapter.⁴² On a side note, Hooper-Greenhill, too, most often mentions works of art and craftsmanship, statues, tapestries, wall-paintings, and so on. The task of the visitor was 'to exercise the gaze in appreciation, to observe, to measure, to admire, to evaluate the time and money and expertise expended on the spaces and the things' and then to draw the proper conclusions.⁴³ But social hierarchies are not established by visual and monetary displays alone. They are established through physical, spatial relations and movement, which are both included in the psychoanalytic concept of 'gaze.' Hooper-Greenhill does speak about the spatial aspect of the Palazzo, of its importance as a space, on several occasions, but not thoroughly, even though one could describe the Palazzo and other similar locations as constructed environments or situations of the gaze, environments in which both the prince and the visitor both exercise the gaze and are gazed upon.

³⁹ On this, Hooper-Greenhill (1993, p. 23) quotes F.H. Taylor (1948) *The Taste of Angels: A History of Art Collecting from Ramses to Napoleon*, Little, Brown & Company, Boston, p. 69; E.P. Alexander (1979) *Museums in Motion*, The American Association for State and Local History, Nashville, p. 20; and J. Alsop (1982) *The Rare Art Traditions: the History of Art Collecting and its Linked Phenomena*, Themes and Hudson, London, p. 339.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁴² Psychologist James J. Gibson advocated, amongst other issues, the connectedness of the senses in *The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems*.

⁴³ Hooper-Greenhill (1993), p. 72.

The Palazzo was built around 1440.⁴⁴ According to Hooper-Greenhill, the Renaissance *episteme* was an era of ‘interpretation and similitude, with things being read for their hidden *relationships to each other*’ and of resemblance.⁴⁵ First of all, all palaces throughout the history do have spatial hierarchy of some kind. The most structured one is perhaps the spatial program of the Chinese culture and empire. There in every official and even private building (or where and when it was possible) the order and hierarchy of the universe is, or at least was, both repeated and maintained by the building. Both the spatial and the structural elements are designed in accordance to the universal order, and the role and place of the individual is embodied through them. For example Zi Jin-cheng, the Forbidden City, the imperial palace in Beijing, is a progression of spaces from the most public on its south side, in front of Tiananmen, the Gate of Heavenly Peacemaking, to the most secluded and private at the north end, the imperial residence. The residential section itself is divided into specific areas for the emperor, his wives of various order, children, domestic necessities and so on. Access was strictly supervised, and admittance to a particular stage in the spatial hierarchy was in direct relation to the role and importance of the subject.⁴⁶ Even today the Forbidden City remains impressive. The walls and buildings tower over you. They seclude and hide, obstruct your view and then spread apart to grant you an expanse of space or an intimate courtyard out of reach for the world beyond. The City places you either at the centre of its attention or under its eaves – often literally – taking you for one of its own. It is the position and the route you take, now that you are able to choose one, that determines who you are; the status, the rank, the social position is *confirmed* or *validated* by your position in the physical space.

A comparable spatial program, although perhaps not as thoroughly detailed one, could in Europe be found, for example, in the court of Louis XIV in Versailles. Similar thinking is also present in the yurts of native Siberian cultures, for whom ‘the shelter is the microcosm’: the roof of the yurt is the sky vault and the hole for the smoke in it points at the North Star.⁴⁷ In other words, the shelter depicts the stratified cosmos of these cultures, and the smoke rising from the fire of the inhabitants is like the spirit of the shaman rising from the plane of the man through the sky vault into the upper world, the plane of the spirits.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 24.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p 12. Italics my own.

⁴⁶ For a description of the Chinese spatial systems and how it is executed in the Forbidden City see e.g., Lip, Evelyn (1996) *Feng Shui – Environments of Power: A Study of Chinese Architecture*, Academy Editions, London.

⁴⁷ Tuan (1990) *Topophilia*, p. 131.

If we follow Arthur Lovejoy's statement that '[t]he men of the fifteenth century still lived in a walled universe,'⁴⁸ we can also perceive the Palazzo as a walled universe. It is not a representation of the general world view typical for its time with man situated at the centre of the universe, but a representation of the world according to the Medici, where the prince is at the centre. From the outside, the Palazzo has the appearance of a contained space. What it holds inside is not accessible to the outside, but the facade is made to be viewed. The vaulted doors and windows of the ground floor indicate access but are still made markedly restrictive by the accompanying smaller windows, which leave most of the ground floor wall intact: they are punctuations in it, peepholes without the possibility to peep in since they are placed too high for a good look. On the second and third floors, rows of twin windows open to the outside allowing a view from within but not into the rooms, and above them the attic storey widens to reach beyond the walls, shading the streets and the passers-by resembling the influence of the family that reaches throughout the city itself. The building communicates power and seclusion but not withdrawal; it is profoundly present.

The sense of vision is reserved as an instrument of appreciation for those who are not important enough to be granted with the right to enter. To them the Palazzo speaks from distance: 'You may dwell in my shadow like you dwell under the influence of my inhabitants.' Hence the distance inherent in viewing, in gazing, is utilised as a symbol of social hierarchy. The aura of the Palazzo is strong, radiating from an oscillation of presence and the inaccessible: the Palazzo both is and is not there, influencing and yet withdrawn. It is not poles apart from today's social hierarchies that situate the famous, the popular, and the important for admiration from afar, and allows presenting a handshake with the president as some sort of a reward.

But looking is only the first and a distant mode of appreciation. In *Topophilia*, Tuan writes about the medieval cathedrals and how they were 'meant to be experienced; it was a dense text to be read with devout attention and not an architectural form to be merely seen.'⁴⁹ In a cathedral the text is written in the language of pictures painted on walls, in sculpted pillars, arcs, and statues. The foundation of the text, however, is written in the geometric and spatial organisation of the building itself. It is an aesthetic field that requires and necessitates knowledge of its symbolism, but most importantly it is a space of movement:

⁴⁸ Lovejoy, Arthur O. (1967) *The Great Chain of Being – A Study of the History of an Idea*, Harper & Row, New York, p. 101.

⁴⁹ Tuan (1990), p. 137.

A tourist with a camera may be interested by the beauty of the nave with its aisles, transepts, radiating chapels, and the span of the vaults. Should he seek a position to set up his camera, he will find that there is no privileged position from which all these features may be seen. To see a gothic interior properly *one has to move about and turn one's head*.⁵⁰

The same is true of the Palazzo: it must be entered. Like in the Forbidden City, the passage through the palace is a movement into closer presence with the merchant prince. The meaning, the message the Palazzo is created to convey, becomes fully visible, readable, and most importantly experienceable because it can be entered. Like a museum exhibition with an iconographic program, let's say the history of modern art, must be walked through in something akin to a correct order if the visitor wishes to understand the message, so was the Palazzo. As the visitor moved further in through the various rooms of the Palazzo, the story depicted in it was told. And it was this process that created the setting for the subject position the visitor, hopefully, adopted. For the visitors of the Palazzo, simply looking was not enough. Their gaze was guided and executed by their movement within the building, and the more important they were to the prince, the more closer to the private sections of the palace they got. Think of the concept of 'private audience'. What does it mean to gain a privileged access to the prince or even a promise of one? The potential of the Palazzo was in fact created by the presence of the merchant prince. Even though the building and its contents are a manifestation of the family's wealth of power, it is the prince who wields it. After all, what are all the wealth and means without the will to use them? While the merchant prince could create, reinforce, and execute his power through the lavishness of the Palazzo, without him the act of entering and moving through the palace does not have the same influence. He, and the influence his presence created, was the goal of the passage.

In conclusion, the Palazzo was very much a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, an aesthetic field originating, in a sense, from the prince and his palace, but relying on the participation of both the visitors and the populace left outside the gates. Inside the palace the visitor was part of the exhibit. She was not there just to watch but to act, to participate, although she was not the one who decided, at least she was not meant to be the one who decided, what the message was. Her role was, so to speak, to read the role and to fulfil it; 'One was paying homage to the prince and encountering his symbolic presence not merely admiring the artefacts.'⁵¹

⁵⁰ Ibid. Italics my own. This certainly is true. It seems to be almost impossible to photograph the spatiality of a cathedral without special equipment. That magnificent view of a space that opens up before you seldom translates into a picture. Especially those forests of rising pillars seem to be guaranteed to disappoint on film. Yet I keep trying; the experience commands it.

⁵¹ Prior (2002), p. 19.

Hein writes:

Museums still collect objects and still take pride in the size and the quality of their collections. They continue to preserve and study objects, but their chief occupation is neither to discover or to keep them. It is to *foster the intersubjective constructions that objects elicit*. No longer content to be styled as graveyards or department stores, museums now are cast as impresarios of *meaning performances*. They have become *manufacturers of experience*.⁵²

What is the difference between the Palazzo and a contemporary museum as described by Hein? The Medici took pride in their collection, or perhaps more so in their ability to cumulate⁵³ such a collection, and their collection of artefacts and the Palazzo itself were used to entice a rather particular experience and message that only those objects, of that variety, could help to create.

Hein makes an interesting note on the 'reconceptualization of authenticity, for the museum's commitment is now to the authentic quality of the experience to which the object has become a means.'⁵⁴ An object's provenance has become not even subsidiary but subordinate to its subjective effect. 'This effect, and not the historically legitimated object, is the "real thing" that museums strive to achieve,' Hein continues. Museums have come to realise that the actual, real object is not necessary for an authentic experience of it, a realisation that seems to much in common with the museum without walls, *Le Musée imaginaire*, by André Malraux, which has become an idea working its influence in the backstage of the museum world.⁵⁵ While this release from the dependency on 'real things' does allow museums new ways of exhibiting – for example by producing replicas for the visitors to handle – it also presents a problem Ada Louise Huxtable calls, in *The Unreal America – Architecture and Illusion*, surrogate experiences and surrogate environments. There are dangers, as her critique of theme parks and shopping malls shows, in these environments and situations where '[d]istinctions are no longer made, or deemed necessary, between the real and the false

⁵² Hein (2000), p. 65. Italics my own.

⁵³ There is a reason why I have chosen to use 'cumulate' instead of 'accumulate'. The Medici did not merely accumulate wealth and possessions, they built an empire of both political and commercial influence. They did not only accumulate, i.e., acquired and gathered wealth, but combined what they had gathered into new possibilities. In other words, the Medici were not satisfied by simple accumulation of money but systematically used their wealth in pursuit of other goals. The Palazzo is an example of this cumulation, an act of rearranging the accumulated wealth into something new.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁵⁵ See e.g., Barker, Emma (1999) 'Introduction' in Barker, Emma (edit.) (1999) *Contemporary Cultures of Display*, Yale University Press, New Haven/New York in association with The Open University, London, pp. 8-12.

(...).⁵⁶ What happens if we become too infatuated with the authentic experience? What happens when we declare after a visit to, for example, the Colonial Williamsburg, whose manufactured nature Huxtable lays open in her book⁵⁷, that it was as if we had really been there in 1770, that it was so real, when in fact very little authenticity is left? What happens if we end up thinking that this is how it was, that this is it, when

[h]istory is quicksilver that runs at the touch, it refers to events that deliver their life, breath, color, and meaning from some elusive shaping moment in the irretrievable past. It is both charged and changed by the prism of passing time. The essential, defining clues of a particular moment may not even survive. By its definition, history is something that is gone forever.⁵⁸

And what is an *authentic* experience? When is an experience authentic? Is there such thing as an unauthentic experience? Is a false memory, a term familiar from psychology, an unauthentic experience? The Palazzo Medici did produce authentic, in whichever way we would define it, experiences at its time, but if I was to visit the palace now, what would I experience? Certainly not what the original guests of the family did.

The custom of using ‘authentic’ with regard to experience is, in my experience, a rather common way of thinking in the museum world. It is not an expression often used directly but perhaps more often something assumed or implied: ‘Does this give the visitors a feel of the real conditions on a tall ship?’ The concept behind open air, folk, and living museums also implies an ideal of authenticity, especially when they have staff in period costumes performing period tasks and sometimes even talking in period lingo. Again, ‘authentic’ is not necessarily mentioned directly but implied with sentences like, ‘Visitors get a unique opportunity to see the earliest Canadian pioneer life (...)’,⁵⁹ as if such thing could be seen today. Or the authentic may be approached through make-believe as the visitors dress up in period costumes and run around a castle taking photographs and pretending to be the lord or the lady, like I once did at Huntingtower Castle on the outskirts of Perth, Scotland. A play like this certainly does ignite one’s imagination with thoughts like, ‘I wonder if some lady of the house has stood in this exact spot and admired the view too?’, but I can never experience the castle in a manner similar to its past occupants. I do not live in their world and I do not have their life-experiences or conceptions. Even

⁵⁶ Huxtable, Ada Louise (1997) *The Unreal America – Architecture and Illusion*, The New Press, New York, p. 2.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-18.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁵⁹ Sainte-Marie among the Hurons, Ontario, Canada at <http://www.saintemarieamongthehurons.on.ca/sm/en/Home/index.htm> Viewed 16.9.2012.

the lady to which I compare myself is a thing of my imagination, created out of my notions, impressions, and personal tastes. The comparison is applicable only within my imagination. There is a certain relativity to authenticity – especially concerning experiences.

I believe that ‘an authentic experience’ is used to refer to an experience about something that is comparable to the original experience in which a particular object has been present – authenticity by association, if you will. For example, the experience of using a hand-forged axe from the 1700s to chop wood today is comparable to the experience of using the same axe three hundred years ago. If a present-day smith, one that is familiar with the forging methods of the 1700s, would make an axe similar to an authentic, historic model, the experience using that replicated axe would be comparable to the experience of using an authentic eighteenth century axe. Using the replicate would give the present-day user a reasonably good experience of how it would have felt to work with such a tool, but that would be true only for the physical act of chopping wood. All the other aspects of experiencing the 1700s would not be re-enacted. For example, had that axe been the latest and the finest product of its time, we would not be able to appreciate its novelty and how it advanced the art of wood chopping. And yet, as Hein points out: ‘What is the meaning of the Holocaust or the moon landing or the Japanese internment camps? Some of the most sensational museums and museum exhibitions today evoke an “experience” of those events with the help of a few artifacts.’⁶⁰ While we can have experiences that reflect those original horrific, exhilarating, anxiety-ridden experiences, our experiences today are not the same. They are sympathetic, but they are authentic only as our experiences; our experiences are, after all, free from the inescapability of the original situations. We do not, no matter how much we would like to, live in those times. Nor can we truly relive them. We can, however, identify with certain elements in them, say, the fear of losing our loved ones, but it would be more appropriate to say that we can approach the experiences of others.⁶¹ Therefore I take ‘authentic experience’ to mean a situation where I approach the past or the distant from my own point of reference and do it to such a degree that the otherwise unavailable world becomes accessible, without my being able to ever fully reach or comprehend its reality.

If I were to visit the Palazzo Medici today, how would I experience it? What would my experience be? Sadly, I have not had the opportunity to do so, but I would expect certain things to happen. I would most likely admire, greatly and with fascination, the still remaining elements in the building and the building itself. I would contemplate the history of the Palazzo and the history of the family and the city itself. I would appreciate the skill and art, but I would also

⁶⁰ Hein (2000), p. 65.

⁶¹ See Ochsner (1995) for an example of Holocaust and identification, and Lowenthal (2009) for nostalgia and the craving for the past.

see the objects as a manifestation of the Medici's might. I imagine I would be moved by the palace's aesthetics. But what I would not have, is an authentic experience comparable to the original Medici experience. All I can do is imagine, and imagining is a fickle art, originating from deep within me and more closely guided by my expectancies, preferences, and previous experiences than I often even realise.

However mystifyingly named (or perhaps precisely because of that mystique), the authenticity of an experience is part of museum vocabulary. Let us then accept the notion of authentic experience and consider it in practice. If the contemporary Palazzo would be identical in every detail to its original condition – which it is not for original contents were sold in 1494 when Florence was taken over by France⁶² – and if identical is here taken to mean that I would not be able to tell the difference even if replicas and reproductions were used since I have not seen the original, would I not experience the place as it was intended? True, I would not be a guest to the family, nor would I be a member of the Renaissance world. But the principle that Hein introduces suggests that comparability would be possible. Also, we do crave for such comparability in our nostalgia and romance of the past.

Stirling Castle, Scotland, has gone through remarkable restorations over the last 20 years. The castle has seen many alterations since its Renaissance days, and the object of the restorations was not only to save the castle from severe deterioration but to restore it in its original period form. While it is questionable if such intentions and actions are reasonable or even possible,⁶³ in Stirling's case some degree of restoration was necessary to guarantee its survival. For example the Chapel Royal had been used as an armoury, a general store, and for other non-ecclesiastical functions. Its richly painted walls were discovered only because the later alterations were removed. The most detailed attention, however, was given to the James V's Palace of Princelie Virtues which before restoration was dangerously derelict to the point of some parts of it being in danger of collapsing.

The construction of the Palace of Princelie Virtues was begun circa 1538 by James V as a palace for him and his second wife, Mary of Guise.⁶⁴ James V had inherited an almost bankrupted realm but managed to restore its fortunes. The Palace was built on same principles as the Palazzo Medici, to express the new wealth of the realm – a virtue common to both princes – and the virtues and

⁶² In Hooper-Greenhill (1993) pp. 71, 73-76.

⁶³ 'Restoration is a difficult and unclear procedure at best,' writes Huxtable, 'unreality is built into the process, which requires a highly subjective kind of cosmetic surgery that balances life and death.' Huxtable (1997), p. 19. See also pp. 17-18.

⁶⁴ Details in this section are based on Historic Scotland's official souvenir guide, *Stirling Castle, Argyll's Lodging, Mar's Mark*, 2011, pp. 50-51.



PIC 2.1 The reconstructed Queen's Bedchamber that capture the lavishness of the royal life in Stirling Castle, Scotland.

abilities of the ruler who had achieved it. James V was greatly influenced by the trends and fashions of continental Europe, and his palace came to be one of the first feats of Renaissance architecture in Britain. Over the years of war and shifting powers the Palace lost its might until not much remained in original state. Restoration of the building required, at least to my understanding, extensive renovations. All in all, the Palace of Princelie Virtues, like many other parts of the Stirling Castle, offered a rare opportunity to recreate entire period interiors in original settings without damaging, corrupting, or removing original features as most of the damage had already been done.

The Palace, the Great Hall, and the Chapel Royal are in-

deed magnificent in the very meaning of the word. Especially the royal lodgings in the Palace have been recreated with skill, time, and patience in minute detail, using original materials and techniques. Practically everything in the lodgings are new reproductions, even the walls, ceilings and the floors. Everything feels real or authentic: when I entered the still unfurnished King's Bedchamber, it was impossible not to think that what I saw, how I felt, and how I reacted was something James V would have felt when he came to see the finished paintings on the walls and the opulent ceiling. He too must have imagined how the room would look after the furniture would be added to the existing luxury, mustn't he? Except that he died before the palace interiors were completed and, according to the official souvenir guide, the King's Lodgings were left unfurnished – except for the frame of the royal bed – to reflect this state of affairs.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 16.

If experience-orientedness is adopted as an approach, thinking that it produces experiences that are comparable to the original experience in the past, does this happen in the Palace of Princes Virtues? I did feel awe in the presence of its magnificence. The power of the aesthetics of the Palace is transforming. The colours of the painted walls and ceilings radiate upon the visitor. The famous carved Stirling Heads in the ceiling of the King's Outer Hall in their full glory, though all recreations, are undoubtedly as stunning as the ornaments of the original ceiling.⁶⁶ The skill of the craftsmen is evident even to an amateur, and the sheer amount of fabrics and painted surfaces is enough to indicate the amount of time, skill, and money spent. Although practically all I saw were reproductions, it did lead me into thinking about the wealth and the might all that opulence would have represented in its day, about how powerful and influential those kings and queens had been. Many fellow visitors seemed to share similar sentiments. While more museum-like exhibitions, exhibitions having vitrines and such, may provoke enthusiastic conversation, the atmosphere in the James V's Palace was awe-inspiring, even solemn. Visitors passed through rooms more quietly, looking around them with thoughtful, introspective eyes. I still find the experience somewhat bewildering: although my modern life is wealthier than that of an ordinary Renaissance citizen, my everyday life is equally removed from such splendour. The Palace was so different from my other experiences that experiencing it was not easy to fit in. I did feel out of place in those rooms meant for royal occupation, and I got the feeling that many other visitors felt so too. Five hundred years ago the Palace was a strictly restricted space and even today, in its current recreation, it still sustains some of that distance. The Palace was originally built to inspire with awe and its current reincarnation manages to do so too.

Hein asks, 'what sort of experiences do museums aim to achieve – pleasure? edification? satisfaction of curiosity? enlightenment? awe? wonder?'⁶⁷ She refers to The Smithsonian's Institutional Studies Office's categorisation of museums experiences – social, object, cognitive, and introspective experiences – and how this categorisation is used to help museums recognise what kinds of experiences visitors wish from particular museums, and then 'to deliver wanted experiences more effectively, according to the assumptions that museums are accountable to their "clients" for providing conditions that enhance the experience they seek.'⁶⁸ Let us assume that I and the other visitors to James V's Palace seek to have an experience that is as faithful as possible to the original period experience. To an extent I did have that kind of an experience. The setting made

⁶⁶ The carver wood emblems are not exact replicas but, while being very similar to the surviving originals, reflect the personal style and interpretation of the master carver today.

⁶⁷ Hein (2000), p. 67.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

it possible to *imagine* how it might have felt, and I think it is safe to say that some of the feelings and thoughts that arose there – the awe at the presence of symbols of wealth and power for example – must be very close to what the historical visitors experienced. Even the thoughts on the social order of the period in question and on the distribution of wealth and power back then might have been in the minds of some of the Renaissance visitors – in the form of envy, if nothing else. But one aspect of the present-day experience is unique to it, making it profoundly different from the experience of the Palace in its heyday: the prince, or the king, is not present. The passage through the rooms that once signified so much does not lead any closer to the king – but to his absence. Not only is he not physically present, but we are not his subjects, we do not seek for his patronage nor do we fall under his justice. We may freely seek firsthand experience of his court, but we are not able to have it since it is not there. The court has gone. In fact, the entire world of the Renaissance Scotland, the pace and the realities of that society are now beyond the reach of our experience. Its direct influence on our everyday lives is gone, although the King is still present to us Westerners as a link in the chain of British rulers and as an influence on and in the history of Europe, especially for the citizens of the contemporary Great Britain. He still does have personal influence of some kind: after all, many of us are fascinated enough to seek that experience.

In many ways the present-day experience of the Palace is comparable to the Renaissance experience, but they are not equivalent. As said, we cannot have an authentic experience in this sense. Times have changed and therefore the aesthetic field of the Palace has changed too. But in one way the situation is the same: both the Palace of Princely Virtues and the Palazzo Medici are still testaments to the might of both families. They were both created to communicate social hierarchy, to put it in practice as a spatial order. They both constructed a particular experience (a situation for gaze, as Cooper might have it) that paid homage to the prince and recognised his status. Now that the world of Renaissance princes is gone, the foundations of the two palaces have changed. As Prior points out, in the past the visitor's 'gaze acquired meaning only in relation to the aura of the prince, not from the works of art themselves,'⁶⁹ and the same was true of the entire experience. In no collection today will we encounter the symbolic presence of might the way the historical princely collection used to do. Instead we encounter the direct presence of objects and through them, the presence of art, culture, the past, nature, science, and so forth, which, much like the status of a prince, are conceptual constructions and not tangible things. It is also a question of changed priorities: nationalism, the sense of a nationhood instead of a sense of subject-hood, turned princely collections into national museums and today, I would suggest, nation-

⁶⁹ Prior (2002), p. 19.

alism is transforming into a sense of roots and of one's place in the world at large.

There is, however, one significant distinction between past and present palaces. While James V's Palace is still an image of the historical court, the view it offers of that court to the visitors is not the same: it is, like the courts of history, a play in action – but with a difference. The palaces of the past with their courts were performances, enactments of social hierarchy, and political power. That display of actual and practical rank and power that had produced these two palaces eventually evolved into elaborate court masques, theatre shows, and musical presentations, pinnacled in the enactments of Louis XIII and XIV during the seventeenth century⁷⁰ with wealth and power no longer measured in the monetary value of the palace but by performing the court ritual. Almost everything became a performance of power to such a point that Prior sees it fitting to call the ceremonial monumentalism the Baroque offered as 'playing out the theatrical appearance of court as an external imposition, as a *Gesamtkunstwerk* (a total work of art).'⁷¹ But while the play in James V's court was a performance of appearances, the play taking place in Stirling Castle today is an attempt to offer a view behind the scenes. The everyday activities of the castle life are presented and explained throughout the premises. Visitors are able to see what it took to maintain the court and the castle and how things got done. The visitors get to hear what music was played and see what kinds of instruments the musicians used. They even get to play the instruments, smell the ingredients of perfumes, and feel the fabrics of the period clothing. These hands-on exhibits help the visitor move closer to the past, sensuously opening her a more involved part to play. The play becomes most theatre-like in the Palace of Princeslie Virtues, where the guides are present in period costumes throughout the day. The guides play different parts – a maid, the jester, the Queen Mary de Guise, and so on – keeping very much in character as they converse with the visitors. They tell about their lives (the presumed lives of their characters) as if they truly were who they pretend to be, and their stories have been used instead of informational texts which would compromise the authentic feel of the lodgings and the period. In a word, the Palace of Princeslie Virtues has become a representation of its former self.

Interestingly, during the time I spent in the royal lodgings, the way visitors reacted to and approached the guides seemed to depend on the character in question. After a moment of hesitation, the jester was approached with relative ease by those visitors who showed an inclination towards such interaction. They seemed relaxed by the jester's uncomplicated banter and friendliness. The queen, who was present in her bedchamber, was approached more hesitantly – also by those visitors who had engaged at ease with the jester. While some visi-

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 17.

⁷¹ Ibid.



PIC 2.2 A maid brushing the carpet in the Queen's Inner Hall, Palace of Princelie Virtues, Sterling Castle.

tors approached the jester themselves, it was the queen who opened the exchange of words. I myself felt somewhat self-aware in her presence, feeling perhaps like I was intruding on her privacy when I looked into her closets; the presence of the jester did not produce such feelings. At one point the queen pulled out her chamber pot from beneath the bed to explain a young girl the realities of Renaissance toilets, which felt like an odd thing for a queen to do. Had the actress of the queen been true to the historical character, would it not be likely that she would have remained a distant figure whose everyday life would remain unreachable? Is it not precisely that these unexpected, anachronistic instances serve as opportunities for insights, as moments when we are able so see and become aware of the similarities and differences between our world and the world of the past? The moment the queen pulled out her chamber pot, I was reminded of the biological similarity of our lives. I felt our worlds converge. The little girl in me could not help but giggle having just realised that the queen had peed in her pot just like I had done as a five-year-old. Had it been a maid who presented the queen's pot, it would not have had quite the same effect, I believe.

The most interesting figure was the maid brushing the fringes of the carpet in front of the throne in the Queen's Inner Hall (2.2). I thought it might be nice to chat with her a bit, but found that I did not know how to start a conversation. There were only three people in the hall at first: me, my partner, and the maid, but I felt like an outsider. Here too I was intruding. She was at home



PIC 2.3 A maid brushing the carpet in the Queen's Inner Hall with visitors apparently trying not to see her directly. Palace of Princes, Sterling Castle.

within that space. She brushed the fringes, sighed, stared at the distance for a moment and then continued with her task. The manner of her gestures removed the room and her from the present, and there was an impression of parallel universes being simultaneously present in that very room; it felt like two eras momentarily overlapped. While it was just the three of us, it was I who existed in a bubble. I felt like a time traveller who can observe the period to which she has travelled, but whose presence cannot be observed by the inhabitants. After a while, other visitors entered the hall, but the impression of two different timelines remained (2.3). No-one expressed a particular interest in communicating with the maid, and she too maintained a detached attitude. Visitors even seemed to actively avoid direct contact with her, even to ignore her completely as if she had been a real servant, although it is unlikely that such mundane tasks would have been allowed to be seen by the visitors to James V's court, at least not in the Inner Hall.

It seems that somehow, although the presence of the king's court has been lost hundreds of years ago, the Palace of Princes still expressed and produced, if not a full picture, then a shadow of the social order and hierarchy of its original existence. Visitors appeared, on occasion, to take on the roles the Palace offered them and doing so acted out its original performance. But are my observations correct or reasonable? Are my interpretations of what I saw and experienced appropriate? Was it only me seeing the historic court shadowed in the presence? It would be interesting to conduct a proper study on how visitors

react to the setting, and to ask from the actor-guides what their experiences are or if they have noticed any particular trends in the conduct of the visitors. But if my first impressions and hypotheses are at all right, then an interesting congruency has appeared: there may be a level of comparability with today's experiences of the Palace that is more profound than what may be expected at first. What if the Palace in its current incarnation does not just offer us a representation of a past reality? What if the Palace still creates a reality which it was originally designed to create, a reality within which not all creatures are created equal, even if the intention of the contemporary exhibition designers was to offer the visitors only a picture or a play-act depicting the past society? 'Experiences are volatile and unruly,' warns Hein.⁷² Could it be that the more involved we get with an act of representation, the more it begins to resemble a performance? Could it be that the more deeply involved and the more engaged we get with a representation, it turns into a performance just as we turn from mere spectators into active performers? Do we not then begin to produce or to express our own interpretation of the situation, which in turn produces 'a more real experience' as we ourselves become even more directly and intimately involved with the process? Does this make the represented world seem more authentic and familiar because it is, in part, created within us, within our person?

The Renaissance palaces mentioned here were very much experience-oriented in their intentions. They sought to impress those who needed to be impressed with a specific idea determined by the prince, and they used their objects and collections, and indeed their whole architectural structure to achieve this. These palaces told a story with the objects; today's museums also tell stories with their objects. Contrary to the palace museums, if Hein is correct, modern museums wish to tell these stories with multiple voices, thus giving room for different views and realities thereby allowing for the relative, pluralistic worldview of today. But experiences are fickle. While the visitor has been freed from the directives governing a visit to the prince, she has also become free, to some extent, to create her own interpretations. Indeed, the experience-orientedness of today encourages her to create her own meanings.

All in all, both palaces are and have been about the visitor experience. In both the objects within them – furniture, tapestries, paintings, decorations, the architecture itself – are and have been the fuel that ignites and feeds the experience. In the Palazzo Medici, like in any princely collection, the experience was validated by the presence of the prince, the feudal system, and the visitor. In the recreated Palace of the Princely Virtues, the first validator is – though the order here does not warrant an order of importance in practice – the absence of the resident ruler which confirms the place as historic; the second is the museum

⁷² Hein (2000), p. 68.

authority (in this case the Historic Scotland) that creates the framing by providing the setting; and the third one is the visitor. Thus these palaces are aesthetic fields, works of art in the sense that they have always relied upon the collaboration of the creator (the prince/museum), the perceiver (the appreciating visitor), the object (the palace in its entirety), and the performer (the visitor *and* the prince/museum) in relation to the surrounding society, age, and the concurrent philosophies. The differences lie in the relationships between these factors. It is interesting how the texts describing the Palazzo emphasise the power and the wealth of the prince; how the Palazzo, and others like it, are manifestations of that influence; and how these palaces establish identities and subject positions. They paint a picture of a situation where the ruler exercises his power over his subjects by stating through the palace, 'It is I who rules.' Is it truly so? Its effect relied on the visitors seeing the head of the family as the merchant prince he set out to be. Hooper-Greenhill suggests that during the time of the Palazzo, 'a new subject role appeared, that of the visitor/viewer/gazer, co-opted to appreciate and, through appreciation, to generate and to maintain the whole complex edifice.'⁷³ But is it a new role? After all, according to popular understanding, the rulers of ancient Rome feared the mob, meaning that they understood the importance of appearances. It is easy to forget this when reading the descriptions of the wealth behind the Palazzo and all the marvels it once treasured, but in truth every prince has always been dependent upon his subjects, a fact that the Medici can be seen to have appreciated. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli recognises the crucial role of the appearances or the (aesthetic) experiences of the prince:

There is nothing more necessary to appear to have than this last quality, inasmuch as men judge generally more by the eye than by the hand, because it belongs to everybody to see you, to few to come in touch with you. Every one sees what you appear to be, few really know what you are, and those few dare not oppose themselves to the opinion of the many, who have the majesty of the state to defend them; and in the actions of all men, and especially of princes, which it is not prudent to challenge, one judges by the result.⁷⁴

The difference between these two experience-oriented systems is that the contemporary museum is more accepting towards the influence and the role of the visitor. If the Medici reminded that the figure in the centre was the prince and it was the visitor who moved towards him, in the Palace it is the visitor for whom

⁷³ Hooper-Greenhill (1993), p. 69.

⁷⁴ Machiavelli (1532), *The Prince*, Project Gutenberg, gutenberg.org, chapter 18, p. 45, retrieved 19.4.2012. Machiavelli had firsthand experiences of the restored Medici rule as a Florentine civil servant. It is also interesting how Machiavelli makes a difference between knowing someone by *seeing* and by coming *in touch with* them, as if touch would reveal the true character hidden behind appearances.

the milieu presents itself. In other words, instead of the setting guiding the visitor towards the prince, the setting brings the past to the visitor. But in both cases it is the gaze of the visitor that has the power to validate.

2.3 Museums and Rituals

In *Civilizing Rituals – Inside Public Art Museums*, Carol Duncan states that '[a]rt museums have always been compared to older ceremonial monuments such as palaces or temples.'⁷⁵ When buildings specifically meant as museums were built in the eighteenth century, they were consciously fashioned to resemble temples and palaces – a trend that, according to Duncan, carried over all the way to the mid-twentieth century. Though the rows of classical columns and facades of stone have, in many cases, given way to steel and glass, I would say that the image of a temple still survives as an underlying thought. To use a well known example, think of Bilbao's Guggenheim museum. At first sight it does not seem to have visually much in common with museums such as the British Museum or the Glyptothek that boast a clear connection with the classical. Although Frank Gehry is often categorised as a deconstructionist, which would imply that the Bilbao museum – as a Deconstructionist building – does not necessarily refer to any universalities, the building does seem to have an aura resembling that of those more temple-like museums.⁷⁶ First of all, although it does not resemble Greek and Roman temples, it does share similarities with ancient Egyptian temples. While the Greek and Roman temples had their structure of columns on the outside of the building as if to enclose the actual temple space within a forest, in ancient Egypt the forest of columns was confined within the temple walls, beyond the reach of the public gaze. The exterior walls of the Bilbao are like the exterior walls of the Egyptian temples: they rise as windowless masses, as soaring planes that sharply separate the interior from the exterior, thereby concealing its contents and withholding them. In accordance with Arnheim's observations in *The Dynamics of Architectural Form*, the lack of windows prevents us from seeing into as well as out of the building, which makes it

⁷⁵ Duncan (2001), p. 7.

⁷⁶ Larry Shiner criticised contemporary art museum design in 'Temptation to Self-Indulgence? Aesthetics and Function in the Recent Art Museum Design', *The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics*, no. 36-37, 2008-2009, pp. 54-80. Though he aims his critique at interior design, that is, at the interiors of the gallery spaces themselves, his thinking does offer interesting ideas about the functionality of art museums. His article also serves as a counterpoint here.

inward-looking.⁷⁷ Contrary to the Palazzo Medici, where the rows of windows on the upper floors allow the prince to gaze upon his subjects while offering the citizens the hope of catching a glance of the prince, the Bilbao museum and the Egyptian temple reserve their contents only for those who may enter: the visitors and the gods.

Secondly, seen from certain vantage points, though seldom photographed so, the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao stands in the city like a Gothic cathedral. The cathedrals around Europe reach up towards the celestial, rising from the commonplace hustle of the mediaeval city in search for divine clarity; the Bilbao museum stays closer to the ground, but the folding and shimmering form separates it from the surrounding industrialism. Though its surface is reflective, it also diffuses the light it scatters, refusing to mirror its surroundings on its surface as clear reflections. This gives the building a certain aura of otherworldliness; it is clearly there and yet not as a substance equally massive as its industrial counterparts. While the cathedrals transcended this world with soaring heights, the Bilbao does the same with perpetual movement in both form and light. The cathedral was the ordering form around which the medieval city and its inhabitants organised themselves 'in a comprehensive order.'⁷⁸ The Bilbao does call for attention in equal manner, but does it have the ordering presence of a cathedral? It is perhaps more like an ice-forming nucleus around which a snowflake grows; its influence is not up towards the heavens but spreading outwards into the city. Its form is anything but formal and strictly geometrical, the kind of qualities that Arnheim connected with reason⁷⁹. Quite the opposite, the form of the Bilbao is organic, shifting, and transmuting, appearing to indicate the artistic, the intuitive, and the interpretative aspects of the world it contains. I see both the Gothic cathedral and the Bilbao museum as reminders of there being something that reaches beyond the routes of our everyday life, that there is something outside the mundaneness of life. With the cathedral, ordinary people reach towards god; with the Bilbao, art radiates or, some would say, pushes towards the people.

Duncan lists three main reasons why museums resemble ritual sites. According to her, this is 'not so much because of their specific architectural references but because they, too, are settings for rituals.'⁸⁰ Firstly, museums are identified and designated as requiring specific kind of attention, contemplation, and learning.

⁷⁷ See Arnheim, Rudolf (1984), *The Dynamics of Architectural Form*, University of California Press, Berkeley/Los Angeles, pp. 232 and 227.

⁷⁸ Arnheim (1984), p. 215.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

⁸⁰ Duncan (2001), p. 10.

A ritual provides a frame. The marked off time or place alerts a special kind of expectancy, just as the oft-repeated 'Once upon a time' creates a mood receptive to fantastic tales.⁸¹

Secondly, visitors or participants are expected to behave in a certain manner, in accordance with a protocol. And thirdly, museums are usually set apart from their surroundings 'by their monumental architecture and clearly defined precincts.'⁸² The last condition is the most flexible one, concerning most often those monumental museums with their own parks and open spaces around them. Local museums often blend in especially well with their surroundings: The Museum of Childhood in Edinburgh is very much like any other shopfront along the Royal Mile. Is this scope of monumentalism somehow in relation to the intimacy or privacy of the museum? Are the most monumental museums the most faceless ones in their influence, in their bureaucracy? It does seem that the distance between the museum and its society is at its smallest in the case of those architectonically unpretentious museums often staffed and run by local enthusiasts.⁸³

While all these three arguments are compelling, there is yet another and perhaps even more practical reason for the rituality of museums, especially as spaces. The three books I use here as the backbone for my thinking – Hein's, Hooper-Greenhill's, and Cooper's – all approach museums and collections first and foremost as instruments of power. Hooper-Greenhill recognises how the history of the museum has been written from various standpoints – e.g., the developmental narratives of individual collectors and institutions – and she criticises how this 'traditional' history, as Foucault calls it, does not take into account, for example, the conditions under which Sir Hans Sloane's passion for collecting, that eventually lead to the establishing of the British Museums (an example she calls forth), was possible.⁸⁴ But I would argue that a history that concentrates on museums from the viewpoint of power and politics, focused on the surrounding context, also paints an incomplete picture.

Almost all of us collect or have collected stuff at some point in our lives. Those collections are not necessarily large at all, and are perhaps collected because we liked something. Perhaps we collected pebbles from a beach and put

⁸¹ Douglas, Mary (1966), *Purity and Danger*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London/Boston/Henley, p. 63. Quoted in Duncan (2001), p. 11.

⁸² Duncan (2001), p. 10.

⁸³ Suzanne MacLeod writes in the introduction to *Reshaping Museum Space – Architecture, Design, Exhibitions* that 'the tension between iconic architecture and the agendas of access and inclusion' are a recurring issue in the book in question. Also, using Bilbao as one example, she notes how these kind of spectacular buildings, while receiving much admiration, 'fight against the other agendas of the museum, confirming to a broad public that museums are not for them (...)' MacLeod (2005), p. 2.

⁸⁴ Hooper-Greenhill (1993), pp. 19-20.

them on the window sill as a reminder of our holiday. Some of us create bigger collections and organise them with care like philatelists do, although it is unclear at which point does a stamp collector become a philatelist. When do I buy art just to decorate my home, and when am I a collector of art? Has it to do with the number of paintings I own? Is this number determined by the amount of wall space I have? Is it a question of attitude? For the sake of space and context of this dissertation, I do not wish to sink any deeper into the philosophy of collecting – excellent discussions can be found elsewhere. I merely wish to open another point of view into museums. Piero de Medici, the son of Cosimo de Medici who built the Palazzo, did, according to the description of Antonia Filarete (c. 1400-1469), enjoy his collections immensely. Filarete's description reveals a more personal enjoyment than the monetary or instrumental value of the objects:

The next day he would look at his jewels and precious stones, of which he has a marvellous quantity of great value, some engraved in various ways, some not. He takes great pleasure and delight in looking at those and in discussing their various powers and excellencies. The next day, maybe, he inspects his vases of gold and silver and other precious materials and praises their noble worth and the skill of the masters who wrought them. All in all when it is the matter of acquiring worthy or strange objects he does not look at the price. (...) I am told he has such a wealth and variety of things (...).⁸⁵

Of course it may be that Filarete was merely painting a misleading picture of a sophisticated collector to create and maintain a certain public image, and elsewhere he wrote the words, 'according to what I am told', indicating that he is echoing a tale told to him. This may mean that he himself was a subject to public relations. Maybe Piero de Medici was in fact an enthusiastic collector who liked beautiful, strange, interesting objects and just happened to have the means to take his hobby extremely seriously. This collecting took place in a setting, a court, that included an aspect of ceremony that in time became an increasingly dominating feature and finally a ritual. Collections are not museums in themselves. The museum is a highly organised ceremony of exhibiting a collection to others. Museums are ritualistic partly because they were born in ritualistic situations: manors, palaces, and courts. Museums took on some of the characteristics of those ritualistic situations and not the least because many museum buildings were at first adapted for the use of ritualistic situations. A considerable number of European museums were at first palaces and royal collections that were converted into museums later in their life, so it is perhaps not surprising that the first purpose-built museums resembled those origins in their spatial order and in the code of conduct that they commanded, and that this tradition

⁸⁵ Gombrich, E. H. (1985), *Norm and Form – Studies in the Art of Renaissance I*, Phaidon Press, Oxford, p. 51. Quoted in Hooper-Greenhill (1993), p. 29.

has carried over to the present. The current state of affairs is therefore both intentional and unintentional, both created and inherited.

Museums are rituals, or at least ritual sites, as Duncan convincingly argues in her book. Although her argument has to do with art museums, her point, as I have claimed, can be extended to include other types of museums too. Even in her book she discusses not only gallery-type art museums but also art museums that exhibit art works as part of period interiors. One of her main examples of such museums is the Metropolitan Museum of Art. What is the museum ritual according to Duncan? How does she define it?

Thus far, I have argued the ritual character of the museum experience in terms of the kind of attention one brings to it and the special quality of its time and space. Ritual also involves *an element of performance*. A ritual site of any kind is *a place programmed for the enactment of something*. It has this structure whether or not visitors can read its cues.⁸⁶

Duncan's approach focuses on this performative aspect of rituality. She points out that the visitors are guided through the museum exhibition much like the participators who follow a ritual route. Museums are microcosms reflecting the world – the physical, the social, the ideological – around them, and museums 'even equip visitors with maps to guide them through the universe they construct.'⁸⁷ This journey *through* is narrative, even strikingly so, and 'performance,' 'narrative,' and 'drama' are concepts that readily bring to mind such pre-conceptions as 'audience,' 'performer,' and 'story.' In Western culture, or in our everyday thinking, a story has a beginning, an intent (often traditionally expressed through a particular goal, say solving a crime, that the characters are trying to achieve), and an end. The actualisation of the story usually requires a conclusion and the fulfilment of this intent-goal, and the narrative character of a story usually prescribes that the fulfilment should be achieved at one go, without having to repeat the story. If we think of rituals as performances in this sense, are we not assigning these expectations on them too? Duncan at least subscribes to these associations, and her book is an excellent examination of art museums in this light. Museum exhibitions, or our thinking dealing with them, have been not only object-oriented in the sense that they are concerned with objects, but also in the sense that much attention has been put in reaching the pre-determined (educational) intent.

This is probably the reason exhibitions have been designed for a purpose – sometimes even excessively so. Education, civilising, nation building, and so on

⁸⁶ Duncan (2001), p. 12. Italics my own.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 8. Compare with Hein's notion of 'museum as enclosures that encapsulate portions of the world.' Hein (2000), p. viii.

are, as they have been, guiding ideals behind much of museum activity. These are all understandable results of the historical connection museums have with the history of European governance and statehood, as well as with the idea of the museum as the home of the Muses, as a place of philosophical inspiration and contemplation.⁸⁸ The anxiety some of my students expressed after reading Pekarik's article on the City Museum mirrored these kind of ideas, ideals, and preconceptions. Their words communicated an expectation of a guided experience that would lead into some kind of a clear end result, and though none of them put what they thought this outcome would be into words directly, there nevertheless appeared to exist a profound idea that one should leave a museum with a clear sense of having learnt something. You should come out being something more than you were when going in, and this change is preordained and pre-existing: the meaning and the purpose of museum exhibitions originate more from the exhibition and its creators than the visitors themselves; there is a predetermined goal.

The museum's sequenced spaces and arrangements of objets, its lighting and architectural details provide both the stage and the script. (...) The situation resembles in some respects certain medieval cathedrals where pilgrims followed a structured narrative route through the interior (...) An ambulatory adorned with representations of the life of Christ could thus prompt pilgrims to imaginatively re-live the sacred story.⁸⁹

Comparing to and thinking rituals in the light of this kind of religious operations creates connotations that are both positive and negative. Rituals pass on the traditions and rules of the society to new generations. They create cultural identities and codes of conduct. They help the participants and the society they represent to make sense of the world and to adjust to the change of the world. Rituals create and maintain hierarchies and power structures; they are tools of governance – and oppression. Rituals are action, acting out and re-living situations, a kind of sympathetic magic where the performance of an action makes it real. Our thinking about rituals is heavily polarised. This polarisation is inherited from the Enlightenment as the separation of the religious and the secular, the rational and the intuitional, and so on, as Duncan recognises.⁹⁰ Catherine Bell encapsulated this dichotomy in *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* as a way of seeing rituals as action, where action is defined as the opposite of thought and rit-

⁸⁸ On the museum as the place of the Muses see Findlen, Paula (2004) 'The Museum – Its Classical Etymology and Renaissance Genealogy', in Messias Carbonel, Bettina (2004) *Museum Studies – An Anthology of Contexts*, pp. 23-50.

⁸⁹ Duncan (2001), p. 12.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

ual as the opposite of mental.⁹¹ This results, according to Bell, in seeing rituals 'as thoughtless action – routinized, habitual, obsessive, or mimetic – and therefore the purely formal, secondary, and the mere physical expression of logically prior ideas.'⁹² Thinking museums as rituals in this sense can understandably lead into negative conclusions or into taking the comparison with rituals as negative critique.

Though Duncan does look at the art museum with a critical eye, examining the ways iconographic programs and donor memorials create convincing narratives, she also recognises what Bell calls the second type of description for rituals. Here ritual is accepted 'as a mechanism for integrating thought and action (...).'⁹³ This does not necessarily mean that the dichotomies have disappeared or that they did not exist, but leads into seeing rituals as 'a medium of integration or synthesis for opposing sociocultural forces.'⁹⁴ According to Bell, Lévi-Strauss argued for this kind of approach that sees ritual as a way of finding resolution to 'the inherent conflict of culture and nature.'⁹⁵ This is where Duncan's thinking comes in contact with what Bell demonstrated through the work of the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz: the idea that rituals can advance change and that therefore they can either fail or succeed. A difficulty in this, as was pointed out by Bell, is that these descriptions of rituals are outsiders' views that do not have the benefit of an insider's perspective. The previously mentioned divisions are hence maintained: '(...) ritual participants act whereas those observing them think.'⁹⁶ Can we determine the objective of a ritual from the outside? Can we deduce whether a ritual was successful or if it failed to do what it was set out to do? Bell saw it to be quite 'common for the scholars to see rituals as resolving the conflict between thought and action, particularly in the guise of belief systems in conflict with the real world.'⁹⁷ But what if there is no conflict? Is there a conflict between a museum and its visitors? Between a museum and the world, or the society? Is a change necessarily a conflict? What is the conflict a matrimonial ceremony resolves? Does a conflict necessarily pre-exist a ritual? Could a ritual be, instead of a conflict, about maintaining harmony, about preventing a conflict from occurring? Certainly rituals are a way to thematise through performance? Is it not most likely that

⁹¹ Bell, Catherine (2009) *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. 19.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 20. See also Duncan (2001), e.g., pp. 8, 11, 12 and 22.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 23.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 35.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 28.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 36.

the function and the meaning of a ritual are immanent in it, like the meaning of art is immanent in art?⁹⁸

The conflict the Louvre was created to resolve was the perceived necessity for a feeling and comprehension of nationhood, a need articulated by the new regime when the old monarchical order of hierarchy needed to be replaced with a new and therefore unfamiliar system. Then again, the ritual of Louvre could also have taken place in order to prevent a new disruption between the government and the people. The iconographical programs of art museums and galleries were created and executed by building on the encyclopaedic thinking that expected the world to have a discoverable order, to create a Great Chain of Being for art, so to speak. So instead of a conflict of interest, they were ways to cope with not knowing.

What is the conflict the City Museum sets out to resolve? Its founder has said that his intention is to help the citizens of St. Louis to discover that their city is worth preserving.⁹⁹ Is this purpose deducible from the museum without awareness of his statement? If (museum) rituals have a predetermined goal (a word the usage of which Bell criticised in *Ritual Theory, Ritual practice*), at what point of the City Museum ritual experience does a visitor reach this realisation? If a ritual is a route the participants travel, a pilgrimage of a sort, having a beginning (the entrance) and an end (the exit, the last exhibit), where does the City Museum ritual end? When is the ritual route completed? Is there a point where this completion is announced? Helping its visitors to come to the conclusion that their city is worth preserving *is* a goal, 'the object of [the City Museum's] ambition and effort; an aim or desired result'¹⁰⁰, from the point of view of the museum but not necessarily, perhaps not even likely, from that of the visitor. One thing concerning the meaning and purpose of museum rituals is that they, like many rituals, are about *repeated visits* and *repeated journeys*; they actualise their purpose through repetition, through repeating the act in a slightly different way; it is an act of evolving. In this sense, museum exhibitions do not have a finishing line, a goal the reaching of which would complete them. In this sense, museums are about practice, a concept to which I will return later on when discussing museums and gardens.

⁹⁸ I am in debt to my supervisor and mentor, Professor Pauline von Bonsdorff for this formulation of the meaning of rituals.

⁹⁹ Mentioned on the earlier version of the City Museums webpage.

¹⁰⁰ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edition (revised) 2005, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

2.4 Museum Exhibitions as Ritual Routes – Some Examples

Hein states that the museum's historic mission has been the showing of objects.¹⁰¹ At its rudiments this showing, as any showing, is an act of stating, 'Here it is. This is how it is. This is what it is.' A museum *exhibition*, like its Latin root¹⁰² suggests, holds out things, objects, structures and ideas for the audience to see and examine. The communicational program of exhibitions, and not only what kind of messages the exhibitions have conveyed but the means of communication, have altered and adjusted throughout history, meaning that the way of showing has changed. At the same time the way museums relate to their audiences and the way they construct their audiences has also changed. Hein's *The Museum in Transition* examines this from the viewpoint of experience and aesthetics, and Hooper-Greenhill sees it as a history of shaping knowledge, but this change can also be considered to show how the spatial relations between the visitor and the exhibition space have changed. This is especially the case if we take a museum exhibition to be a microcosm of the world (or of a specific aspect of the world) and if we consider the visit as a journey through that world, much like the ritual route of a worshipper through that Gothic cathedral. I will return to this 'route through a world' idea later on, when I look into a specific example in more detail, but here I wish to form an idea of the situation. Following some of the examples used by Hooper-Greenhill to examine the history of museums – the princely palace, the Repository of the Royal Society – I here wish to sketch a picture of the relationship of the visitor, the exhibition and the world the exhibition represents.

In a princely palace and in a Gothic cathedral, the visitor is immersed in the environment, but there is a difference in who can enter. Into a palace, only a select few may enter. They form a seclusive group who have access to a space that is rarely seen by others but which is, presumably, much talked about, or otherwise it would not be useful for building a public image. To the cathedral, all may enter. Walking through the main doors with their multiple arches and underneath the face of the Christ, the sinner (for we all are expected to be sinners) leaves behind the Earthly world – like the visitor to the palace leaves behind the world of the commoners – and steps into a world closer to Heaven. Entering a special space makes one a part of it: one becomes a member upon entering. In both

¹⁰¹ Hein (2000), p. 5.

¹⁰² Late Middle English, 'submit for consideration', also 'present a document for evidence in court'. From Latin *exhibit-*, 'held out', from the verb *exhibere*, *ex-* 'out' and *habere-*, 'hold'. *Oxford Dictionary of English*, 2nd edition (revised) 2005, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

places, the visitor both follows and is led up a route. In the palace this route leads towards the prince and his favour, in the cathedral towards God and salvation. The route meanders through the building, being possibly more controlled within the palace, where the visitor receives personal attention from the prince's staff and ultimately from the prince himself. In the cathedral, the visitor is most often a part of a group or the crowd, making her more self-sufficient in her action. She, especially a medieval visitor, is also a member of a congregation and a belief system which would make her more attuned to the symbolical and social significance of the place and its architecture. She moves from altar to altar, especially during big seasonal celebrations, although she may be guided by a monk or some other member of the ecclesial staff. Or she may be part of a structured ritual such as a wedding, a funeral, or an ordinary sunday service, when her route will be more structured and predetermined.

The heart of the process is the bodily presence of the visitor within the building, the movement of her body and mind towards a closer contact with the central figure. It is a full body experience: the scent of the frankincense, the aromas of the feast; the heavenly light falling through the rose window on the sinner¹⁰³, the glitter of precious stones and metals; the chanting, the exotic birds or skilled musicians. And finally, as a climax, the act of touch. In the palace, the visitor is throughout her stay guided by the members of the household to observe and experience the vast riches of the palace before being offered a chance to hold in her hands an object from the prince's collection, preferably by the prince himself. She is encouraged to admire it and offered a chance to express her opinion on it – which in reality is only a partially veiled compliment on the host. In the cathedral, the pilgrim touches and kisses the statues of the saints and the reliquaries, kneels down on the cold, hard floor in prayer offering the pain in her knees as a proof of her devotion. Her bowed head is touched by the blessing hands of a priest, her sins washed away with holy water, wine, and bread. In both environments, the visitors have the use of the building. They sit and move in order to become a part of their surroundings and, perhaps even more importantly, a part of the society represented and present through that specific building. They enact and thereby make real and solidify their standing in a community in both their own mind and in the eyes of the others. Though both places have their restrictions, obviously, they at the same time encourage engagement to its fullest.

Whereas in the Renaissance palace and the Gothic cathedral the visitor enters an enclosed world, a visitor to the Repository of the Royal Society just before the 1700s did not come to experience the order of the world, but to *see* it laid out before her eyes. In the Renaissance palace and the Gothic cathedral, the

¹⁰³ On the aesthetics of light in the Middle Ages see Eco, Umberto (1986) *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, chapter IV, pp. 43-51, particularly pp. 45-46.

visitor used not only her abilities of interpretation but her body and movement to read the narrative in her surroundings in order to enter and become a part of that world. All things in the world were connected through similitudes, and the world itself was an endless play of symbols.¹⁰⁴ A gothic cathedral is in itself an embodied manifestation of the creation: even the measurements and proportions of the building are reflections of the world. In a way it is a memory palace, a mnemonic device brought to life.

The Renaissance eventually transformed into what Foucault called the Classical *episteme*.¹⁰⁵ With it began an era that was fascinated by encyclopaedias. Things were no longer collected for their hidden meanings, but by measuring. During the late sixteenth century, museums 'became an attempt to preserve, if not fully reconstitute, the encyclopaedic programme of the classical and medieval world' which then matured into a vision of universal wisdom during the next century or so.¹⁰⁶ The seventeenth century replaced interpretations of the Renaissance with the ideal of order.¹⁰⁷ 'To know was to discriminate (...)' and '[t]he seeing of things was now privileged over the reading of things. To *see* was to *know*.'¹⁰⁸ This inspiration to describe the reality of creation culminated in the eighteenth century idea of the universe as the Chain of Being.¹⁰⁹ In this chain, in the encyclopaedia of full Creation, all things had their place in a 'hierarchical sequence from the God to the lowest grade of sentient life, no two alike, but each differing from those just below and just above it in the scale by the least possible difference.'¹¹⁰ The world of magic where '[n]ature was seen as a vast allegorical representation of the supernatural'¹¹¹ had become a world of reason and science, where the motions of the divine mind were seen in the order of things.

If we think of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance as eras of magic, then we could think of the following centuries of the Early modern period, roughly the era of the Foucauldian classical *episteme*, as the age of the encyclopaedia or

¹⁰⁴ Hooper-Greenhill (1993), p. 12. See also p. 133 on the role of writing and texts during the Renaissance.

¹⁰⁵ Foucault (1994), p. xxii.

¹⁰⁶ Findlen, Paula (2004) 'The Museum – Its Classical Etymology and Renaissance Genealogy', p. 26, in Messias Carbonell, Bettina (2004) *Museum Studies – An Anthology of Contexts*, Blackwell Publishers, Malden MA & Oxford, p. 23-50.

¹⁰⁷ Hooper-Greenhill (1993), p. 135.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, first p. 134, second p. 135. Italics my own.

¹⁰⁹ Lovejoy (1967), p. 183.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

¹¹¹ Eco (1986) *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, p. 61.

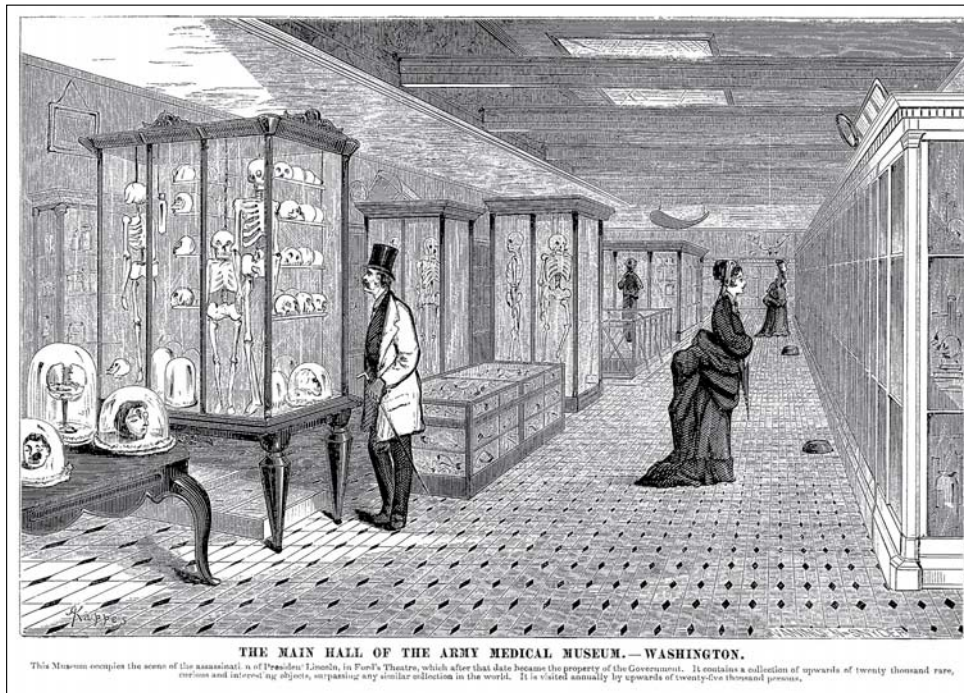
the encyclopaedic age.¹¹² Museums and the museology of those times, during the Age of Reason or the Enlightenment, reflected the foundational concepts of linearity, hierarchy, and ascension, and not just in their manner of treating objects as specimens and organising them according to the aforesaid principles. While the visitor and her body had earlier been placed in the middle of the world of the collection – like man was considered to be situated at the centre of the Creation¹¹³ – she was now envisioned as the reader of an encyclopaedia: a body separate from that of the book, and a mind looking at or into that book. Paradoxically, the confinement of the object from the visitor increased over this period, although more and more collections and museums opened up for the general public. As the objects are arranged into a specific order, the storage and the exhibition space must support the maintaining of that order. This is when the earliest museum catalogues appeared. First catalogue of the Repository of the Royal Society was put together and published in 1681 by Nemeniah Grew, but how the collection was stored and displayed is not known.¹¹⁴ Apparently the accounts of the Society show that in 1669 a set of chests of drawers were purchased. Considering the preceding custom of cabinets of curiosities and the use of vitrines, and the fact that the encyclopaedic system required a ‘book’ within which to place the objects, we can see how the display cabinet became the standard husk for housing the museum objects, the kernels of the exhibitions.

The distancing, removing, and even excluding effect of display cabinets is repeatedly criticised in the museum world and I do see no point in going into detail about that discourse on this occasion. Instead, I wish to describe the setup for museum exhibitions created during this period, focusing on the relation between the visitor as a bodily presence and the exhibition as a space. Cooper takes a ritual to be a performance where the participants act out the particular roles given to them. If we think of this in terms of theatre, then in the princely palace the visitors were clearly part of the play. They physically entered the

¹¹² It is worth noting that the borders of different eras are hazy or evasive, depending on geography and local culture. In general, but disputable, terms the Early modern period begins roughly around 1500 and lasts until the early nineteenth century. Foucault’s classical episteme, however, ends, at least the way Hooper-Greenhill describes it, at the end of the eighteenth century. Hooper-Greenhill (1993), p. 16. Renaissance is a period of cultural transition that expands from the late medieval to the Early modern era and is very much dependent on local cultures. Here Renaissance is used to refer to a period in history of philosophy, where it precedes the Enlightenment.

¹¹³ Lovejoy (1967), p. 101. ‘(...) the centre of the world was not a position of honour; (...) it was rather the place farthest removed from the empyrean, the bottom of the Creation (...)’ But simultaneously ‘it was also the only region of regeneration; here alone new souls were born (...).’ Last quote p. 103.

¹¹⁴ <http://royalsociety.org/Before-the-British-Museum-the-Repository-of-the-Royal-Society/> Accessed 2.5.2012.



PIC 2.4 From *Ten Years in Washington – Life and Scenes in the National Capital as a Woman Sees Them*, Mary Clemmes Ames, 1874. To this context from <http://boothiebarn.wordpress.com/2012/06/09/the-collapse-of-fords-theatre/>

stage and saw the story unfold from within. But here (2.4), in what I will call the classical museum exhibition, the visitor has become the observer, physically removed from the world the objects represent. The reality of the objects has been set apart from the reality of the observer. The display cabinets are like islands in the ocean of the exhibition space which the visitor navigates, moving from an island to an island, looking at them but never being able to disembark and step ashore. In a way the museum exhibition had come to resemble a memory palace, an imagined construction within which the memory of knowledge is stored in the form of symbolic objects. As the person trying to remember something walks through the halls of her palace, seeing a specific object helps her bring to mind a specific piece of knowledge. These kinds of exhibitions often seem to be silent like libraries, both as soundscapes and atmospheres: like the books on the shelves, the objects wait to be opened and read but unlike the books, the museum objects cannot be picked up and leafed through. Here the whole exhibition is the book through which the visitor leafs by proceeding from cabinet to cabinet, eyeing the words and the objects in them. Or like a Chinese scroll painting which is viewed by gradually scrolling through it, allowing the appreciator only a limited view of the complete picture at a given moment, while the rest of the picture is left to memory and imagination. And like any

book, the exhibition has a set order of reading. The free space between the cabinets is like a path leading the visitor from sentence to sentence and then on to the next chapter. Though, of course, the visitor is able to skip some pages.

The classical museum exhibition expresses in its design and style the principles of the Enlightenment. The mind is separated from the body, the sense of vision from other senses which are deemed as more bodily. The principle of discrimination as a basis of knowledge and knowing is expressed in categorised and hierarchical displays that make visible the gradual variations in the shape of seashells or the succession of art from folk art and crafts to the Western fine art. 'Theory and nature, being and knowing, become two parts of the world, which was now to be known through objective analysis rather than through subjective experience.'¹¹⁵ Interestingly enough, this structure of exhibiting peaked in the art museums after the mid 20th century as 'the white cube' where the disembodied eye gazed upon the works of art with disinterest.¹¹⁶

Dioramas appeared in the exhibitions at the end of the nineteenth century, along with the rise of public museum exhibitions.¹¹⁷ The diorama is a sign or an expression of the change in visitor demographics. The expert visitor of the Repository or other scientific collections did not necessarily need to see the objects in their proper settings; she was interested in the properties of the objects. But the general public needed to see how things were in the past or are in some distant part of the world, and this is exactly what a diorama shows. A diorama is a window to a world not present in the reality of the visitor (2.5, following page). Here the analogy with theatre becomes even more obvious. The stage-like atmosphere is perhaps more prominent with dioramas representing rooms or other human-related surroundings, but the basics are the same. The visitors become spectators, members of an audience. The diorama is a stage with its curtains open and the set ready for the play to begin. We are still observers, but there is a connection forming between us and the play. We recognise the objects and their relations, the context summons up their use and we respond to their call; the chair and the act of sitting, the things stored in the cupboard, the spinning wheel turning. But much like a stage setting, the diorama is strangely frozen in time: a snap shot or a stored moment. It is still merely a display of objects paralysed in time. We remain in the moment, remain on our seats, and wait for the actors to enter, but they never do. There is a sense of perpetual expectancy that over time (after our curiosity is satisfied) turns into a hint of disappoint-

¹¹⁵ Hooper-Greenhill (1993), p. 15. See also Foucault (1996), p. 72-73.

¹¹⁶ See O'Doherty, Brian (1999) *Inside the White Cube – The Ideology of the Gallery Space* and Grunenberg, Christoph (1999) 'The modern art museum' pp. 26-31 and 38-41 in Barker (edit.) (1999a).

¹¹⁷ Wonders, Karen (1993) *Habitat Dioramas – Illusions of Wilderness in Museums of Natural History*, Figura Nova Series 25, Acta Universitatis Upsalensis, Upsala, Sweden, pp. 9-10.



PIC 2.5 Diorama-like exhibit depicting Finnish furniture from the 1600s. Ostrobothnia Museum, Vaasa, Finland.

ment that ushers us forward to see the next setting. To continue the medieval analogy, dioramas could be compared with the murals in cathedrals that picture the life of Christ or the Creation: visitors move from picture to picture seeing them in sequence and forming a narrative in their minds. This applies mostly to history or ethnographic museums, but natural history museums also have series of dioramas depicting geological epochs or climate zones. Dioramas seem to work best mainly because the stuffed animals, oddly enough, bring life and drama to the setting: tigers leap and birds spread their tails in display. Some dioramas aim for a hyperrealistic environment, where the immersion of the visitor into the exhibition is hoped to be as convincing as possible. For example, the main exhibit of the Biologiska Museet (2.6) in Stockholm takes the form of a two-storey bird watching tower with a 360-degree view of the Nordic landscape that changes from the arctic seaside to the boreal bog as the visitor walks around the tower. The exhibit is well past its prime and some stuffed specimens have lost their colour to the point of being hard to recognise, but the sense of immersion into an environment is still alluring, a feat only a few contemporary exhibitions have managed. Interestingly, this aim for hyperreality appears to be, in my experience, a trait more common to biological exhibitions than historical or ethnographical exhibitions. The Natural History Museum in Helsinki, for example, has taken great care to have animal tracks in their African dioramas (2.7). This might be, at least in part, because exhibiting taxidermy encourages hyperrealism but also because biology has not as burdened a past as ethnogra-



PIC 2.6 The first tier of the Biologiska Museet, Stockholm, Sweden. Opened in 1893.

phy with its entanglement in the history of colonialism and racism.

In the cases mentioned so far, the visitor commonly follows a path. Along this route, she turns her attention (her gaze) in appreciation and contemplation on things or objects that are laid along the route. Travelling the route creates a narrative that carries information about the order or the state of the world. This message is predetermined by whoever designed the route, though it must be remembered that the visitor does not necessarily accept the intended message, even if she follows the route. Once the visitor reaches the end of the route (the prince, the God/altar, the end of the exhibition) the route is completed, although the underlying purpose may not be realised. Naturally,



PIC 2.7 Tracks of animals and birds in a diorama depicting African semi-arid savanna at The Natural History Museum, Helsinki.



PIC 2.8 Amongst other hands on- activities, visitors could climb in a bird house to contemplate on nesting in the exhibition 'In Flight – Birds at Vapriikki', Tampere, Finland.

the visitor may travel the route again, but this is more like rereading a book: you already know, or think you know, how things turn out. Consequently, the visitor has a very limited set of alternative routes to take and therefore not much of a chance to create varied readings over consecutive visits. You may have forgotten details or might remember them incorrectly, but when you come across such a point during the second reading of a book you say, 'Oh, that's how it was,' and read on to complete the task. To see familiar things with new eyes is not easy.

Is there a route to follow in the City Museum? Is there a right sequence of activities? Are the exhibitions and activities designed so that if they are followed in the right order, they build upon each other? So that if one activity is followed by a particular other, the experience of the second one is more rewarding or profound?

The City Museum is certainly not a representative example of contemporary museums, but it is representative of one end of the spectrum of contemporary museums, namely the experience-oriented and participation-oriented ones. While encyclopaedic museums still exist – and they do have their place – increasing numbers of museums are moving towards the 'City Museum end' of the spectrum. In them, the pre-laid course is dissolving. Some subjects in particular benefit from being narrativised, others, like history or evolution, are difficult to comprehend as anything other than narratives. Also, the power of nar-

rative in teaching, learning, and remembering is recognised in general, but it is becoming more and more common to run across exhibitions that are more or less freeform sequence-wise. The exhibition 'In Flight – Birds at Vapriikki'¹¹⁸ in Tampere, Finland, had a very broad subject of birds in biology, mythology, and in contemporary culture (2.8). The different aspects were mixed and distributed evenly throughout the exhibition space as smaller exhibits. Objects from the anthropological collections from Russia were placed next to an exhibit about bird migrations, which in turn was put next to a shooting gallery based on the Angry Birds game. The exhibition was entered through an entranceway that acted as a short introduction, but after that the choice of routes was basically limited only by other visitors. The Angry Birds shooting gallery, for example, was continuously occupied while we were there. Although each exhibit had its independent style and space, the exhibition had a comfortably flowing atmosphere. No single exhibit dominated the space but they accommodated the needs of the surrounding exhibits and the general feel of the space. Where is the ritual here? Describing ritual as a performance with a predetermined script and function does not fit here easily. It is misleadingly easy to think that a ritual would have an intent common to all participants, and in 'In Flight' there seemed to be several depending on the participant/visitor. Most visitors seemed to have fun. Can that be the *one* common function by which the success of a ritual is determined? It would seem more appropriate to think that there are several concurrent functions or intents that can be shared by the participants – the museum, the visitors, the society at large – but which different participants may appreciate differently. Fun may be most crucial for a family and knowledge more of a side-effect, but to the museum knowledge may be a more important goal and fun just the means to achieve it.

2.5 Rethinking Museums as Ritual Sites

It is true that museum exhibitions can be ritualistic or at least ritual-like. This is one of the reasons why accusations of rituality and of museums being temples for the worship of Western culture, values, et cetera are a common heavy instrument against museums. This characterisation is also easy to turn into an accusation, because in our contemporary everyday thinking words and expressions connected to rituality are often seen as having, if not a negative, then at least a suspicious tone. But in my view, placing emphasis on the negative associations is counterproductive. Rituals and ritual action are an important and in-

¹¹⁸ 'Lennossa – Linnut Vapriikissa' was held at Museum Centre Vapriikki in Tampere 24.2.2012-21.4.2013.

fluent tool for the human mind; even so important that it appears to be difficult for cultures and individuals to operate without some level of rituality mixed in the pattern of their behaviour and character. Therefore I suggest that instead of rejecting the ritual potential of museums it should be accepted as one way to consider museum exhibitions and their meaning and function, and the way people act and have experiences within their framework. But instead of seeing museums as formal or formative temples and set rituals, I think it would be more appropriate to see them as ritual sites, as spaces set aside for special kind of experiencing. Before looking into what it means to see museums as ritual sites, I will consider the problematics of ritual and of seeing something as ritual – both at large and in the context of museums.

Duncan's description and analysis of donor memorials – museums founded on a donation of a tycoon and often located in the donor's formal residence or in a building resembling a residence – reveals the ritualistic nature of such museums: 'Thus, a visit to a donor memorial is often structured as a ritual enactment of a visit to an idealized (albeit absent or deceased) donor,'¹¹⁹ a characteristic mirroring the princely collections. She shows how these museums (and others too) work in the world of politics and the social: they are 'a public space, they constitute an arena in which a community may test, examine, and imaginatively live both older truths and possibilities for new ones. (...) Above all, they are spaces in which communities can work out the values that identify them as communities.'¹²⁰ Although she reveals how the donor memorials may manipulate their visitor to see the donor in a particular light, or how in modern art museums the 'viewers enact [through art works] a drama of enlightenment in which spiritual freedom is won by repeatedly overcoming and moving beyond the visible, material world,'¹²¹ she also sees art museums as communally valuable rituals like the first quote conveys. She views rituals as performances that help the community to form and adjust. In this she follows the viewpoint of examining aspects of culture as rituals or as resembling rituals, whether or not those aspects are religious. In *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, Bell linked this movement with the understanding of rituals as texts that are culturally produced and which therefore are open to 'interpretive endeavors.'¹²² And it certainly is true that many modern day traditions and activities, for example sport events and spectatorship, can be seen as rituals or as having ritualistic aspects,

¹¹⁹ Duncan (2001), p. 72. The museums she examines are e.g., J.Paul Getty in Malibu, California, Henry E. Huntington Art Gallery in San Marino, California, Frick Collection in New York City, Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, DC, and Dulwich Picture Gallery, London.

¹²⁰ Ibid., pp. 133-134.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 110.

¹²² Bell (2009), pp. 15-16.

and that we do maintain the ritualistic habits in many nowadays secular acts such as marriage. Bell apparently agreed with George E. Marcus and Michael M. J. Fischer who in *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* suggested that the ritual is such a popular theoretical tool because public performances can be read as texts with ease.¹²³ A view that in the context of museums bears an interesting resemblance to the Medieval and Renaissance world view.

I see calling museums as temples or mausoleums of the past or as ritualistic in general as a way of criticising their normative ability and activity. It is a power that needs a critical counterpart to maintain the balance, but it is also good to keep in mind that rituals or rituality are not in themselves intrinsically negative. However, thinking something as a ritual is not necessarily a beneficial strategy. Bell reminded about the underlying presumptions behind ritual theory. One, that I have already mentioned, are the dualistic or polarised pairings: ritual versus mental, action versus thought. This is the kind of description where ritual is seen as ‘thoughtless action – routinised, habitual, obsessive or mimetic – and therefore the purely formal, secondary, and the mere physical *expression of logically prior ideas*.’¹²⁴ This priority of thought is a point to which Bell returned repeatedly. She also pointed out how the thought–action dichotomy underlies the theories of ritual and rituality, when ritual is described as a way of integrating action and thought and as a way of creating and maintaining communal unity. She warned:

(...) we do not see how such dichotomies as continuity and change, individual experience and social forms, beliefs and behaviour invoke an assumption about thought and action that runs particularly deep in the intellectual traditions of Western culture. We do not see that we are wielding a particularly powerful analytical tool, nor do we see how our unconscious manipulation of it is driven not only by the need to resolve the dichotomy it establishes, but also simultaneously to affirm *and* resolve the more fundamental opposition it poses – the opposition between the theoretician and the object of theoretical discourse.¹²⁵

The observations, arguments and conclusions she made are thorough but here I will concern myself with two questions that are the most relevant to my approach. First is the question of the performer of the ritual and the observer who watches the ritual unfold. In this Bell quoted the works of Clifford Geertz whom she recognised as ‘a major influence in the study of religion and ritual’ and whose critical sense concerning methodological issues and the ‘symmetry of terminology’ she gave credit.¹²⁶ While in Bell’s view Geertz maintained the

¹²³ Marcus & Fischer (1986) *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, p. 61. Quoted in Bell (2009), p. 44.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 19. Italics my own.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

dichotomy of thought and action, she pointed out Geertz's observation on how differently an outsider observer and a ritual performer experience and comprehend the same ritual. 'Outsiders, states Geertz, will see in ritual only the mere presentation of a particular religious perspective which they may appreciate aesthetically or analyze scientifically.'¹²⁷ While Geertz's observation is made in relation to religious rituals, it is equally applicable to secular rituals. The outside observer approaches the ritual action through conceptual categories, Bell explained, but the participants, however, experience the ritual as 'the integration of their own conceptual framework and dispositional imperatives,' which leads into a conceptual setting where the participants act and the observers think.¹²⁸ This separation of thought and action may keep the observer from seeing the meaningfulness of the ritual for the participants since the meaningfulness rises from the fusion of conceptual and dispositional categories. Nevertheless, it is possible for an observer to internalise, or at least recognise, the way ritual becomes meaningful for a participant, and then grasp this meaningfulness as a cultural phenomenon as the ritual becomes meaningful for the observing theorist. Then the rite may become 'a veritable window on the most important processes of cultural life.'

The question of the observer and the participant in the theory of ritual shares some common ground with the questions of disinterestedness, engagement, and aesthetic field in aesthetics, specifically in relation to how the immediacy, integrity, and the encompassing character of experience and its role in meaning-making can be appreciated. Like visits to museum exhibitions, rituals also have to do with meaning-making. Museums 'have always been reservoirs of meaning,' Hein writes¹²⁹, but the meaning of museum objects has shifted and keeps shifting over time. While the factual knowledge of an object – the origin, usage, material composition, production, et cetera – can remain over time, the cultural meaning of things and their characteristics can and do change. Contemporary museology recognises this. Whereas the minds behind the Louvre, as was already said earlier, saw the museum as a way of relaying a particular package of meaning to the visitors, intending it to be absorbed in the sense they had envisioned through the ritual of the visit, many contemporary museums are more freeform. This indicates that the museum ritual has changed together with its ritual path.

Another question is one that I have also already mentioned: the description of rituals as a way to reconcile fundamental conflicts within society, its members, and between the beliefs and the world. Bell saw this idea of fundamental contradiction as a suspicious logical structure which, when imposed,

¹²⁷ Geertz, Clifford (1973) *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Basic Books, New York, pp. 89, 126-127. Referred to in Bell (2009), p. 28.

¹²⁸ Bell (2009), p. 28. Both quotes.

¹²⁹ Hein (2000), p. 55.

'renders ritual action amenable to theoretical analysis.'¹³⁰ This notion assumes, as said, an existence of a conflict at the root of culture and society, whether such contradiction exists or not, thus legitimising the framework of research. This notion of ritual is linked to a certain ontological framework which, based on Bell's quote, Bourdieu linked with taxonomic schemes and orders within a culture.¹³¹ Bell also pointed out that thinking that there are fundamentals, and that searching for and finding these fundamentals would be a key to understanding, may be equally mythical. But 'nothing is fundamental' she reminds us, quoting Foucault¹³², and therefore the idea of fundamentals is similar to the notion of an underlying contradiction: it expects the existence of a discoverable fundamentality. This may elucidate why the notion and the critique of a museum exhibition as a ritual and a ritual site came to be. The encyclopaedic museums were rituals in this sense: the philosophy behind them expected the existence of an underlying and hidden but yet discoverable, in a word, fundamental taxonomic order. Uncovering and then reconstructing this order into a visible, measurable form would lead to the discovery of further fundamental knowledge. The museum was at first the ritual for this visual and concrete ordering and later a way of instilling this order into society.

Bell also scrutinised the notion of cultural performance and the viewing of rituals as performances. Within this frame, ritual, and ritual action in particular, 'is seen as dramatizing or enacting prior conceptual entities in order to reaffirm or reexperience them.'¹³³ This retains the priority of the mind by supposing a mental goal decided in advance and an assumption of a new mental state that is reached after the ritual. While the analogy of performance does offer an alternative and beneficial perspective into rituals, it is also a slippery slope, as Bell put it.¹³⁴ Defined as a performance, there is the danger that 'ritual comes to be seen as performance in the sense of symbolic acts specifically meant to have an impact on an audience and entreat their interpretive appropriation.' Who is the audience of a museum visit? In the Palazzo Medici, the visitor performed for the prince, thereby reassuring his status in the hierarchy and vice versa. In Louvre, the visitors' performance confirmed their status as citizens in the eyes of both the state (represented by the Louvre) and themselves. But who was the audience in the early British Museum, for instance? Creating the British Museum can be seen as an act to show other nations that Britain was as accom-

¹³⁰ Bell (2009), p. 37.

¹³¹ Ibid., pp. 36-37. Bell refers to Bourdieu, Pierre (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. by Richard Nice, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 114-124.

¹³² Ibid., p. 37. Quote originally in 'Space, Knowledge and Power', an interview with Michel Foucault in *The Foucault Reader*, edit. Paul Rabinow, 1984, Pantheon, New York, p. 247.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 38

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 44.

plished as its continental rivals. It can be concluded that the museum did perform for foreign visitors, but if the visitor was a British native, for whom did she perform? For her nation? To her fellow citizens or the society? Or was her visit a patriotic act, underlining the importance of the museum in the eyes of foreigners? Who is the acting performer and who is the thinking observer? The question becomes even more convoluted when applied to the City Museum. Is a performance in this sense enacted there? Bell warned us about this. She wrote that while performance may be used as a criterion to determine whether or not something is a ritual, it may also lead into difficulties in differentiating how ritual is not the same as, for example, spectator sports.¹³⁵

A quick note on the notions of the performer and the audience. I cannot find a clear and consistent way of separating the audience from the performers. First of all, 'performance' can be used to indicate such activities that have no audience and, also, a performer can be her own audience: I can perform the act of hanging laundry following my own aesthetics and at my own pleasure without an audience. But more importantly, the roles of an audience and a performer are intertwined. In theatre, the actors carry out the performing of a play as they present the story to the audience. The audience performs the action of watching the play and its performance. They react and express their reactions, although not necessarily as clear vocalisations or through other expressions, but as 'energy' to which many stage actors often refer. A performance of a play is more an oscillation of this energy back and forth between the actors and the audience than a simple one-way action where one is the origin and the other one is the receiver. A museum exhibition is a similar kind of situation where the museum is the actor, the one who puts forward an exhibition for the visitors to appreciate. The visitors then carry out their visit in the setting the museum created. Contemporary museums talk about their visitors as their *audiences*, which implies a different kind of attitude from the one of post-revolution Louvre. The visitors are not the object of the ritual, the object that needs to be civilised and moulded into citizens by guiding them to perform a certain ritual. Contemporary understanding of the word 'audience' includes an idea of an active, independent, and able individual who is not only the object of a performance but a contributing and creative participant. Here again the inclusive approach of the aesthetic field is appropriate.

Complications arise when this view of rituals as cultural performances is applied to contemporary exhibitions, especially to such exhibitions and museums as the 'In Flight – Birds at Vapriikki' and the City Museum. First of all, in these and similar exhibitions the concept of fundamentals is not necessarily fixed or the scope of what can be considered as fundamentals has tightened; relativity is the word of the day. The way things are ordered may change when

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 43. Bell makes a reference to Geertz, Clifford (1983) *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*, Basic Books, New York, pp. 19-35.

the perspective from which they are viewed and of the viewer change. For example, previously the organisation of the natural world was visualised as the Great Chain of Being and the food chain with their linear taxonomic orders. Today the taxonomy of life is expressed as the Tree of Life and as networks of and within ecosystems. This kind of lost cohesion of linearity may be seen to manifest in museum exhibitions a decrease of formality and reliance on particular iconographic programs. Interestingly, this view of the world as a network, the perceiving of things and the world as interconnected, compares with the medieval notions of the structure of the world – sans the notions of magic and the supernatural.

Secondly, while a classical museum exhibition may fit the notion of a ritual as a cultural performance, the City Museum does not. The connotations of performance – stage, audience, plot, performer, acting, the hero's journey, climax, conflict, resolution – are difficult to apply to it, although by no means necessarily impossible. If we watch a play in a theatre, we assume that what we see, the action, has an encoded underlying meaning or the theme of the play, and this assumption in turn, in Bell's understanding, 'devalues the action itself, making it a second-stage representation of prior values.'¹³⁶ Putting this much weight on the intellectual, the interpretive aspects turn us away from the immediate sensory experiences and responses that activity and action include. And this is what the City Museum embraces: meaning making as an activity, in action, and through activity. It, and other museums too, has recognised the potential in action not as a performance, but as an engaged state of the whole person without the separation of mind/intellect, body, action, and emotion. In this kind of activity, the goal or one of the goals is the activity itself. What *follows* that activity is not (necessarily) determined prior to it or from the outside, the outcome is not fixed in advance. There is an element of surprise in play. The meaning arises out of the situation which can be considered to be homologous to the aesthetic field.

I do not wish to imply that all museums endorse play similarly as the City Museum does but only that the idea of how visitors gain meaning from exhibitions has changed. While museums still seek to educate their audiences, they no longer attempt to civilise – definitely not in the manner of the post-revolution Louvre. Instead of nation-building or other such rituals, museums are more interested in the *personal* experiences of their visitors. But here a personal experience is not only about how the visitor personally experiences something, meaning how her personal values and history affect her interpretation or her take on a situation or a subject outside herself. The perhaps idealistic wish is to help her to experience herself: '[p]lay like this, incorporating art, imagination and social interaction, is truly the fountainhead of human experience – self-development action,' writes Pekarik in his article, indicating his conviction that 'museums at

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 45.

their best are about helping people satisfy their needs for identity and self-development (...).¹³⁷ In other words, while museums previously hoped to make the visitor see the world (often in a certain way), contemporary museums, ideally, hope to help a visitor see herself and the way she connects with the world. This idealism Pekarik expresses is interested in nothing less than the self-realisation of its visitors. It also needs a different kind of ritual space.

Let me recapitulate the main points before I continue. Instead of working through objects, museum exhibitions today focus on experience, although the objects are still both the instruments of experience and the source of meaning. The objects are used to elicit stories, they are tools for recollection by their presence, according to Hein. There is, like there has always been, a strong reliance on narration in museum exhibitions, but today the awareness of it has permeated the vocabulary of museum pedagogy. Hein speaks of exhibitions as meaning performances, Asma as museum drama and edutainment, and Duncan as ritual performances. This focus on performance-like qualities and on the power of narration as a form of communication is by no means limited only to museums but is a common trend in contemporary culture reaching from television commercials to school books and business presentations. We are no longer resorting to the intellectual but have realised the importance and the power of the emotional and the intuitional for learning, communication, and memory.

Together with experience, exhibitions have come to accommodate the postmodern ideal of pluralistic relativity instead of epistemic homogeneity and the singularity of truth. The scope of things considered to be relative has grown. The normative power of museums, though still existing, has lost some of its influence. People, the various audiences of museums, are more skilled in recognising value-related issues and are more eager to call them out. Museums have become more accommodating to different perspectives. This is connected to the notion of meaning-making, a term adopted from Nelson Goodman's *Ways of Worldmaking*, which in museums has come to mean that visitors create their own meanings for the experiences they have in exhibitions. This meaning is personal, though sharable, and when successful, it leads into shaping the visitor's identity and self.

The concept of visitor-driven meaning making has led to participation as a foundation of museum pedagogy. Instead of being considered as the object of civilising, communities and their members are today seen as partners. Many, but not necessarily most, museums today try to have strong, active links to their community. Museums put up exhibitions that address issues and themes relevant to the community. They aspire to involve members of the community in museum practice, although not as audience but as active participants and producers who can have their say in how things are handled in exhibitions and

¹³⁷ Pekarik (2002a), p. 179.

even how objects are preserved.¹³⁸ Various projects approach the public as a source of information and knowledge, for example a museum may request photographs of the town during a certain period or ask for help in identifying a photograph. Especially local museums often seek to encourage the feeling of togetherness and a sense of community. True, this has always been a major motivation in local museum practice, but today it is more about bringing individual people together than about what separates our community from the others; it is not about showing off but about getting people involved. It is not only a question of how to facilitate meaning-making through experience, but also of how to engage the visitors to participate actively and physically with both the exhibition and each other. Although this, the social, interpersonal interaction, is not the main focus of my dissertation, it is one of the borderlands through which I have travelled on this journey. It has influenced my thinking and I see it as a route to explaining the significance I find in museums and in the experiences they can provide. Interactivity and interaction are also so closely linked with engagement and especially the experiencing of engagement that I find it necessary to explore them briefly. Also, 'interactive' and 'participatory' are words that are often mentioned in connection with museum experience – so often, in fact, that one may wonder if they have become prerequisites for what is considered to be a successful museum experience.

'Participatory' and 'interactive' are most often used in connection with exhibitions and individual exhibits that utilise multimedia, computers, and hands-on activities. For example, the 'In Flight – Birds at Vapriikki' exhibition included mainly these kinds of exhibits – gadgets, a critic might say. While I believe that they first appeared as a way to introduce touch and other senses into exhibitions, they are now recognised as ways of promoting and enabling social interaction. In *Participatory Museum*, Nina Simon describes how objects can 'allow people to focus their attention on a third thing rather than on each other, making interpersonal engagement more comfortable. People can connect with strangers when they have a shared interest in specific objects.'¹³⁹ While this is certainly true, I still think that it is slightly inaccurately defined. It is true that shared objects do ease up interpersonal connection, especially between perfect strangers, but Simon's description, I fear, may overly underline the presence of an object at the cost of the presence itself. I see this as a situation similar to the problems Bell saw in theories of rituals as performances where the action and

¹³⁸ See Simpson, Moira G. (2006) 'Revealing and Concealing: Museums, Objects, and the Transmission of Knowledge in Aboriginal Australia' for how the handling, preserving and exhibiting of aboriginal objects is organised together with the aboriginal communities. In Marstine, Janet (edit.) (2006a) *New Museum Theory and Practice: An Introduction*, Blackwell Publishing, Malden, MA, USA, pp. 152-177.

¹³⁹ Simon, Nina (2010), <http://www.participatorymuseum.org/chapter4/>

immediate sensuous, emotional, and mental aspects of the situation are in danger of being overlooked.

In his article, 'The Living Language' David Abram writes:

Meaning, according to my friend, arises from *meeting*, from the felt contact between oneself and what is not self. From the encounter between oneself and another person, or a river, or the surfing wind. From, ultimately, the ongoing interaction and intercourse between oneself and the rest of the earthly cosmos.¹⁴⁰

I strongly believe this contact, or being in the presence, is the core of museum exhibitions. In his article, Pekarik makes several notes on various kinds of social interaction between visitors he had seen on his visit to the City Museum: how family members take photographs of each other experiencing the museum actively, how an elderly great-grandmother takes a train ride with kids through a dark tunnel, and how she is applauded by other visiting adults for her readiness to play.¹⁴¹ He describes how in 'a pit of thousands of interlocking plastic things' or building components, one girl aspires to build a silver ball, an adult male constructs a long, multi-coloured looping rope and another girl makes a short rope and tries to skip with it.¹⁴² In these examples from the City Museum, the objects 'explicitly invite interpersonal use'¹⁴³ as their affordance connotes that for a more full experience, two or more people can or need to work together.

Often these kinds of exhibits invite interaction quite directly, but they can do it more subtly. Using the building block pit in the City Museum does not require that a visitor has a friend in order to commence building. Instead it directs a visitor to share the physical space of the pit with other players as well as with the pieces, and as the plastic pieces are utterly mixed together, it encourages builders to ask for the pieces they cannot find or reach, and to notice opportunities for helping others to find the pieces they need in return. The opportunities for social interaction rise out of shared action, the act of clicking pieces of plastic together, without being enforced upon the participants. But most of all they are fed by presence, and being present is not necessarily a form of vibrant activity.

In the television travel series *Journey to the End of the World*, the British comedian Billy Connolly travels through the North American Arctic, loosely following the Northwest Passage. In the end of the second episode, Connolly reminisces about his experiences on Baffin Island and on the people he met, recollecting an encounter in Nunatta Sunakkutaagit Museum in Iqaluit, Canada:

¹⁴⁰ Abram, David (2011b) 'The Living Language', *Shambhala Sun*, November 2011, p. 54.

¹⁴¹ Pekarik (2002a), p. 179.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 180.

¹⁴³ Simon (2010), <http://www.participatorymuseum.org/chapter4/>

But there's one who haunts me is a little man I met in a museum in Iqaluit. He goes in every day to watch this rerun of a film. His grandfather is in it, his grandfather's brother, his uncle is in it. His whole world has radically changed. It's gone from the dog sledges to the Internet, and to me he represents this whole part of the world.¹⁴⁴

We, the viewers, also get to see this 'little man' in a short clip in which he and Connolly sit watching the film together. We can barely make out how Connolly asks, under his own voice-over commentary, the little man if it is him on the film, and the little man points at the silver screen perhaps explaining who is who, how they are related, and what they are doing. Then he tugs his hands back under his thighs and continues to watch the film with an intensity of expression that transcends words. We see Connolly copy the little man's posture as they immerse themselves in the moving pictures of the past. The two men, and we the audience (to some extent at least), share something of that moment, even if we do not seem to have much in common, at least as far as the level of our personal experiences is concerned. I have never met or seen the little man's relatives nor his everyday world, nor am I familiar with Connolly's, yet I relate instinctively to the life experiences present through them. This is, of course, largely because of the way the episode and the scene in particular is put together and because of Connolly's skills as a narrator, but it seems that I do not need prior knowledge in order to understand – the shared humanness is enough.¹⁴⁵

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, the psychologist behind the concept of flow and a researcher of creativity and happiness, made an interesting point in his TED 2004 talk on flow.¹⁴⁶ While the concept of flow is not something I will discuss any further, it is in my view closely linked to engagement. The point in Csikszentmihalyi's talk is the reference he makes to presence, which I consider to be relevant for the notion of exhibition:

Now, "ecstasy" in Greek meant simply to stand to the side of something. And then it became essentially an analogy for a mental state where you feel that you are not doing your ordinary everyday routines. So ecstasy is essentially a stepping into an alternative reality. And it's interesting, if you think about it, how, when we think about

¹⁴⁴ The series was made by the British ITV in 2009. The quoted part can be seen online at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BHSZXEmIZpw&feature=related>. The transcription is my own.

¹⁴⁵ It is noteworthy that the 'little man' is not named in the narration. Would my experience as a viewer have changed if I had been told his name? Was this done deliberately in order to entice a precise experience out of me? Or did the little man express a wish not to be named?

¹⁴⁶ Can be viewed online: http://www.ted.com/talks/mihaly_csikszentmihalyi_on_flow.html

the civilizations that we look up to as having been pinnacles of human achievement -- whether it's China, Greece, the Hindu civilization, or the Mayas, or Egyptians -- what we know about them is really about their ecstasies, not about their everyday life. We know the temples they built, where people could come to experience a different reality. We know about the circuses, the arenas, the theaters. These are the remains of civilizations and they are the places that people went to experience life in a more concentrated, more ordered form.¹⁴⁷

A museum exhibition is this kind of a place, a place outside our ordinary routines which by no means should mean that it is a place removed from the everyday. The difference lies in the idea of the exhibition as a place set aside for a particular purpose; in this case a place and space set aside for being in presence, for being engaged. Ecstasy is a strong word and although appropriate for describing flow, it is too loaded with connotations to be the perfect word to use in connection to engagement. Its original meaning is, however, intriguing and the last line of the Csikszentmihalyi quote is illuminating. Museums are, in a sense, concentrated worlds or concentrated views on particular aspects of the world where the hidden order of the world (if we accept that there is such a thing) is made observable. Following Csikszentmihalyi's thinking, we go into museums to stand on the side of things, or to be with things.

It is this kind of meaning making that museum exhibitions, if seen as ritual sites, can at their best accommodate: the coming together of people, ideas, nature, and the world. Action, the active doing is only one part of such coming together; the active doing is only one part of engagement and participation, but not all action is active doing. While performance theory in ritual studies has underestimated the value of the present and of immediate sensory responses, then it sometimes feels that museums like the City Museum are in danger of underestimating the value of contemplation. Contemplation is not necessarily a disinterested mental action. We must be careful not to create yet another polarisation, but to keep in mind that contemplation is not separated from our being: '(...)human activity is situational, which is to say that much of what is important to it cannot be grasped outside of the specific context in which it occurs,' wrote Bell. Nor should activity be 'analysed and categorised as something already finished, [or] the very nature of activity is lost.'¹⁴⁸

One more brief observation is called for. While the first public museums were in fact not really open to all members of the public, contemporary museums are. In the beginning of this chapter, I mentioned that some of the students on my museum pedagogy course were concerned that the visitors of the City Museum seemed to have the freedom of the museum to themselves, and Pekarik cer-

¹⁴⁷ Transcript obtained from the aforementioned webpage 14.5.2012.

¹⁴⁸ Bell (2009), first p. 81, second p. 72.

tainly presents an idea of a museum that allows a lot of freedom for its visitors. Every participatory museum does this, although few do so to the extent of the City Museum, but if a museum exhibition is to succeed within the parameters indicated here, then it must do so. How else can the visitors truly engage with the exhibited world? This may mean that the visitors use the exhibition differently than the museum may have envisioned. If the meaning is to come out of the visitor's personal experiences and her own meaning-making, then a museum putting up an exhibition must risk that she may not act according to the plan. In 'The utopics of social ordering – Stonehenge as a museum without walls', Kevin Hetherington describes how Stonehenge has had numerous, often overlapping meanings as an important archeological site: a Druidic temple, an ancient astronomical instrument, a tourist attraction, a symbol of ancient Britain, part of English cultural heritage, a node in a system of ley lines, a place of UFO sightings, and the site of an annual free festival.¹⁴⁹ While some of these roles of meaning-making may seem silly to some, how could denying one meaningful usage be justified if an exhibition is to be a habitat and not a territory? A ritual space may have a rather strictly ordered form which does not allow for varied uses and occupation of that space. This is not necessarily because the authority governing the space decides what activities can and cannot be carried out in that specific space but because the space itself – its spatial order, form, lighting conditions and so on – furnish certain forms of activity. Steward Brand characterises these kinds of buildings as 'no road', meaning that these buildings and the space they define 'strenuously avoid any relationship whatever with time' and change.¹⁵⁰ They are spaces that are difficult, even impossible to use differently. A *site* such as the Stonehenge, however, is more freeform: it can provide the setting for varied ways of occupation and activity.

2.6 The Garden as an Analogy for Exhibitions as Ritual Sites

The trouble with theorising and philosophising on museums is that there are many different kinds of museums and that these museums differ significantly from each other, as the opening quote of this chapter shows. Museums also exist in a variety of cultures within which the attitudes towards objects and the way they are displayed may differ significantly, as Moira Simpson demonstrates in

¹⁴⁹ Hetherington, Kevin (2004), 'The utopics of social ordering – Stonehenge as a museum without walls', *Theorizing Museums – Representing Identity and Diversity in a Changing World*, edit. MacDonald, Sharon & Fyfe, Gordon, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford/Cambridge, p. 156.

¹⁵⁰ See Brand, Steward (1994) *How Buildings Learn – What Happens After They're Built*, Phoenix Illustrated/Orion Books, London,, pp. 52-71. Quote p. 52.

her 'Revealing and Concealing – Museums, Objects, and the Transmission of Knowledge in Aboriginal Australia'. Simpson explains how very differently two cultures may manage and access knowledge¹⁵¹. These are the major reasons for the difficulty of providing a general description for the word 'museum', as it is quite difficult to find the characteristics that would fit all, or even most candidates. Therefore, not surprisingly, the ICOM's basic definition is more concerned with the activities of museums than with the physical or practical realities. However, my study is concerned with the physical reality of museum exhibitions: their architecture, spatiality, and the bodily experiences of the visitors. This would benefit from a way to consider all kinds of museums regardless of their physical and culture-specific forms. Thinking them as ritual sites and aesthetic fields is one such way, but it is more of a theoretical setting, leaning too easily towards the clearly intellectual aspects of museum visits. I also think that it does not, in itself, accommodate the bodily aspect to the extent I feel would be helpful.

What attributes characterise exhibitions as aesthetic fields? I would suggest the following: all senses, not just vision, are embraced; the visitor is engaged with her whole being; mentally, emotionally, and bodily; a freedom of meaning-making is allowed; the visitor is allowed to decide (within reason) how she engages with her habitat; the space allows various levels of presence and activity, ranging from direct physical contact (when possible) to quiet contemplation; and the visitor is offered with various levels of stories to explore and objects to appreciate. In museums, these attributes combine with a vast variety of environments: art galleries and sculpture parks, science centres and museums of technology, museums of history and living history villages, arboreta and botanical collections, house museums and local heritage rooms. How to settle the confusion this abundance of specimens creates? How to see the forest from the trees?

The theories and philosophies of gardens suffers from difficulties similar to those of museums. David E. Cooper begins his book, *Philosophy of Gardens* by lamenting the lack or near nonexistence of contemplation of gardens in contemporary philosophy and especially in aesthetics.¹⁵² Many of the reasons he presents for this are connected to the concepts of art – for example the lack of autonomy and that in contrast to art, 'people no longer make statements in the medium of gardening'¹⁵³ – but gardens, like museums, are a group of highly diverse places which makes it difficult to define what a garden is. Is it necessary for a garden to have living plants? Can something that exists indoors be a garden? Or does a garden have to have 'exposure to the open air or sky' in order to

¹⁵¹ Simpson (2006).

¹⁵² Cooper (2006), pp. 1-2.

¹⁵³ Ibid., pp. 8-10, quote p. 9.

be a true garden, as Mara Miller suggests in *The Garden as Art*?¹⁵⁴ Does a garden have a clear boundary, a wall or a fence surrounding it, or is it enough that we conceive of gardens as being something separate from the wild or nature (whatever we may mean with such concepts)? What about English landscape gardens which try to blend in with the wider surrounding landscape without any obvious boundaries? Not only is there a great physical variety to gardens but in addition to that, different gardens have different grounds for their existence. Some, such as vegetable and kitchen gardens, are profoundly practical, while others exist purely for reasons of aesthetics, pleasure, and sensuality. The abundance of form and meaning of gardens does not render them impossible to discuss. Like Cooper assures us, we do not need to have a precise definition of a term in order to discuss it; the common, everyday understanding about what gardens are is enough.¹⁵⁵ The discussion of museums, however, somewhat suffers from the abundance of form and meaning of museums. It seems to me that the writings on museums are often concerned with and grouped according to a particular type of museum. This means that writings on art museums are set apart from writings on science museums, for example. This is where I find the analogue of gardens particularly constructive as it helps reach across the lines drawn according to subject matter.

There are some reasons why the garden analogy is rather obvious. Firstly, gardens appeal to our senses at large, even if some gardens may highlight one sense over others.

Landscape gardens try to imitate, and to improve, on nature's sensual wealth. Asian gardens are created with visual-tactile qualities in mind (...) An Islamic garden is a concordance of sight, sound, and scent, but it is also an oasis of thermal delight (...).¹⁵⁶

Even the taste and the sense of hunger are addressed, particularly in kitchen gardens and orchards, but other kinds of gardens can have edible plants too. A good example are the woodland strawberries, *Fragaria vesca*, the stroller can pick and enjoy. The senses are not 'separately engaged, in the sense that one could abstract a visual pleasure, say, or a tactile one from the *gesamt* experience,' writes Cooper and continues:

¹⁵⁴ Miller, Mara (1993) *The Garden as Art*, State University of New York Press, Albany, p. 15.

¹⁵⁵ Cooper (2006), pp. 12-13.

¹⁵⁶ Tuan (1993), p. 44.

I wouldn't enjoy the feel of a wet stone beneath my bare feet in a Japanese garden in just the way I do unless I could see its glistening dampness studded with the mat green of the moss.¹⁵⁷

Secondly, because gardens address the whole range of senses, they are places of embodied experience. They must be entered, viewed, smelled, strolled around, explored, and contemplated while lying on the grass, for example. In order to experience a garden, we must actively and physically engage it if we are to discover what it has to offer.

Unlike the case with paintings and even sculptures, there are no privileged points from which to view and experience a garden. Some formal gardens, to be sure, with their *alleés* and focal objects invite certain views: but one would hardly criticize or find eccentric the stroller who looks at the garden from perspectives not invited by the designer (...) gardens are not viewed, as Arnold Berleant puts it (1993), as 'framed' objects standing there before us in the manner of a painting on a wall.¹⁵⁸

Even a stationary viewer is surrounded by the garden, but 'as a three-dimensional place there will always be parts of the garden invisible – obscured by the trees, for example – from any given viewpoint.'¹⁵⁹ In fact, most of the garden is often out of sight. To see the whole of a garden, one must move around, bend over, stand on tiptoes, close one's eyes and listen, and so on. Also, as the garden changes over time and with the seasons, weather, and lighting, it affords multiple visits and renewed experiences. In fact, Cooper explains gardens 'as "occasions" – to use Berleant's term – for active, engaged experience.'¹⁶⁰

Thirdly, human interactions with and in gardens are manifold. You can become a gardener who actively creates and nurtures a garden, or simply visit gardens without ever getting any soil under your fingernails. In a garden, you can play hide and seek, football, or violin; read a book; listen to the birds and other sounds; sleep; have a party; examine the insects; or lose yourself into philosophical pondering. Or grow your own food, a practice that is deceptively simple but includes many levels of ethical and practical questions. Cooper calls these 'activities and practices that are appropriately pursued in the garden' as garden-practices.¹⁶¹ In relation to this, Cooper makes a note that reflects interestingly on contemporary museums:

¹⁵⁷ Cooper (2006), pp. 28-29.

¹⁵⁸ Cooper (2006), p. 30. Miller sees the existence of a single privileged point of view as one defining characteristic for a formal garden, Miller (1993), p. 22.

¹⁵⁹ Cooper (2006), p. 31.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

On a historical note, it is my impression that (...) the garden has become increasingly appreciated in recent years as a theatre of garden-practices, and less as an aesthetic spectacle.¹⁶²

Museums too have come to be theatres as they have become increasingly experience-oriented. Museums have become more recreational as opposed to simply educational or civilising. The extreme examples like the City Museum are open for private social functions such as weddings, and some museums offer special services for birthdays. Many museum restaurants and cafés have customers who do not visit the exhibitions. Museums may not, yet, be open to equally many and equally varied sets of 'practices' but the tendency is there.

However, the main connection between gardens and museums is their mutual history and nature as places of contemplation and philosophising. Their origins are entwined in the sacred grove. Cooper describes 'the garden as a place peculiarly suited to the conduct of philosophical thought and discussion'¹⁶³, but this is equally true of museums. One could argue, of course, that museums were and are created, built and designed for that purpose but the same is true for many gardens. Japanese gardens, for example, are exceedingly allegorical and symbolical and are thus meant to serve as a vessel for the mind and soul to reach beyond the boundaries of this world: for example an upright stone cutting a waterfall in half can remind the viewer of a leaping carp, an allegory of the struggle for spiritual attainment¹⁶⁴. To establish some difference between gardens and museums, I would say that gardens, in general, are more symbolical and allegorical, and museums more factual and describing, but I feel that this is what the shift from object-orientedness to experience-orientedness may be changing. Nevertheless, gardens, like museums, are encapsulated portions of the world – though quite literally in comparison to museums – and even the most practical and utilitarian gardens have metaphysical potential. Museums and gardens are or can be liminal 'in-between' spaces, in a sense similar to rituals, a characteristic forming the basis of Duncan's *Civilizing Rituals*. 'Every garden is an attempt at the reconciliation of the oppositions which constrain our existence,' writes Miller echoing the purpose of rituals, 'an insistence on determining the terms of our existence. As such it is always an act of hope.'¹⁶⁵ This may be most obvious in the case of gardens dedicated to growing food, but this is what all gardening – the act of creating and maintaining a garden – is about, and it is observable also to those who only visit them. It is perhaps because of this that gardens are so 'precisely the combination of conditions

¹⁶² Ibid., p. 65.

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁶⁴ Slawson, David A (1991) *Secret Teachings in the Art of Japanese Gardens – Design Principles, Aesthetic Values*, Kodnasha International, Tokyo, Japan, p. 42.

¹⁶⁵ Miller (1993), p. 25.

conducive to reverie', as Cooper puts it.¹⁶⁶ In fact, this is perhaps the reason why gardens and garden-practices are so meaningful to people: they lend themselves so well to our ponderations on good life as well as on the meaning of life,¹⁶⁷ a task not too dissimilar to that of museums.

Gardens also share some of the philosophical problems with museums. For example, writing on environmental ethics, Eugene C. Hargrove has criticised gardens – landscape and formal gardens in particular:

In the formal landscape garden, plants had been regarded as indifferent blobs of *matter* to be shaped into whatever forms the gardener chose, and attention was directed towards these artificial and indeed superficial shapes and not towards the properties of plants themselves.¹⁶⁸

He sees that this 'provides a distorted and simplified picture of nature' which does no justice to the complexity of the world and reality, that it 'does not produce the real thing.'¹⁶⁹ Gardens, especially those that try to be as natural as possible, withhold the same intrinsic, incongruous aspect as do most types of museum exhibitions: the problematics of the real and the authentic. On the other hand, gardens such as the Japanese stroll garden leads 'with its winding path the viewer to an ever-changing sequence of scenic effects'¹⁷⁰ while being potentially aesthetic and pondering-inducing can at the same time be distancing in a manner similar to the encyclopaedic exhibition described earlier in this chapter.

The relationship between gardens and museums is old, complex and sophisticated, and deserves a study of its own to be fully appreciated. In addition to what I have said above, I must settle with noting that gardens have great potential for pertaining and expressing information and knowledge in an organised albeit symbolical fashion, without going any deeper into this history. It is interesting how often and in different cultures in different parts of the world gardens have been used to describe the order of the universe, the paradise, and the virtues – all subjects that are hard to imagine and comprehend for their conceptual and transcendental nature. '[T]he garden offers 'one of the most innocent Delights in human Life', writes Cooper quoting Joseph Addison, 'reflective of 'a virtuous Habit of Mind,' above all for the opportunities it affords that most characteristically human of capacities, *the exercise of imagination – the pre-*

¹⁶⁶ Cooper (2006), p. 84.

¹⁶⁷ See Cooper (2006), pp. 86-107 and Miller (1993), p. 25.

¹⁶⁸ Hargrove, Eugene C. (1989) *Foundations of Environmental Ethics*, Environmental Ethics Books, Denton, TX, USA, p. 83.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.194.

¹⁷⁰ Slawson (1991), p. 14.

*condition of wisdom, creativity, and insight, (...)*¹⁷¹ Contenting myself with that, I will move on to actual exhibitions over the next chapters, in which the analogy of gardens will be put to use. Many issues that I have only touched here will become more clear as they come up in connection with various examples of engagement in museum exhibitions.

¹⁷¹ Originally Hunt, John Dixon & Willis, Peter (1988) (edits) *The Genius of the Place – The English Landscape Gardens 1620-1820*, MIT Press, Boston, p. 147. Quoted in Cooper (2006), p. 10. Italics my own.

3 PRODUCING PRESENCE – LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR A PATH BETWEEN WORLDS¹

Our experience of physical environments depends upon changing perceptions of patterns generated by solid and void, light and shade – patterns which reveal forms in space as we move among them and change our position in relation to them. It is this direct existential experience, combined with the imagery we perceive in our surroundings, that offers the basic material of environmental memory.²

Malcolm Quantrill:
The Environmental Memory
– *Man and Architecture in the Landscape of Ideas*

During a recent conference, the timetable allowed me to stay for an additional full day in Oslo, Norway. I had been to the city before and visited the Kon-tiki Museum (a visit I will reflect upon later on). I had planned to visit it again for several years had passed since the previous visit and I thought it might be prudent to refresh the memories. However, that Sunday morning the three days at the conference had taken their toll on my mental stamina, and I did not feel like visiting any museums. But it was a very rainy day in Oslo and any outdoor activities had even less appeal. I contemplated going to the Natural History Museum instead (their collection includes some interesting fossils) but I nevertheless ended up in the docks and found myself with the other tourists waiting for the ferry that shuttles between the city centre and the Bygdøy peninsula, where the maritime museums of Oslo are located.

¹ The title of this chapter was inspired by Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's book *Production of Presence – What Meaning Cannot Convey*.

² Quantrill, Malcolm (1987) *The Environmental Memory – Man and Architecture in the Landscape of Ideas*, Schocken Books, New York, USA, p. xiv.

I felt drained of all my mental energy, but I had to spend the day somehow. The Kon-tiki Museum would have been a safe option, but I did not feel like going through something I had already seen. Yet, I remained undecided until I found myself standing between two buildings and having to choose whether to turn right for the Kon-tiki or left for the Fram Museum. I decided to walk through the doors of the latter with very little enthusiasm and knowing only that there would be some kind of an old ship inside. I expected nothing more than to spend the day indoors, seeing something I had not already seen.

I did know that the museum was supposed to be very good and that it had won some kind of an award for its exhibition. Initially, I was underwhelmed. The building has been constructed around a hundred-year-old arctic exploration ship and it rises around its treasure like a tent, leaving very little space for the exhibitions between the walls and the ship itself. The prow of the ship, Fram, greets the visitors with its cutwater above the front desk, directing the flow of the visitors towards the entrance on the left and leaving the right side for the exit. Very dramatic and impressive, no doubt, but left me unimpressed, fatigued as I was. I have seen more awe-inspiring ships in museums before – the Wasa in Stockholm, Sweden, in particular. I walked past the ship, wondered briefly what would be the right spot for starting my tour (I am sure it is there, I just could not be bothered to find it), decided to head directly for the upmost of the narrow tiers between the bulk of the ship and the walls, and work my way down.

I had had no idea that I would actually be able to board the ship until I saw the gangway connecting the tier with the ship's deck. I had never before been to an indoors museum where the visitors are allowed to do so. I had only admired the vessels from the outside or peeked in through portholes. Unexpectedly, I had found a *raison d'être* for the visit and it seemed to change everything: there was an adventure for me to experience. I climbed aboard, reading only some of the exhibition texts. The headlines of the displays I had passed by had reminded me of the Fram having been an exploration vessel of the Norwegian explorers Roald Amundsen, Fridtjof Nansen, and Otto Sverdrup and that it had been especially designed and built to withstand the force and might of the Arctic sea ice.

The moment I took my first steps on the deck of the Fram, everything again changed. It was not my first time on a big ship, not even on a proper sailing ship, and yet it was something new. I felt the ship move under me and the depths of the arctic ocean swell under it. Or it felt like I *ought* to have felt it. The sensation was so convincing that at first I felt slightly off-balance, as if I had been forced to find my sea legs. I walked around the deck and the sensation persisted. Somewhere just beyond my senses the mass of the ship seemed to yield and rise with the billowing sea that I could almost smell and feel on my skin. I expected for the wind to rise any minute; I could almost hear it move

through the rigging and around the masts. The sea and the voyage was out there somewhere, alive and real, though of course it now exists only as history.

I took the narrow, steep stairs below and it was the same there within the massive, 80 centimetre thick hull and minuscule cabins around the common spaces. The scent of tar and diesel hung in the air, especially in the engine room and the cargo holds. Outside the hull, the polar ice field extended about the trapped ship, and below it descended the dark coldness of the Arctic sea. The explorers had allowed for the ice to trap the ship, hoping to float with the ice all the way to the North Pole – an exploration that had taken them about six years. Below the deck, the consciousness of waiting persisted as a counterpart to the sense of a sea voyage above. It was easy to imagine that I had boarded the ship recently after it had arrived home, and that the contents had just been hauled away for the last time.

I am fully aware that this recollection sounds mystical, but it was transcendent in its intangibility. At the moment of the experience, I was unable at first to fully realise what it was that I was experiencing. The sensations and emotions at first escaped my recognition and I had to reorient myself. That re-orientation was not only spatial and physical: I had to figure out that the ship was not moving but that I could imagine, very convincingly, what it might have felt like to be at sea. It was also mental and internal: I had to both rationalise the experience and to distance myself from its immediate intensity in order to grasp it. And it was as emotional as it was bodily: it so overwhelmed me that I was close to tears at one point. What I mean to say is that this particular experience was by no means a typical museum experience, not even as far as fully engaging and moving ones are concerned. It was an instance of extreme ecstasy in the sense of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (see the previous chapter): I was, quite literally it seemed, standing in the direct presence of the Fram, or more precisely of its voyage and meaning. Csikszentmihalyi's description of ecstasy as 'stepping into an alternative reality' describes my experience exactly: it was as if the real, not the imagined voyage of the Fram and its crew could have been within my reach had I only been able to take that crucial step through the fabric of time. A full comprehension of the voyage and its significance and ramifications seemed possible, although at the same time I was becoming increasingly aware of never being able to achieve that but only sympathise with it. I experienced the full blow of an engaged aesthetic experience.

Such a momentous and extreme experience cannot be, in my view, the intended goal of a museum exhibition. First of all, although such experiences most certainly are desirable on an individual level, they are also extremely personal. They are not open to everyone at any instance as they require, I presume, an openness of mind for such experiences and not everyone necessarily seeks such experiences. I was one of the first visitors of the day and had only a handful of

others for company. Some of them seemed to be rather taken by their personal experiences but to say, without asking them, how strong their experiences were, is obviously impossible. When the larger tour groups started to arrive and the museum got crowded, they seemed to be as exited as anyone can be expected to be when a degree of tiredness and lack of interest is part of the palette. It is difficult to say what it would take to ignite in most visitors experiences similar to mine, for I believe that what created the intensity had much to do with my personal history and knowledge. On the other hand, creating exhibitions that would have as high an impact on the larger public as the Fram had on me must nevertheless be possible, but is it desirable? What would be the purpose of such experience? Entertainment? How would such museum exhibition differ from, let us say, a film studio amusement park designed to induce an experience of being in a major blockbuster film such as the *Jaws*, for example? Influence? While museums do try to influence their audiences they try to do it – ideally – through education and by challenging the visitors' conventions through thinking, not through powerful emotions alone.³ Extremely affective experiences, which mine certainly was, have throughout history been (and continue to be) produced for the masses in order to influence them. Often merely a controversial, sensitive subject matter is enough to create such experiences and to arouse strong emotions, as in the well-known case of the Enola Gay exhibition that rattled the gage of almost any group connected to atomic bombs and the Second World War.⁴ Holocaust museums, I would imagine, have to be particularly careful in how they represent their subject matter, as they have to find a balance between thinking and feeling, a feat Pekarik pondered over in his article 'Feeling or Learning?' in connection to an exhibition about the 9/11 events.⁵ Excessive levels of feelings – perhaps especially those of guilt, remorse, sadness, anger, fear, revulsion, hopelessness, despair, and so on – can make an exhibition difficult to approach, comprehend, and generalise or, in a word, to learn. Like the legendary American horseman Monty Roberts constantly reminds his students, when adrenalin goes up, learning goes down as the mind becomes defensive. Conversely, positive and neutral emotions and sensations can significantly ad-

³ Nature-themed museums and zoos in particular have such agendas as they, for example, try to persuade their visitors to support and promote environmentalism or at least green values, but such aspirations are not exclusive to these types of museums. Art exhibitions dealing with issues such as women's rights, homelessness or refugees and conflicts are common enough. In fact, social awareness and an active role concerning the society at large are and have been at the heart of the museum institution.

⁴ See e.g., Zolberg, Vera (2004) 'Museums as Contested Sites of Remembrance – The Enola Gay Affair', in MacDonald & Fyve (2004) *Theorizing Museums – Representing Identity and Diversity in a Changing World*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, UK/ Cambridge, USA, pp. 69-82.

⁵ Pekarik (2002b) 'Feeling or Learning?' in *Curator – The Museum Journal*, vol. 45, no. 4, October 2002, pp. 262-264.

vocate and advance an open attitude towards the subject at hand. During public demonstrations or clinics on horse training, Roberts keeps the atmosphere light by telling the audience little lighthearted stories about what he and the horse are thinking, for what takes place in the pen can sometimes be very dramatic both emotionally and physically.⁶

Despite these dangers – profound subjectivity and emotionality – there is still something to be learned from my experience if we can determine what actually happened and how it came to pass. What I experienced was a moment when the world, or at least a specific area or section of it, became present to me at large. It was a moment of comprehension or clarity as different bits of information and knowledge I had gathered over the years and from various sources came together. I remembered them and saw how they fitted together, as the individual bits and pieces fell into their places and the picture was completed. I left the museum with a (more) coherent understanding of the situation – though still in many ways flawed and imperfect, I am sure. How did this happen? I had little idea what I was about to see when I went in, as I said, and I did not read but a few short snippets of the information texts I happened to pass on my way up. I was aware of the museum having to do with arctic explorations and that Roald Amundsen had been part of the Fram crew. I had quite recently read about him, so I had a fresh picture of his South Pole expedition in my mind. But on board of the Fram, I suddenly – or so it seemed – remembered a lot more: I recognised items, suddenly knew bits about the general structure of wooden sailing ships, remembered stories about the Norwegian arctic explorers, and most importantly, remembered and recognised the Fram I had learnt about before. My knowing was not so much remembering piecemeal facts, snippets of information and titbits of stories, as it was an experience of a coherent world. But what was it that revived and awakened both these memories and the knowledge I did not remember having? Was it the Fram herself, even though it seemed that what I remembered, reanimated the ship? Maybe it was the other way round and it was the ship that reanimated the information held in my memory? What I experienced and what I have described here sprang forth from within me in connection to that particular environment. A new horizon opened to me, new things and understanding became part of my life and my lifeworld. Each museum visitor sees what she sees from her own perspective, from her own horizon, and it is the museum's challenge and aspiration to connect vari-

⁶ Roberts has not only worked with and for the benefit of horses, but he has also fostered about 50 children and has recently put together a program for war veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. Working with problem horses in public demonstrations, he found out that the demonstrations can have deep impact on the members of the audience with a history of mental and physical abuse or who are otherwise traumatised. This gave Roberts the idea of teaching his horse skills to veterans as a form of self-empowerment. See www.montyroberts.com

ous individual horizons into a shared landscape. But how to do that? How to animate knowledge, how to make it real and alive? How to bring theoretical knowledge from the immaterial sphere into the lifeworld?

In *The Environmental Memory – Man and Architecture in the Landscape of Ideas*, Malcolm Quantrill describes the ways the architecture of cities and individual buildings can be seen as presenting and retaining in their structure and form the ideas, ideologies, and even the collective memory of the community that built it, thus supporting and preserving the identity of the community.⁷ Drawing inspiration especially from Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* and his description of how buildings, experiences, and memory can be bridged together, Quantrill describes how, for example, the temples of ancient Egypt not only reflected the hierarchy of the religion, but foreshadowed the 'ordering of the city form'⁸ and how

[t]hroughout almost three millennia ancient Egyptian architecture responded to man's consciousness of the phenomenological world, *representing* a landscape of his ideas about cosmic order and its relation to his vision of both temporal and eternal life.⁹

In other words, the architecture of a place reminds a person of, amongst other things, the stories, customs and history of the culture. Exploring architecture 'as the tool-kit of memory', as the title of the first part of his book says, Quantrill recounts the age-old mnemonic device of the palace.¹⁰ An ancient orator, who wanted to memorise his speech, imagined in detail a house (or a palace for a more poetic flair). He imagined its rooms and their order and a route he would follow through that house. Along the route he would place mostly symbolical or allegorical images and objects of the things he would have to later recite over the course of his speech. The route through the house thus followed the order of his speech, and as the orator begun his presentation, he entered the house in his mind and walked through it, following the previously set course and using the images and the objects in order to recall his speech. When the orator passed an object in the imagined palace, it would remind him of a specific fact, subject, or delivery in question.

I had not built an imagined Fram Museum with all its exhibits, but it nevertheless acted as a memory palace for me. The setting tingled my memory and my mind which was already and in spite of my listlessness occupied with the

⁷ Quantrill, Malcolm (1987) *The Environmental Memory – Man and Architecture in the Landscape of Ideas*, Schocken Books, New York, USA.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, see e.g. pp. 11-19.

questions of the nature and significance of the ship. Although the experience was instantaneous at the moment I became engaged, the process leading to it had begun well before it. It required a certain mental and emotional state and openness to (new) experiences but it was helped, or even enabled, by particular elements of the environment of the Fram Museum. These are the elements or characteristics of the environment that are of interest here. First of all, these elements do include the museum objects displayed in the vitrines integrated into the walls of the museum and the exhibition text printed on the walls (there were hardly any texts on or in the ship itself, with the exception of labels such as 'galley' or the names of the occupants above the cabin doors). I will not concern myself with these elements within the confines of this study, as I already stated in the introduction. Also, I believe that they are not the element that brought forth the experience but that it was a result of those aspects of the environment that addressed me directly through my body. It was the act of boarding the Fram that kindled the experience, the rareness of such opportunity and the sensations it brought about: the smell of tar and diesel are smells I associate with such ships, the feel of the deck planks under my feet, and the sloping of the decks and their knotted surfaces. Standing on the deck, most of the ship's mass is located beneath one's feet and remains invisible unless one peers over the bulwarks. What turned out to be elemental was my bodily presence directly on-board the ship and how it in turn stirred the memories (real and imagined) of sensations experienced on ships, and how being on-board in person, as opposed to some computer generated virtual multimedia presentation, gave me concrete understanding of the ship's measurements in relation to human body – to my own body in particular as it is the only one I know intimately and with which I identify. In a way I gained a kind of a stewardship of the Fram: I came to know the ship in the sense that my body knew it, or at least how it felt to be in contact with it. That contact served as a connecting or a central point around which the knowledge held in my memory could arrange itself and through which individual facts and snippets could find connection and meaning. This is how I consciously describe the experience.

Yet the conscious description is not enough to reveal all the facets of the experience, especially the experience of the intersection of two timelines – my contemporary one and the one of the Fram's journey. Perhaps the best way to describe the time I stood on-board comes from fantasy literature and pagan traditions in which the cosmos is composed of several parallel, overlapping universes of man (the one we live in) and the ones of the supernatural (the underworld or the netherworld, the land of the fairies, the spirit land, and so on). According to such traditions, it is possible, but very dangerous and energy-consuming, to cross from one world to another, except where or when the 'membrane' between the worlds is unusually thin. Apparently, according to many Western European traditions, the membrane is at its thinnest during Hal-

loween (All Hallow's Eve, All Saint's Day) when it is so thin that all kinds of creatures can easily slip into our universe. This may sound all too fantastical, but it is how it felt to be onboard the Fram: I could *almost* see, feel, and enter the time when the Fram was on its voyage. The voyage became available to me in ways I had not expected; *having* information and knowledge became *knowing*.

Though this experience was unusual, it is basically something museum exhibitions should strive for since it was an experience that allowed me to gain comprehension of not only the scientific, historical, and sociological but also the human meaning of the ship Fram. I gained *an insight* on the significance the journey carried for the men taking it, for their families, for members of the public who followed it, and so on. My view changed from that of an outside observer towards that of a participant, a change valued and sought after in the contemporary museum world.

One way to explain this change is through Husserl's concept of the lifeworld, which for us, who are in it and awake in it, is always already there as the pre-existing, given, assumed ground behind, or under, all human experiences.¹¹ Although the lifeworld is a priori and ever-present, it is, as David Abram describes it in *The Spell of the Sensuous*, 'a world that we count on without necessarily paying much attention' and 'easily overlooked'.¹² In fact, the topic of Abram's book is the detachment or alienation of Western culture from an embodied and conscious experience of the lifeworld, especially in comparison to many indigenous cultures and tribes. All of us, individual humans as well as other beings and things of the world, exist in the lifeworld, and we are aware of others and the world as a universal horizon within which we all live. In this sense the lifeworld is a 'collective field of experience lived through from many different angles'¹³ but it is also private or personal, relative to the perceiving subject's history and situation; in a way we all have our 'homeworld'. Abram points out that the lifeworld is not only personal but it 'may be quite different for different cultures (...) influenced by the ways they live and engage the world.'¹⁴ But most of all, the lifeworld is fundamentally a shared world, although different individuals and cultures may experience and perceive its aspects differently. In other words, there are different ways of being aware of the

¹¹ See for example Husserl, Edmund (2011) *Eurooppalaisten tieteiden kriisi ja transsendentaalinen fenomenologia*, trans. Markku Lehtinen, Gaudeamus Helsinki University Press, Helsinki, Finland, pp. 132-133. Orig. (1962) *Die Krisis euroäeischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie. Eine Einleitung in die phänomenologische Philosophie*, Martinus Nijhoff, Haag.

¹² Abram, David (1997) *The Spell of the Sensuous*, Vintage Books/Random House, Inc., New York/Toronto, p. 40.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

lifeworld and the beings in it,¹⁵ and we can share our personal 'homeworlds' intersubjectively by integrating or appropriating other personal lifeworlds into ours. This is what happened to mine in my experience: my 'homeworld' which included an amount of knowledge and experiences of seafaring, arctic environments and explorations, and so on, enlarged or expanded to include the 'homeworld' of the Fram as a social, historical phenomenon, as a happening where individual and social histories, goals, challenges, inspirations, and realisations exist with the ship as their nucleus. The intentions, expectations, and the aspirations of the Fram became part of my horizon. I was no longer only intellectually aware or did not only know that these things existed – they became available to me in a more insightful manner. In a way they became increasingly or intently anticipated, in Husserl's terms.

This is the strength of intense experiences: through the intensity of the experience, things that are not directly physically present or available to us, or that are abstract in some other respect, can become real, concrete, and meaningful as actual, existent, and authentic experiences. The voyages of Fram were actualised in my experience. Seeing colour photographs from the Second World War or the photos of Finland taken by Sergei Prokudin-Gorsky, the early Russian pioneer of colour photography, a hundred years ago can on a single glance make it clear that the world really was full of colours even back then. Of course we know that the world had colours even then, but yet seeing such images makes it real, makes it more so. Seeing them is believing, *an act* that turns having knowledge into intimate *knowing* through active participation, as Michael Polanyi would put it, "in the act on knowing."¹⁶

Abram argues that despite the apparent multiplicity of the lifeworld, it can be shared, even between species, through common basic structures, especially the earth that 'provides the most immediate, bodily awareness of space (...).'¹⁷ Therefore it could be assumed that a museum exhibition may try to address a visitor through her body in order to entice her into appropriating the world of the exhibition (and the 'homeworlds' it comprises) into hers. This is best done in the periphery of her senses and in the bodily experience at large for it is in the periphery where most of the lifeworld spans around us. And it is in the periphery where the lifeworld is present to us 'in any thought or activity we undertake.'¹⁸ In a way it is because of this peripherality that the lifeworld is al-

¹⁵ See Husserl (2011), p. 133.

¹⁶ See Polanyi, Michael (1958), *Personal Knowledge – Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, p. 17. His concepts of subsidiary and focal awareness can also be seen in play in my experience on board the Fram.

¹⁷ Abram (1997), pp. 41-42. The concept of peripheral vision owes much to such classics as Polanyi and Gibson.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

ways already there. The world behind my back is already there, all I need to do to see it is to turn towards it.

How to utilise this presence in the periphery? How to address the body through it so that the ‘homeworlds’ can integrate? How to bridge them? Quantrill suggested that ‘our existential patterns require a path,’ a ‘continuity in space and time (...) a continuum of what is, what was, and what could be’ and that the path retains the continuity of consciousness.¹⁹ This, however, happens only on the horizontal plane, along the earth, and it needs to be a visually dynamic path. If the past present through the exhibition is indeed a foreign country, how do we build a path from our contemporary moment to it? I think this is essentially a rather literal task of creating a path through the exhibition. However, this path does not have to take the common visual appearance of a path or a road, but its construction begins with the sense of touch, its importance and the ways of addressing it. But before continuing, and before tackling the concepts and practicalities of periphery and *genius loci* later on, a short description of ‘touch’ is in order. The concepts of ‘touch’ and ‘the sense of touch’ are complicated. They include all the sensations that arise when our bodies are in physical contact with the world and its things – pressure, balance, proprioception (sensation produced in the body by the position and the moment of the body) – but it extends to reach sensations of the presence of things felt in the body, namely the act of being in close proximity of things within one’s reach but which yet remain untouched. The examples I will use and think about do not include the sensations of temperature or wetness but textures – which do, as such, include these two – lie within the domain of touch and are taken into consideration as elemental parts of environment and the embodied experiences of it.

3.1 The Role and Importance of Haptic Visuality

In the science fiction movie, *Star Trek: First Contact*, the eighth feature film in the series of movies based on the prominent TV-series, the starship USS *Enterprise* and its crew are once again struggling to save humankind. In order to do so they travel back in time to ensure that the first faster-than-light spacecraft in human history, *The Phoenix*, makes its maiden voyage on time. In scene seven, Jean-Luc Picard, the scholarly yet, when need be, fierce captain of the USS *Enterprise* is examining *The Phoenix* for the very first time with his second officer lieutenant commander Data, an android who, like Pinocchio, strives to become more human:

¹⁹ Quantrill (1987), p. 50.

Picard: 'Isn't it amazing. This ship used to be a nuclear missile.'

Data: 'It is a historical irony that Dr. Cochran would choose an instrument of mass destruction to inaugurate an era of peace.'

(Picard touches the ship with admiration; Data looks at him questioningly.)

Picard: 'It's a boyhood fantasy, Data. I must have seen this ship hundreds of times in the Smithsonian, but I was never able to touch it.'

Data: 'Sir, does tactile contact alter your perception of the Phoenix?'

Picard: 'Oh, yes. For humans, touch can connect you to an object in a very personal way. Make it seem more real.'

(Both Picard and Data touch the ship.)

Data: 'I am detecting imperfection in the titanium casing, temperature variations in the fuel manifold. It is no more real to me now than it was a moment ago.'²⁰

Captain Picard is right, although his observation may seem self-evident. We humans are creatures of touch. We love to touch – as any museum guard may testify having had to repeatedly remind the visitors to keep their fingers to themselves. Touching does make things seem (more) real to us. Seeing is not believing, touching is. When in the Bible Thomas doubts the reality of the resurrected Christ, he is not satisfied with merely seeing the wounds inflicted during crucifixion but insists on touching them before he is willing to cast aside his doubts.²¹ We can see the evidence of similar reassurance and outright magic on the various saintly statues throughout Europe where countless pilgrim hands have caressed the statues in hope of salvation or a miracle, consequently rubbing the bronze golden or the stone smooth. In pop concerts, front row fans reach out to touch their idol; the supporting voters shake the hand of their candidate as a sign of coming together or even of a union. And it goes the other way round too: we touch to reassure. We touch the arm of our companion during conversation to underline a point or a feeling, to confirm our standing in the matter or the firmness of our opinion. A doctor will touch the shoulder of a patient in order to strengthen the patient's trust in the doctor's medical proficiency.

Touch has also the power to make the unrecognisable familiar: the non-existing cat we notice sleeping on our armchair in the darkness of the night –

²⁰ My own transliteration from the movie.

²¹ In King James Bible John 20:24-29.

conjured up by our own imagination – is quickly turned into the blouse it always was by the second our fingertips reach it. Sometimes the act of reaching is itself enough. Other times it may be enough to look hard and long enough to verify the reality but is it ever as quick and effortless as the touch of our finger?²² Our sight has the power of imagination or, perhaps more truthfully, our sight has an exquisite ability to pick out the seeds our imagination then germinates as it can, more readily at least, make up realities, *see* possibilities, but it is touch that seems to *know* its object on the instance of contact. If, in the darkness of night, I reach for my glasses on the nightstand I know that I have found them on the moment of the slightest touch. Not only I know that I have found my glasses, but I also know the totality of their shape and weight. I know the totality of the object's being from all angles through a single point of contact under my fingertip. I do not only know that the glasses are within my reach, but that they *are there*, in the world, with me.

These kinds of visual phantoms, illusions, and misinterpretations are due to the fact that in truth our visual faculty and visual experiences are 'not as rich as [they] seem,' as Alva Noë puts it, which makes us very suggestible visually.²³ Firstly, as amazing an apparatus as our eye is, it is far from the finest in the animal kingdom. For instance, we have three types of colour receptors in our eyes whereas mantis shrimps have ten and even the goldfish outguns us with four.²⁴ Eyes alone would be a rather poor equipment for perceiving the world before us.

Secondly, on the biological level of cognition, it can be argued that seeing is constructing, that it is a part of the nature of our visual intelligence to construct images according to certain principles, many of which have been described by science.²⁵ But the trouble is that these rules – while apparently critical to vision, for many visual pathologies can be explained and examined as disruptions of rule(s) – 'are not inviolable. Sometimes one rule overrides another, sometimes they compromise, often they are not black and white but deal in probabilities. They are not explicitly written down in your mind, as one might write down instructions for assembling a bicycle, but are implicit in its workings, just as the laws of physics are not explicitly written down in nature,

²² It could be said, following an analogy sometimes used to describe Polanyi's subsidiary and focal awareness, that the touch connects the tip of the iceberg above the surface – the thing that we see or know by seeing – with the massive bulk of it that remains unseen – the knowledge contained in our being, some of which we are unaware or unable to express.

²³ Noë, Alva (2009), *Out of Our Heads – Why You Are Not Your Brain and Other Lessons from the Biology of Consciousness*, Hill and Wang, New York, p. 137.

²⁴ Hoffman, Donald D. (2000), *Visual Intelligence – How We Create What We See*, W.W. Norton and Company, New York/London, pp. 7-8.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

but are implicit in its workings,' elucidates Donald D. Hoffman in *Visual Intelligence – How We Create What We See*.²⁶ And, as he continues, 'You are not, in general, aware of these rules or their role in constructing what you see.' An infant brain must learn how to see, how to apply these rules in practice, and while we get at least some help from others with talking, walking, and many other skills, seeing is something we have to figure out largely by ourselves. Neurologically, from the viewpoint of neuroscience, this is a difficult task. Hoffman calls it the fundamental problem of vision: 'The image in the eye [i.e. the retinal image] has countless possible interpretations' meaning 'that, for a given image, there are countless 3D worlds that a child can construct, each of which is compatible with the image' in her eyes though only one is the world in which the child exists.²⁷ But while the neurological functions of our brains can be expressed as algorithms and we can build machines that function on the basis of these algorithms, we need the world in order to learn to see. And we need the help of other senses. Therefore, from the viewpoint of human experience, we only need to practice by living in the world.

In the case of the impossible cat, the pet we do not have, the illusion is born when we see something that our brains do not recognise, or more accurately, something for the interpretation of which our brains cannot decide on the rules to apply. In a way, we get entangled in our brains and they panic. In a way, they try out various interpretations which we can see flashing in front of us or notice as thoughts in our minds. Our brains are willing to resort to any possible, never mind how improbable, interpretation they can come up with, and voilà, we see a sleeping cat. Or a severed hand I once saw lying in a ditch (it was an oddly shaped piece of a fallen branch). Anything goes, as long as it *visually* makes sense. Logic, reason or knowledge about the situation have very little to do with it. But on the very moment of touch, and sometimes even slightly before it, when we regain our contact with the world and are freed from the loop within our mind, we are able to see what really is there in front of us. In other words, a neuroscientist would say that touching the cat we stop constructing it visually as touch solidifies the object. 'In general ...', Hoffman reminds us, 'I can confirm what I see by what I feel,'²⁸ and in *Touching – The Human Significance of the Skin*, Ashley Montague went as far as stating that '[w]hat we perceive through the other senses as reality we actually take to be nothing

²⁶ Ibid., p. 24.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 13.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 21. This is not always the case. Hoffman tells in his book about a case study, Mrs. B, who after a stroke begun to experience visual hallucinations that she was able to touch and feel. Hoffman reports this as a result of the stroke damaging the restraints we all have in order to keep the interpretations of our visual intelligence in check. pp. 76-77.

more than a good hypothesis, subject to the confirmation of touch.²⁹ And so it could be said that while vision observes, touch explores and confirms.

Richard L. Gregory, a neuropsychologist specialising in vision and visual illusions and advocating perception as an active internal process, furthered vision's dependency on touch in *Eye and brain – The Psychology of Seeing*: 'Indeed without touch retinal images would have little or no meaning.'³⁰ He pointed out that it is not the brain's task to see retinal images, but to relate visual signals to tactile signals, 'to objects of the external world, as essentially known by touch.'³¹ But it is not enough to touch an object once. It is necessary to keep handling things, for according to Gregory it is important that the relation the brain has formed between the visual and the tactile signals remains coherent. Active handling and movement appear to be the way to keep the calibration of these two senses up-to-date.³² So from neuroscience's point of view, touching *The Phoenix* is a foundational experience for captain Picard: by touching he confirms, corrects, and maintains the assumptions his brain has constructed on the basis of his previous visual – and other – information about the vessel.

Describing the sense of vision as a set of rules and principles that can be expressed as mathematical formulas does seem to be in conflict with the phenomenological or the aesthetic understanding of experience. Such mechanistic, computer-like descriptions and views do not seem to capture the intricate and holistic nature of perception and perceiving. Perception takes place in the world, it develops in the world.

Also, I have no experience or knowledge of what takes place in my brain when I, for example, look at my dog. I simply *see* my dog, how it is, what it does, and where it is. The trouble with the study of brain and cognition is that one cannot, as a principle, observe the functions of one's brain and mind. I can learn, with enough committed practice, to observe and actively control the movements, reactions, and actions of my body in surprisingly great detail, but although I can learn to catch myself thinking disruptive thoughts, at least to an extent, I cannot observe my brain doing it; I can observe the muscles in my shoulder tensing up as I prepare to give a horse the cue for canter, but I cannot observe the process in my nervous system that led to that tensing of the muscles. I can only deduce that it is a result of the activity in my mind, but I cannot observe the process. Although my experience of the world and myself are im-

²⁹ Montague, Ashley (1971) *Touching – The Human Significance of the Skin*, Perennial Library/Harper & Row Publishers, New York, p. 122. A lot has obviously happened in this field since the publication of this book.

³⁰ Gregory, Richard L. (2005) *Eyes and Brain – The Psychology of Seeing*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. 53. Gregory, 1923-2010, was the Professor Emeritus of Neurosciences at the University of Bristol and studied perception as hypotheses.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 151.

mediate and without a sense of the processes of the mind, it does not mean that such 'inbuilt' mental processes do not exist. And anyway, although those processes can be expressed (to some extent) in the language of mathematics, it does not mean that they actually exist and take place as mathematical functions and calculations in my brain.

All in all, touch is an emotional necessity and an emotional sense. Montague underlined the elementary importance of the sense of touch to human development. According to her, touch is the first of the senses to develop. At eight weeks, when the eyes and the ears are yet to develop, the human embryo begins to react to touch, even though skin itself is still in the early stages of its development.³³ Therefore, the significance of touch follows the general embryological law, 'the earlier a function develops the more fundamental it is likely to be.'³⁴ Besides, vision is the sense that the developing foetus cannot practise effectively within the womb (although it does react to light), while touch and movement, which also begin during the eight week, get the most practice. The womb is not a sensory deprivation tank, and it is especially the sense of touch it stimulates. Maybe it is because of this that tactile stimulations during infancy of both humans and other primates are 'necessary for behavioral development of the young' and even 'an indispensably necessary condition for their survival,'³⁵ a fact which Montague demonstrated in her book with descriptions of experiments where primate babies are deprived of being touched from their birth. She also recounts how our own convictions on the role of touch in infant care have changed almost completely since the beginning of the twentieth century. The once felt fear that too much touching and cuddling would cause the infant to fall ill has been replaced with the practices of today where the newborn is laid as soon as possible into direct contact with the mother for the benefit of both. Her examples from various primate species underscore the fact that 'as an order primates are (...) contact animals.'³⁶ We can sustain and survive sensory deprivation concerning sound and vision, even find it relaxing for short periods of time, but only as long as the tactile experiences are maintained. Maintaining a contact with the world through our primal medium of communication appears then to be an essential act for us. Incidentally, it is interesting to notice that a meditation practice known as mindfulness has recently been introduced in the West as a relaxation technique for busy professionals and in psychotherapy for

³³ Montague (1971), p. 1. The human embryo begins to move at six weeks of age when it is able to arch its back. The eighth week is the age when it reacts to touch moving.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

patients suffering from anxiety and depression-related issues.³⁷ Essentially mindfulness is a practice of learning to notice how the practitioner's body and mind are in any given situation in relation to the circumstances, to ask how and what do I and my body feel.

3.2 Touch and the Museum Ritual

'It's a boyhood fantasy,' says captain Picard about touching *The Phoenix*, 'I must have seen this ship hundreds of times in the Smithsonian, but I was never able to touch it.' Captain Picard may be a fictional character, but the boyhood fantasy bestowed on him is universal. Who has not wanted to touch something utterly fascinating, something that is physically within our reach but the touching of which has been forbidden or in some other way prevented from us? In the present context those denied objects are, just like *The Phoenix*, museum objects, but this is a more comprehensive experience. As children we are taught to refrain from touching the merchandise on the shelves in shops and interesting things on the window sill when visiting a relative. By adulthood, we have internalised the rules of not touching. But it is in museum exhibitions that these rules are perhaps at their strictest and even when touching is allowed in that environment, we do not seem to be readily able to do so (this goes for adults, children seem to be more willing to touch things).

I had a chance to observe this some years ago in the Finnish National Museum in Helsinki, where in one exhibition hall the visitors are provided with a chance to get into the atmosphere of the period – the 1950s if I remember correctly. A period reading nook is set up in one corner of the hall: an armchair, a side table, a radio, and a reading lamp. On the table is a bunch of Finnish magazines from that period, still common enough so that they can be lost to the wear and tear in the hands of the visitors. The day I visited the museum was a particularly quiet one, for some reason, and so I had the chance to explore the exhibitions virtually all by myself. I still had to spend some time to summon up the courage to sit in that armchair. The sign inviting to do so was obvious, unquestionable, but the moment I put my behind on the seat and leaned my back against the backrest, I begun to doubt if I had indeed understood the sign cor-

³⁷ 25.6.2012 a Google search with 'mindfulness' yielded over 84 million results ranging from meditation, Buddhism and relaxation-related links to those concerning education, creativity and therapies for eating disorders among other things. Google Scholar gave just over 30000 results for 'mindfulness cognitive therapy' alone. Also e.g., the American psychotherapist and psychologist Robert Rosenbaum has written a book on meditation and Zen in psychotherapy, *Zen and the Heart of Psychotherapy*, 1999, Brunner/Mazel (Taylor & Francis Group), Philadelphia/London.

rectly. The uneasiness of doing something forbidden persisted as long as I remained sitting, even after rereading the sign. Somehow my reason was unable to convince my emotions and my body that I was not doing anything verboten. I had to force myself to stay seated.

After a while, when I was still sitting, an approximately 10-year-old boy and his mother came in through the doorway at the opposite end of the exhibition hall. They proceeded through the exhibition in an orderly fashion, going through the vitrines and pictures in the intended order, which helped me hide from their view. The boy noticed me about half way through; I pretended to be reading a magazine. The boy looked at me in puzzlement for a moment and then said something to his mother. It was very quiet and although I was not able to make out precisely what he said, his manners made it sure it that he was surprised and confused about seeing someone sitting *on* an exhibit. The mother glanced at me and then spoke to him in a disapproving manner. The boy asked something that made his mother slightly more annoyed. The mother tried her hardest not to pay any attention to me, an act equal to not thinking about the pink elephant, and her pose communicated a clear intentional avoidance towards me. On their way to the next hall, they had to walk past me and the reading nook. Doing so, they both kept shooting shy glances at me, with the mother clearly objecting my action and the boy showing obvious interest. The mother even made a half-whispered comment about people and proper behaviour as they passed by me. I am sure the sign welcoming visitors to sit down was visible to them too, and I suspect that the boy might have noticed it and said something about it to the mother. However, the behavioural code was so strongly adopted that the experience of something unacceptable taking place overran her readiness to investigate the matter. I find it quite likely that had there been someone else in the exhibition hall with me before I sat down, I would not have done it. I was prone to do it only without having another visitor's eyes on my back. In cases like this, opportunity often does tempt us to touch an object in passing.

Application of ritual theory allows us to see this incidence as a collision of two bodies ritualised in slightly different ways. 'A ritualized body is,' according to Bell, 'a body invested with a "sense" of ritual.'³⁸ A sense of ritual is a form of socially acquired embodied knowledge that enables individuals to partake in and to organise social functions such as a wedding or a birthday celebration.³⁹ In other words, it is an ability to recognise a social situation and to participate in it without undue disruption or disrespect. The sense of ritual has much to do with being a social person. Bell explained that the ritualised body is produced 'through interaction of the body with a structured and structuring environment,'

³⁸ Bell (2009) *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, p. 98.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

especially through physical movements.⁴⁰ The logic of the ritual is embedded within these movements and as a ritual participant goes through them, the logic becomes embodied in her.⁴¹ This ritualisation is profoundly situational as it takes place in a certain environment and in a certain and immediate sociocultural situation. A crude description would be to say that when we enter a specific sociocultural situation such as a birthday party, we recognise the situation by its markers – the balloons, a cake, presents, the expressions of the participants, and so on – and act accordingly. It must be stressed that being impressed with a sense of ritual does not equal Pavlovian conditioning that produces reflex-like reactions. Different individuals may not ‘always agree how to do a ritual or what to make of it’, although equally ‘[t]he body is always conditioned by and responsive to a specific context.’⁴² This is what made it so difficult for me to sit down on that armchair and raised the objection in the mother. The no touching logic of the museum ritual was so deeply embedded in our bodies, ‘lodged beyond the grasp of consciousness and articulation,’⁴³ that when confronted with another possible route of action, it was first and foremost our bodies that objected. In the end it was not us as individuals who conflicted, but the sense of ritual of no touching with this new execution of the museum ritual.

As was said in an earlier chapter, the longstanding preference for vision and the omission of touch in museum exhibitions can be justified on the basis that the primary objective of all museums is to preserve the objects, and allowing constant handling by the visitors would certainly wreck them. But while this is a legitimate reason, it is not the whole picture. The no touching rule of museums is connected to the history of sciences. Both museum exhibitions and science work by collecting and displaying evidence. They both declare, ‘This is. This is the evidence.’ Taxonomy, the categorising of basically the entire world, was for a long time, and still is, one of the basic principles of science along with describing the laws of nature. In this sense, modern science begun as a study of what can be seen and observed and what can be made observable. The magnifying glass and the microscope make the small more easy to see for the naked eye. The electronic microscope makes the infinitely small visible and the particle accelerator makes the directly unobservable world of the subatomic observable. Radiography takes pictures of the patient’s innards usually hidden under the skin. Natural phenomena that are utterly beyond the grasp of human senses and experience can be captured and described in the language of mathematics. Telescopes capture images of countless galaxies in the pitch black patches of the

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 98.

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 98-99.

⁴² Ibid., first p. 80, second p. 100.

⁴³ As quoted in Bell (2009), p. 99. Orig. Pierre Bourdieu (1977), *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 116-117.

night sky. They even look into the history of the universe as they capture the rays of light that left their source millions of years ago. All in all, many scientific gadgets, methods and practices are ways of enlarging the boundaries of what is visible. And museums are a part of this visuality of modern science.

As an institution and a notion intimately linked with the emergence of the modern, the history of museums can also be seen as reflecting the history of the attitude towards the senses which can be portrayed as the history of vision, or even as the hegemony of vision⁴⁴ if one is inclined to criticise the Cartesian tradition of modernism. Descartes himself considered vision to be the most virtuous of the senses, which goes well with his objectifying philosophy,⁴⁵ though in this he followed the path already laid out in classical Greece. Vision, the act of seeing and looking at things, certainly is more objective than other sensory faculties in that it allows distance and enables control; it is a sense very suitable for scientific observation. In my conscious experience, I do not affect the object of my gaze, I can spy on the object of my interest in secret and in great detail. My gaze does not leave marks on its object, nor does it affect its course unless the object is a sentient being that is aware of my gaze. In general, I am not physically affected by the object of my gaze, although I still may be thoroughly moved emotionally. In relation to that, I am in control of my vision. I can close my eyes or turn my head away if I do not wish to see something, but it is far more troublesome to take control of my other senses. Sounds reach my ears without my consent. They can even enter my consciousness through other parts of my body than just ears. I can wear earplugs to keep out unwanted or harmful noises, but even then the sound of my own breathing and circulation is an ever-present companion. Smells too can invade me. I can pinch my nose with my fingers to dampen a stench but still get a whiff of it as I am forced to breathe through my mouth. But of all these, the most unruly is touch. I cannot distance, not easily at least, myself from anything that is in contact with my body. This gives the tactile, and touch, a profound sense of subjectivity which is often contrasted in vision as objectivity. Or as Pallasmaa puts it:

The eye is the organ of distance and separation, whereas touch is the sense of nearness, intimacy and affection, The eye surveys, controls and investigates, whereas touch approaches and caresses.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ See e.g., Pallasmaa, Juhani (2008) *Eyes of the Skin – Architecture and the Senses*, John Wiley & Sons Ltd., Chichester, West Sussex, UK, e.g. p. 21. Bell also criticises the Cartesian tradition of dichotomies and opposites in *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*. Martin Jay examines in *Downcast Eyes – The Denigration of Vision* (1994, University of California Press, Oakland, CA, USA) this history of the criticism of vision in philosophy.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

Touch brings an investigator into bodily contact with her subject; it transforms an observer into a handler. And so in the mind of the philosopher and of the early scientists, the body was seen as weak: 'The pervasive experience of bodily weakness may be philosophy's deepest reason for rejecting the body, for refusing to accept it as defining human identity,' writes Richard Shusterman in *Body Consciousness – A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics*, 'for philosophy, bodily weakness also means cognitive deficiency.'⁴⁷ According to him, the whole body was questionable as a source of knowledge, not only the senses that emerge in it:

As the body's imperfect senses can distort the truth, so can its desires distract the mind from the pursuit of knowledge. The body, moreover is not a clear object of knowledge. One cannot directly see one's outer bodily surface in its totality, and the body is especially mysterious because its inner workings are always in some way hidden from the subject's view. One cannot directly scan it in the way we often assume we can examine and know our minds through immediate introspection. Regarding the body as at best a mere servant or instrument of the mind, philosophy has propagated it as a tortuous prison of deception, temptation, and pain.⁴⁸

Philosophy that sought for the elemental and in many ways the final truth needed to guard the mind against the imperfect, the misleading, and the fickle. Although it is in Shusterman's interest to emphasise the disregard of the body by earlier Western philosophers, the practice of doing so should not be taken as a misinformed decision, but as a way of discovering what is, to determine a common understanding of the world and to create a shared language and logic amongst the new scientists. This meant that not much room could be left for the interpretive, the inexplicit, and the ambivalent. Carl von Linné's classification system for flowering plants did just this: it gave the means for the community of natural historians to make sure that every one was talking about the same plant and on the same principles. Prior to this, during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, things of the world were regarded not only with their visible and tangible characteristics in mind but through their hidden powers and meanings which, naturally, were open for endless debates due to their unverifiable nature. This led into a kind of an intellectual blind alley as it was, I would imagine, impossible to agree on a conclusion after an argument. The discovery of the order of the world had come to a standstill in this regard, and the discussion turned to those properties of things that could be verified and agreed on by all scientists through the measurement of visual and material properties which are much easier to verify than for example smell or taste.

⁴⁷ Shusterman, Richard (2008), *Body Consciousness – A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 51.

⁴⁸ Ibid.



PIC 3.1 The permanent exhibition of Finnish prehistory in the National Museum of Finland, Helsinki. The construction of the exhibition strongly favours the act of looking at objects and the movement of the body through the gallery in an orderly fashion.

Museum exhibitions were and are, in one part, dictionaries of the language of science. Natural history museums spell out the language of natural science, art museums clarify the language of art history and art, and history museums describe the ways of organising past events. Museum exhibitions and the way collections have been arranged have also been a medium for scientific discussion. For example, the British anatomist William Hunter (1728-1783) and his French counterpart Georges Cuvier (1769-1833) wanted to communicate through the collections they curated not only the 'newly discovered invisibles' but the new ideas they had about taxonomy.⁴⁹ But collections were also a method of honing the power of observation. Medical collections were an educational tool for the students of medicine just like art museums were for artists. And they still are. Art students still spend time contemplating the masters. The questions proposed in hands-on exhibits in science centres guide the visitor to focus her attention on a particular subject in a particular way. Today many exhibitions address the use of several senses, but early on it was perhaps necessary to focus on the eye in order to strengthen the visual skills of the students of science. The eye is, after all, the observational tool that we, firstly, carry with us at all times and, secondly, the observations of which we can communicate in words or pictures without any additional tools except for a paper and a pen. Recording and communicating observations of weight, length, distance, sound, smell, and so on objectively requires either a measuring tool or the use of analogues or other comparative or relative verbal descriptions that can easily turn out to be mis-

⁴⁹ Asma (2001) *Stuffed Animals and Pickled Heads*, p. 78.

leading. Be that as it may, as a tool of observation any sense needs to be trained and honed. To demonstrate the importance of focus, Asma refers to perhaps the most famous observer of all times, Sherlock Holmes who scolds his companion saying, 'You *see*, Watson, but you do not *observe*.'⁵⁰ In the end, honing the visual skills left the body confined to the corridors between the displays, and the eye as the principal method of discovery in exhibitions for years to come (see pic. 3.1, prev. page).

Secondly, the handling of the objects would have been counterproductive, not just materially destructive, and it still would be in many cases. Museums communicate by *showing*; it is in their essence to show how things are or at least how they are believed to be. Today, amidst the postmodern, this is not so evident anymore as visitors are encouraged to make and explore various equally justifiable interpretations, but it still is the museums' habit to state, 'This is.' This originates in the museum's early connection to the encyclopaedic endeavours of the early moderns, in the aspirations to find the order of the world. Collections and museums were – and in many ways still are – experimental orders of things; suggestions, theories, and hypotheses about what the order of the world could be. The juxtaposition of objects according to different principles is the paramount method of visualising, both as making visible and envisioning, as differences, similarities, compatibilities, variations, and gradual changes become more discernible. In fact, the ordering of a collection is an articulation of thought and theory, but unlike in a conversation, the listener is not allowed to affect that articulation directly. It is the point of a collection that the objects are in a certain order. 'Specimens are like words in the sense that their meaningfulness happens only within the context of rule-governed semantic systems,' as Asma points out.⁵¹ In museums that order is, or used to be, open for discussion but only from the outside and on the basis of visual observations, and the order may be changed only after the discussion, provided that a new order is called for. If the museum visitors were allowed to handle and move objects, it would then be difficult to maintain the narrative of the order. I am not saying that a museum could not function like this. The St. Louis City Museum does seem to do so and so do many children's museums, but most museums rely on relatively fixed narratives in their communication, and a narrative can handle only so much reorganisation before losing its coherence and the original story.

This narrative-ness or the rituality of museum exhibitions reveals their similarity to memory palaces. The ritual route through the exhibition, albeit not necessarily restricted and set in stone, resembles the route of the speech memorised as the way through the memory palace: objects placed along the route are meant to stand for larger groups of objects, to represent and demonstrate theories, to bring in mind objects not present in the museum or knowledge pre-

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 77. Asma does not provide the exact original source.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 170.

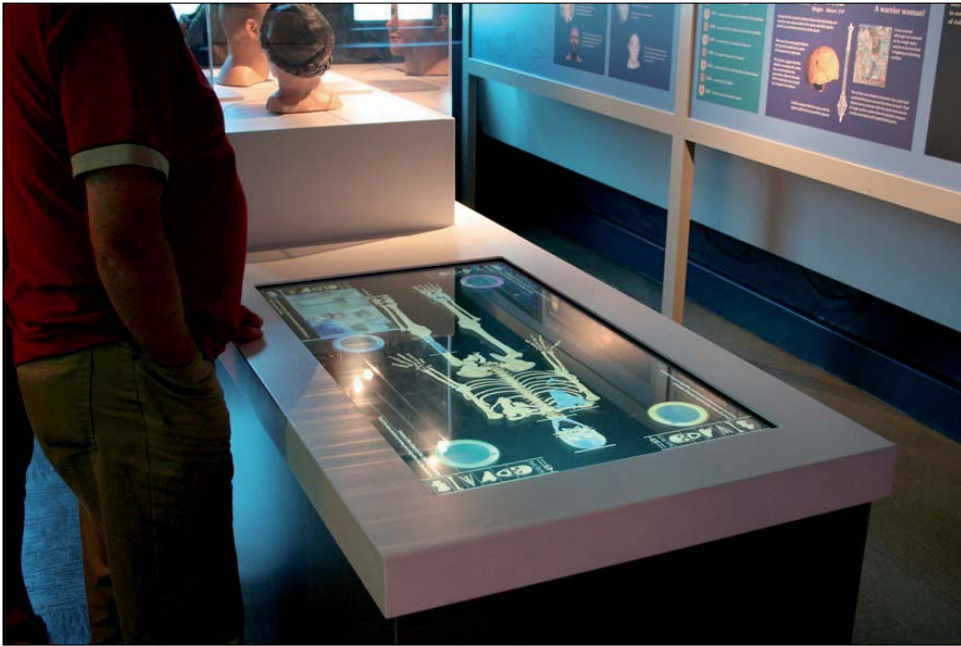
sented elsewhere. In a word, museum exhibitions always point to things outside them, not just to the objects present even if this is often believed to be the case. The meaning and the message of a speech becomes apparent over its course and so does an exhibition. The difference between a memory palace and an exhibition is that the latter is – at least to an extent – constructed for the visitor, not by her. In fact, the early manifestations of the museum, namely the princely collections and the cabinets of curiosities were very much like memory palaces or landscapes of memory, where the state of being personally in an environment carried and produced meaning and significance.

3.3 Engagement and Scarcity of the Tactile

There is little to be done to the fact that objects incorporated into a museum collection become detached and even uprooted from their original context. An axe in a museum is no longer an axe, a tool available for use, but a museum piece. When an object is placed in a museum, it is *musealised*. The meaning of the word is twofold: It indicates both the physical and practical process of adding an object into a museum collection and the ontological change the object subsequently goes through. It is possible in the latter sense to musealise a building *in situ*, or to even musealise an event or a ritual. In such cases the word is often used to denote a museum's power to preserve an object in its then current state, in a state in which further alterations are no longer possible. In this meaning, the word is used to point out that adding objects into a museum collection removes them from real life, so to speak. The immediate situation of the object has been replaced, it has become at least once removed from its immediate meaning and importance, but it can be argued that this is the price we pay for our wish to keep to ourselves the things of the past and the faraway present.

The second degree of removal, the vitrine or any other barrier between the object and the visitor, isolates the object in an exhibition into its own sphere which is open for only visual observation. Since this border is not physically traversable, it is an often raised concern when designing exhibitions or in discussions concerning visitor participation.⁵² Most contemporary museum professionals, I dare to assume, would gladly be done with the safeguarding glass if they could, for they do recognise the importance of touch and of direct contact.

⁵² This concern is the starting point of for example Outi Turpeinen's dissertation (2005) *Merkityksellinen museoesine – Kriittinen visuaalisuus kulttuurihistoriallisen museoon näytelysuunnittelussa*, Taideteollisen korkeakoulun julkaisu A 63, Tammer-paino Oy, Tampere, Finland, to which I will refer in the final chapter. The title translates in English as, 'The meaningful museum object – Critical visibility in the exhibition design of cultural history museums'.



PIC 3.2 The CSI-like computer interface in Stirling Castle. The vitrine at the end of the table holds facial reconstructions of the persons found buried in the castle grounds.

At least a lot of effort is put into trying to provide alternative means of physically experiencing the objects and the subject matter. Some museums, those with sufficient means, create computer terminals and other such virtual interfaces in order to create a bridge between the object and the visitor. It is true that with the help of a computer the object – whether it is an actual physical object or an era or another nonmaterial object of interest – can be brought closer and made more tangible. Microscopic details can be zoomed in on. Qualities invisible to the naked eye can be observed in ultraviolet or infrared pictures. Through multimedia, the visitors can be given the means even to manipulate or handle these virtual objects.

The exhibitions in Stirling Castle utilise one such adaptation of computer-based exhibits (3.2). Visitors are able to examine one of the skeletons found buried within the castle walls – a rather unusual discovery – with the help of a touchscreen computer embedded in a table. The visitor can select indicated sections of the skeleton, zoom in and discover medical evidence. She can follow the forensic leads and find out what possible explanations for the evidence are available and then deduce what kind of life this person might have lived. The exhibit counts on the visitors intrigue and there are no specific instructions for the use of the table, which clearly has been inspired by the various television series about crime scene investigators and medical examiners or coroners. The skeleton lies on the screen like a body on the slab in a TV morgue. The visitors stand around it like a team of investigators, although they are able to conduct

their research individually through the access stations in each corner. The exhibit works on the idea familiar from popular culture, enabling the visitor to step into the role of a criminal investigator. And it does work. It is fun to act out the role familiar from television, and the table is a great tool for play. This coroner's slab is fun and engaging, but it still is a computer screen. We have the image of the skeleton and pictures of details but the real skeleton is not present, a fact that can be defended for example on the basis of respecting the deceased and her⁵³ remains.

Hein opens her book, *The Museum in Transition* with anecdotes of similar situations of 'the removal of authentic and historically cherished things from exhibitions, and the substitution for them of something conceptual.'⁵⁴ The reasons behind these actions can be justified. Hein's anecdote of the clay figures that must be replaced with plastic replicas since the originals will not survive being exhibited any longer is one such case. It sounds perfectly reasonable, provided that the public is informed about the substitution, but are the figures an equal substitute? Pallasmaa, an ardent advocate of the tactile, points out the limitations of the computerised hand, as he calls it, in *The Thinking Hand – Existential and Embodied Wisdom in Architecture*. He acknowledges the ways computers have advanced the design process in architecture, for example in structural testing, but also warns against overly relying on them. According to, drawing, sketching, and modelling by hand creates a direct haptic connection between the designer, the object, and its representation. Manual drawing joins the materialities of the designer and the object. Real objects have rich materiality and so does drawing. This can be seen in drawings in which the texture of the paper, the quality of the drawing tool (pen, pencil, crayon, etc.), the style of the hand that draws, and so on have joined together to produce a result which reveals the effects of all these variables. '[C]omputer operations and imagery,' however, 'take place in a mathematical and abstracted immaterial world.'⁵⁵ In his view, with which I agree,

... computer imaging tends to flatten out the magnificent multi-sensory and synchronic capacity of imagination by turning the design process into a passive visual manipulation, a retinal survey. *The computer creates a distance between the maker and the object*, whereas drawing by hand or building a model puts the designer in skin-contact with the object or space.⁵⁶

⁵³ One of the skeletons, all of which show the marks of death in a battle, belongs to a woman.

⁵⁴ Hein (2000), p. 2.

⁵⁵ Pallasmaa (2009) *The Thinking Hand – Existential and Embodied Wisdom in Architecture*, AD Primers, John Wiley and Sons, Ltd, Chichester, UK, pp. 95-96.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

I, personally, do feel more engaged with the subject when drawing manually than when drawing with a computer. I perceive computer drawing more as a manipulation of an image than I do when adding colour to a pencil-drawn image, although a distinction between the two is sometimes difficult to make. It may be that some of the reservations I share with Pallasmaa about computers has to do with the fact that we both have had the luxury of computer-based design and drawing at its contemporary technological level only for a certain part of our adult life. We did not learn our trade of drawing in that environment. And it may well be that a digital illustrator does not experience similar kind of difference in the drawing experience or she may not experience it as strongly. But if we look at the basic argument Pallasmaa presents here, it does ring true. Computers and computer images do create a distance between the user⁵⁷ and the actual material object. When I touched the screen in Stirling Castle, I touched an image of the skeleton. I can tell from experience that touching a real skeleton is nothing like it. An image of a skeleton is not a skeleton. The easiness of touching an image comes partly from the fact that something of the otherness of the original skeleton has been lost, smoothed out, or diluted. On the other hand, it can also be argued that the (digital) image brings the object closer to the visitor just because it lessens the gap between them by decreasing the otherness of the object. But if we lose something of the otherness, does that not also mean that we lose something of the experience of coming together, of meeting? Many of us are unlikely to be willing to touch a real skeleton anyway, but that is besides the point. Watching and manipulating an image on a screen is just that: interacting with an image. It is an excellent way of introducing more opportunities for participation in exhibitions but it is not enough in itself.

Nonetheless, using the Sterling castle's touchscreen is not strictly speaking drawing at all. If we think of drawing as producing a representation of the subject's form on the paper as contours, which means that our eye seeks out and follows the contours of the subject and our drawing hand subsequently transfers what we see as a line on the paper (as a likeness, we hope), then basing my conclusions on the comparability of drawing with this particular touchscreen exhibit is far from being ideal. Selecting a button or an icon from the desktop is not drawing at all. But if we think of drawing as an act of exploring and analysing our subject so that we can reproduce and interpret it on paper, we can see the difference between it and manipulating a virtual image. Both are sensuous

⁵⁷ I perceive computers primarily as interactive, situational tools and therefore consider them to have only users, not observers, viewers, audiences, or such. This may be because I learnt to use computers and rudimentary programming skills fairly early on in my life for my generation and am thus more conscious of their machine character. I can watch television, but not computers (unless it sits on the table and I look at it), just as I use a DVD-player to watch movies.

experiences but the intensity and the complexity of the act are remarkably different.

As a sensuous experience, touching computers and screens, no matter how modern they are, is one-dimensional. Touching a button, even pushing a button, is an exercise simple and sensuously shallow to the point that touchscreen-based operating systems are equipped with sound effects that imitate the clicks of a keyboard. Even the keys on the brand new laptop with which I am writing these lines are made in such a way that they slightly resist the pressure of my fingers and produce a soft click-clack, the rhythm of which follows the intensity of my writing. It is possible to manufacture a completely silent keyboard but apparently users find the clicking ones more satisfying to use. If I touch a button on a touchscreen in order to run a program which makes the laser scanned 3D-image of a Hellenic vase play on the screen, all I did was touch a certain spot on the screen. I am not actually handling the vase. I am not actively exploring its contours, texture, dimensions and weight in my hand. I am not learning how one should handle the vase when carrying it or pouring wine from it. I merely touched the image of a button and watched the picture move on the screen to run an animation. I am not learning and finding meaning through actual, bodily contact with the object; I am not able to experience the moment of discovery gained through the exploring touch. The embodied insight that can be attained only through handling, through contact and interplay between me and the object, is not possible. The tacit knowledge contained in the physicality of the object cannot be learned in this way. Instead of knowing the physical reality of the object I am left with what I imagine it to be: 'It's a rather large vase. I can't imagine it being easy to handle even when empty.' Assuming that I can get the scale right.

Then what about physical models, replicas and such? The ethics of museum exhibitions dictate that visitors must be told if something on display is a reproduction or in some other way inauthentic. With computer terminals and other audiovisual aids this is rather self-evident, as the concrete object obviously is not there, although it could be located in a vitrine in the same room. Regardless of the fact that a replica may be virtually indiscernible from the real thing, it is nonetheless just that, virtual. It is perhaps made in the image of the real thing, and if a visitor is aware of it being a replica, will she not, most likely, think: 'A real headpiece *would look* exactly like this'? Looking exactly like the authentic object may not seem problematic, but I disagree. If the thing that I am seeing is not the authentic headpiece, then the real one must be somewhere else. It is not here with me. It is removed from me. If I know that the object is not physically present, am I as likely to engage with it to a similar degree? The same argument applies to many hands-on exhibits. The prehistoric musical instruments in Kilmartin Museum probably sound just like authentic ones. This modern piece of linen feels like the linen shirt from the Middle Ages. Are these

experiences in themselves more than sensations? Imagine how the experience would deepen if you could see the authentic shirt in front of you while you feel the piece of cloth woven in the same style, even if you cannot touch the original shirt itself. At least with replicas, especially with ones made out of materials similar to the original product, the authenticity of the material is also present, not only the form. With the newly woven linen I can think, 'Oh, that shirt feels like this,' or, 'This is the material for a shirt like that,' instead of imagining how the material might feel. I can imagine how it must have felt to wear clothes made out of similar materials.

But some museums do well with only a few authentic objects, and even entirely without them, being still able to entice engagement.⁵⁸ The Museum of Medieval Stockholm is one such place. They have succeeded in producing a convincing and highly engaging exhibition depicting life in Medieval Stockholm with only a handful of authentic objects, with the site itself being one of them. The museum is built underground, almost directly under the Swedish parliament, around a length of the original Medieval town wall found during archeological excavations on the site. The wall is preserved in the state it was found but around it has been reconstructed various parts of the period town. Visitors can enter many of the houses, visit the harbour, the graveyard, and the monastery. The experience is compelling and the environment has an authentic air about it. Unless someone points it out, it does not easily occur to you that the houses are not even in scale but about half the size the real buildings would have been. There is very little original in the created environment of the museum but it makes it easy to imagine and play walking on Medieval lanes. The exhibition is an extremely engaging environment, very tactile and tangible. There are not that many things that visitors can physically handle and many objects are physically out of bounds but yet it does not feel like visitors are particularly restricted from touching. Most of the things seem to be within reach. There does not seem to be much distance between the world of the exhibition – the Medieval Stockholm – and the visitor, and the existing distance feels natural and has little effect on the experience (3.3). I will return to the museum in more detail in the next chapter.

I personally found all these three examples – the skeleton, the stone instruments, and the Medieval Stockholm – engaging. Interacting with each of them felt natural, intriguing, and involved but not to the same degree of engagement,

⁵⁸ Science centres etc., are pretty much an exception here. As Hein point out, they do not exhibit authentic objects per se but natural phenomena, laws of physics and other such non-objects. Objects present in their exhibitions are instruments or props of teaching and communication rather than collections. See Hein (2000), p. 26. E.g., a science centre cannot have a tornado on display but it may have an instrument that produces a miniature tornado in a glass box.



PIC 3.3 A view into one of the reconstructed houses in the Medieval Museum of Stockholm. The restriction of access feels natural: not many would walk right into a stranger's home. Though some could find the peeking through windows improper too.

if such a scale can be determined. Every time I visit the Museum of Medieval Stockholm, I feel like stepping into a real world and when I leave, I feel like that world continues to exist beneath the actual contemporary Stockholm. It does not disappear or transform to exist in my imagination or mind in general nor as a world existing only in history. Discovering the secrets of the Stirling skeleton was just as intriguing but less engaging. Though it was exciting to use the touchscreen table and to learn about the life encoded in the skeleton, it was less engaging. A considerable part of the excitement came from the 'coolness' of the gadget which was the first thing I noticed in the room, not the opportunity to study a skeleton. I tried it out because I wanted to know how the screen would work, what would happen with each activated function. The science fiction nerd in me simply wanted to touch this cool-looking instrument which resembled the fancy computers in science fiction films. I am not saying that there is something wrong in getting visitors interested by enticing their imagination in this way, but it should not stop there. I continued to use the table after the sci-fi nerd in me had satisfied her curiosity, but although the exhibitions had many visitors that day and although many that came in to see that particular exhibition played with the table, only a fraction spent time actually using it. Most adults looked from aside as children tried it out, and most kids only played with it manipulating the image and moving the cursor around the screen. They

seemed to be more interested in the possibility of manipulating a computer screen directly with their fingers. This is certainly partly because the table, while being very visual, required good reading skills and most of the children trying it out seemed to be less than ten years old. Also, the user interface was unfamiliar to them. Firstly, touch screens in that scale are still uncommon and secondly, the interface required quite a lot of reasoning in order to be used as there were no direct instructions and the logic of the touchscreen differed from that of ordinary computers. This, however, might have changed: I saw the exhibition in 2010 after which touch screen tablets have become much more common. The children discovered the logic quite easily but left the table quite soon after that. They appeared to be more interested in what the table was and how it functioned, which seemed to come naturally to young children, than in using the table to discover anything about the skeleton. This might have to do with the missed reference to science fiction and crime series, which are less familiar to young children. Most museums have a demographically varied body of visitors which means that such inconsistencies are to be expected though not necessarily always anticipated.

The stone age instruments in Kilmartin Museum, on the contrary, were literally foolproof. You found them on the floor of the first exhibition room, read the short description, picked up the stone mallet, and started to tap the instrument. Very straightforward. Even if you could not read the texts but were brave enough to try, you could figure out the way to proceed. Also, the instruments in Kilmartin resembled modern xylophones which are likely to be familiar to most visitors. The experience was fun and interesting. It was surprising how nice a shard of stone could sound and how well in tune it can be, but the experience was quickly over. The instruments were, as said, lying on the floor besides the walls. Most of the room was occupied by a large domed scale model of the Kilmartin glen (see 4.22), depicting all the prehistoric and historic sites in it with little lamps that could be turned on by choosing a site from the rim of the table. The instruments were slightly out of place in that setting, like an afterthought. Without a distinct connection to the model, the instruments were more like a curiosity and not part of the continuum, more like a peek at an aspect of prehistoric life but not a step into it.

Obviously all three examples have left a mark in my memory as exceptional experiences, otherwise I would not have felt that they could serve as examples. And while I do mention the CSI-table and the stone instruments as examples of instances where tactility has been introduced into an exhibition without fully succeeding in bridging the gap between the visitors and the subject matter, they have still done well in that respect. The Stirling Castle I imagine is now occupied by a knight with an exceptionally sturdy physique and I can imagine the instruments being played in the Kilmartin glen thousands of years ago. But why are the experiences of Medieval Stockholm so engaging? Is it be-

cause the museum is so immersive? In it the visitor is, after all, literally surrounded by the Medieval scene. But so are the CSI table and the vault which houses it surrounded by the impressive Stirling Castle, and the Kilmartin Museum is situated in the middle of a landscape visibly full of thousands of years of history. In both cases the visitor can see how history surrounds her. She can imagine how she is following in the footsteps of the preceding generations of habitants, but the Museum of Medieval Stockholm is visually isolated from the city above it. There are few windows, namely skylights, and a tunnel that leads underneath a bridge, but no vistas of the contemporary city open from them. The old town wall that crosses the space is original, but it is not necessarily forthcoming to imagine it as existing in the world outside. Yet when I visited the museum with some of the students from my museum pedagogy course, they were all taken by it, impressed even, and by their own description felt very much engaged.

3.4 The Peripheral, Genius Loci and the Thickness of Place

In the Introduction, I dealt briefly with the experience of distance between the visitor and the exhibition and suggested that this experience could be due to a discontinuity in the body's silent conversation with things, or in the constant murmur of the lifeworld around us. If this is true, then where and how does the disconnection take place? A visitor is undoubtedly present in an exhibition, and are the objects not equally there? Does it all have to do with the inability to touch? After all, in any random everyday situation we do not feel particularly separated from the things we cannot touch or feel no need to touch. It is equally mistaken to enter my neighbour's garden and fiddle about with his gardening tools or to try on the lovely jacket of an unknown lady in a restaurant without permission. Just think how rude it is considered to be to take food from someone else's plate, even with permission, but that does not hinder my ability to feel every delicious sensation of eating as I watch the lady eat her dinner. I do not feel disconnected or distanced in those situations. Those objects of interest are readily available to me, just as the whole of the lifeworld is. They are part of the (broadly defined) aesthetic field around me, part of my habitat.

How can an environment become an aesthetic field and what elements in it help turn it into a habitat, a lifeworld where a visitor may feel at home, where she may be a native? This is not necessarily a conscious position which transforms our attitude towards the things within that environment. A strange new object in our habitat does not feel removed; it has entered into our habitat. It may well feel out of place, an odd thing to be found at the given place, but it nevertheless has become a part of our lifeworld by just appearing there. It is

readily available for our attention, just as any part of our lifeworld is. It is within our reach. This state of being has, I believe, much to do with two aspects of the experience of being-in-the-world: the range of the world experienced through our peripheral sense, and that layer of the lifeworld which Husserl perceived as the earth itself, to which I will return in a moment.

In *The Eyes of the Skin*, Pallasmaa calls attention to the role of peripheral and unfocused vision for our experience of architecture, claiming that

The very essence of the lived experience is moulded by hapticity and peripheral vision. Focused vision confronts us with the world whereas peripheral vision envelops us in the flesh of the world.⁵⁹

And:

Peripheral vision integrates us with space, while focused vision pushes us out of the space, making us mere spectators.⁶⁰

Pallasmaa's argumentation is admittedly stern, but let us agree that on a very fundamental level, focused vision is a medium of active connection with the world, and the peripheral field of our senses – not just of vision but the ambient sounds and other sensations – is where we experience the world extending to enfold us. The focus of our senses can only hold a portion of the world at a time – most of it exists as ever-present, always-already there in our peripheral field.

Is this why it is possible to be both a disinterested observer and to experience disconnectedness in a museum exhibition? Most museum exhibitions are about focus, about keen interest centred on objects, knowledge, information, and so on. In exhibitions, these objects of interest are presented as such, as targets, as objectives of intense observation. Could it be that if an exhibition is too concerned with the objects and the subject they convey in a goal-oriented manner, then the (once again broadly defined) aesthetic field becomes so narrow that it is easy to become disconnected if one's attention dwindles or one becomes distracted, if one loses focus? Could it be that in situations like this the boundary between the field of focus and the peripheral is too harshly defined, that the fuzzy borderland existing in our experience between the two extremes has been overlooked?

Pallasmaa writes about architectural space while I have so far talked about objects which I, at the beginning, defined as not being my main interest here. The reason for this is that while the objects, the things – whether material or immaterial – are at the heart of museums, it is the space of the exhibition that brings us in contact, engages us with them. One substantial factor in this is, I

⁵⁹ Pallasmaa (2008), p. 10.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 13.

believe, the peripheral field of the experience of that space. But while I agree that too much emphasis on focused vision makes an architectural space seem distant, how much does focused sensory attention alter our experience of singular objects? After all, we all have, I dare to assume, experienced what happens when we focus intently on something, whether it be a book, film, craft, physical exercise, or any one thing, for a period of time. During such experience, the rumble of the world around us falls away. We seem to exist more intently and intensely with the object of our focus. But does the world cease to be? Does it disappear? Or is it just that as the focus of our intention sharpens and our field of attention narrows down, the field of the peripheral grows to include a greater portion of our phenomenal field? In such moments, I myself feel cocooned in the peripheral. Things there become unfocused, hazy, and muffled, yet still even more present. I feel more present but not only in relation to the object but with the world at large. The presence of the moment grows as the past and the future are withdrawn into the distance. So it may seem that Pallasmaa is wrong, that focused vision does not necessarily bring about a distance between us and the things of the world. And it is true that concentrating our attention on something does not in itself create a disinterested, distanced observer, but it may be a question of relying too much on the visual as the sole method of appreciation. Another reason why this may be true with architecture and environments in general but untrue when considering objects has to do with the meaning of 'focused' and the size of the object of perception in relation to our visual field. What I think Pallasmaa means with focused vision is just that rather narrow part of our field of vision within which objects are visually in focus – clear and sharp with their contours and details well defined; where they have a clear visual definition. What I mean with focused vision also includes the focusing of our attention. While it is a physiological fact that only a certain area of our vision is able to see the world *in focus*, to *see* the world and its things actually in focus demands that our attention participates in perceiving it. When I daydream with my eyes open and directed at the clouds, I do not *see* those clouds though they nevertheless can be visually in focus.

The focal and the peripheral, however, are relative. 'Every person is at the centre of his world,' writes Tuan in *Space and Place – The Perspective of Experience*, 'and circumambient space is differentiated in accordance with the schema of his body.'⁶¹ Things do come into focus just because I focus my vision on them, but also because my movement, or theirs, has brought them *within* my focus – and not just in focus visually, but in my attention. Movement in and through space causes things – buildings, objects, as well as scenes – to enter and exit various zones of the space surrounding me. If enough things remain in the peripheral,

⁶¹ Tuan, Yi-Fu (2008) *Space and Place – The Perspective of Experience*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis,, p. 41. 'My body is truly the navel of my world (...),' writes Pallasmaa in *The Eyes of the Skin – Architecture and the Senses*, 2008, p. 11.

they do not necessarily entice my attention unless something catches my eye (movement) or my ear (approaching, unexpected, or strange sounds). Things come in focus as they get close to the limit of my personal space⁶² or threaten to enter it. In other words, the closer to us and the deeper into our observable space a thing is, the more it demands our attention and focus. Writing on the experience of distance in humans in *The Hidden Dimension*, Edward T. Hall included a chart showing how distance and visual observation are related to each other. According to him, in the field of peripheral vision other people become important when they come within 30 feet or about 9 meters. After 16 feet or about 5 meters, other people become present, which is about the same distance beyond which 'objects begin to flatten out.'⁶³ Hall built his theory of *proxemics* on Gibson's theory of senses as perceptual systems instead of on individual senses, and Hall also recognised the role of the perceiver's activity in how the world is perceived, a perspective Alva Noë has then taken further in his books: 'Consciousness of the world around us is something we do: we enact it, with the world's help, in our dynamic living activities.'⁶⁴ This applies, as indicated, also to the concepts of focus and the peripheral. I return to Noë's theories in more detail in the next chapter.

Quantrill explains the experience of a presence in or of the environment as the *genius loci* or the spirit of place, the aura or presence of a particular environment that 'is composed of the total character of the things that make up that place.'⁶⁵ In other words, *Genius loci* is the phenomenological aspect of a place:

[It] depends upon the particular relationship of things to each other in a particular place. Being in the same place, in the same physical, environmental framework, things set up an interaction by that very coexistence so that they become intelligible to us not only as isolated phenomena but also as integrated parts of a unique whole.⁶⁶

This whole is more than the sum of its parts: it has character, presence, even an identity. According to Quantrill, the presence of a place is the result of its general characteristics (form, structure, scale, and so on) and its identity is the result of its details (patterns, texture, window frames, and so on). Places may have a very strong presence but without any or with only a few details they can

⁶² Edward T. Hall categorised distances in space into four main categories: intimate, personal, social, and public, each having a close and a far phase. See Hall, Edward T. (1969) *The Hidden Dimension*, Anchor Books, Doubleday & Co., Inc., New York, pp. 113-129.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

⁶⁴ Noë, Alva (2009) *Out of Our Heads*, p. 64. Other books on the subject by Noë are *Action in Perception* (2004) and *Varieties of Presence* (2012).

⁶⁵ Quantrill (1987), p. 48.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

become obstructive, overbearing, or even oppressive objects that rebuff our attempts to approach them; they refuse to communicate with us. Also places, both buildings and otherwise, are not only spatial constructions but they have to be experienced with time, as Quantrill underlines.⁶⁷ The details of a place become apparent to us over time and during repeated visits, as we often do not see everything at once as more subtle details are initially hidden by the more obvious ones. But it is not uncommon for us to be conscious of their existence even before we notice them. We experience them as thickness of the presence and the character, as the *genius loci* that can become even more prominent by spending time in and with the place in an active encounter of the body's movement and the attention of an open mind as our memories begin to add thickness to the place. Architect Christian Nordberg-Schultz emphasised the role history plays in the formation of *genius loci*, and so does Tuan who writes, 'Humble events can in time build up a strong sentiment for place.'⁶⁸ In a way such a place begins to appear as alive to us as its character and mood changes with the seasons, the lighting, our movement through it, and as we begin to know it through the layers of its history. Museums, however, can lack that thickness of history partly because the objects have been removed from the environment of their history, because they exist in an introduced environment, and because most visitors do not visit a museum often enough for their visits to build up as a thickness of the place. How effectively, then, can museums create a sense of a place, of *genius loci*, with a more weaker the continuum of history of experiences than the original environments of the objects?

Quantrill writes:

The ancient Greeks realized that through this *spirit of place* man meets with his spiritual other self. (...) The concept of *genius loci* necessarily involves a meeting and merging, of existence with spirit. In such a place, our existential or concrete awareness extends into the spiritual or abstract dimensions.⁶⁹

Seen in this light, as places where our awareness extends into the abstract dimensions of the past, the faraway, or art, museums indeed are temples or ritual sites where meeting with the divine is replaced with meeting the other (self). Museums by necessity include a certain degree of spirituality though not in a religious sense but in the sense that they require and promote a psychological reorientation towards the other. In order for there to be an experience of presence and engagement, there has to be a thickness to the place, 'the surface struc-

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 47.

⁶⁸ For Nordberg-Schultz, see especially his *Genius Loci – Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*, 1984, Rizzoli, New York. Tuan (2008), p. 143.

⁶⁹ Quantrill (1987), p. 48.

ture must be underlined by a deeper structure⁷⁰. In a way the experience of *genius loci* is a path linking the visitor's mind and imagination with the abstract, metaphysical, theoretical, and conceptual realms of history, science, culture, and art. It is a clue connoting what is not tangibly there but remains available and present.

Abram makes an interesting observation about the role of variations in relation to perceiving and experiencing the world which may have bearing on the importance of the peripheral and the experience of *genius loci*. He notes how crafts and things of nature, as opposed to manufactured things, have considerable variations in their form and rhythm. 'The patterns on the stream's surface as it ripples over the rocks (...) are all composed of repetitive figures that *never exactly repeat themselves*,' while '[i]n contrast, the mass-produced artifacts of civilisation (...) draw our senses into a dance that endlessly reiterates itself *without variation*.'⁷¹ Abram concludes that this eventually wears out our interest in them, making us crave for new things in our wish to stimulate ourselves. Perhaps this is also true in relation to buildings and surroundings in general. Could it be that when a building, an environment or anything at all is constructed to be looked at⁷² (not unlike a picture, as 2D in comparison to 3D), it is unable to provide sufficient stimulation for the peripheral senses? Is it then too dull to offer topics for our silent conversation with the world? Think about old high-rise buildings and even the early skyscrapers. From a distance they form a shaped, structured mass that upon approach begins to loom over you, eventually making it impossible to fathom anything else but their sheer size. The form disappears as the building takes over your field of vision and its material presence overwhelms you. In older buildings, and there certainly are some new ones too, however, new details become perceivable as one approaches: the richly detailed window frames, doors, cornerstones, door handles, and so on which from a greater, public distance are indiscernible. An example of such hidden variation in contemporary architecture can be found in Arabianranta, a growing residential area in Helsinki, Finland that has turned out to be well liked by its inhabitants as well as by architectural critics. The buildings are not flashy or architectonically in vogue but have a rather ordinary, homely overall feel. However, from a closer range, many buildings reveal new perspectives with hidden treasures for an unhurried observer to discover. Each building's true character is revealed from a close range. One brick-detailed house, for example,

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Abram (1997), p. 64.

⁷² The preoccupation with images in architecture is a subject that has received much attention. See e.g., Neil Leach's *The Aesthetics of Architecture* (1999). However, of course not all Modern architecture views details with indifference. Many great names of Modern architecture (Mies, Le Corbusier, Alvar Aalto, etc.) were and are particular when it comes to details.



PIC 3.4 A detail of the bricks embossed with cycling anecdotes on a residential building in Arabianranta, Helsinki, Finland. The brick at the centre reads: 'Oh lord, if you're walking and you walk half a kilometre the wrong way, then it's an awful long way to walk back. But with a bike it's nothing. That gives you an incredible sense of freedom. So that you are both free to get lost and to make mistakes, but that you're also able to...'

has short anecdotes concerning experiences of cycling embossed on the surfaces of the bricks (3.4).⁷³ From beyond five or so meters away, the writing is hidden and the bricks look merely textured, but passing the house on the pavement, the nature of the texture becomes obvious. It is as Abram writes: what seemed repetitive is revealed to be variable.

As said, with peripheral I do not mean only that particular part of the visual field or not even only the things related to our visual faculty. All our senses have their peripheral fields, although I have to admit that they are not so readily defined as peripheral vision. Nevertheless, all ranges of senses are matters of degree. I cannot define by pointing out or even stating where the peripheral part of my visual field begins. There is the relatively narrow section of the world that I see in focus, but the moment I begin to look for the boundaries of that section, it moves. Somewhere in my peripheral vision I cease to be able to see shapes and colours while my ability to perceive movement remains. That I can point out by looking straight ahead while someone moves her finger across my field of vision. Then I am able to locate the moment when the picture of her finger ceases to be seen but I can still see it moving.

Other sense modalities have similar gradations through which things move in and out of focus. We are constantly in physical contact with the world.

⁷³ The building is designed by architects Hannukari & Mäkipaja. The art work on the bricks is named 'Seinät puhuvat kesät talvet,' 'The Walls Speak All Summer All Winter' by Kirsi Kivivirta (2005).

We stand on our feet, we sit on chairs, the air breathes against our skin, our clothes drape us. We become aware of these contacts, these touches only when their intensity passes a threshold. Background noise fills our ears. The constant murmur of traffic, wind, people, birds, and animals, all the sounds of the world exist in the periphery of our hearing. We do not focus our attention on them unless something calls for it, usually a disruption, something unexpected in the monotony of it. We are seldom aware of the role the background noises, the soundscape, play in our lives and of their importance to our comfortability, and we praise silence even when apparently only a handful of us with normal hearing can stand the absolute silence of a silent room. The world record is 45 minutes, and most of us start to have visual hallucinations well before that.⁷⁴ In Daily Mail's MailOnline's article about the quietest anechoic chamber in the world, Steven Orfield, the president of the Orfield Laboratories that owns the chamber, explains why the room causes such disorientation that sitting is mandatory:

How you orient yourself is through sounds you hear when you walk. In the anechoic chamber, you don't have any cues. You take away the perceptual cues that allow you to balance and manoeuvre.⁷⁵

Our senses are not independent of each other and our body. Perception is not a result of the mind and individual senses, but of a state of participation, just like the focal and the peripheral, 'the experience of an active interplay, or coupling, between the perceiving body and that which it perceives.'⁷⁶ First of all, as Abram concurs, each sense is not its own distinct modality, but 'they are divergent modalities of a single and unitary living body, ... they are complementary powers evolved in complex interdependence with one another.' Abram follows Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the senses as inherently synaesthetic by pointing out how the intertwining of the sensory modalities is not an odd occurrence, a mishap in perception but the natural state of affairs, a result of the dynamic participation between our bodies and the things within the act of perception and between the senses and the body.⁷⁷ Synaesthesia does not refer only to those cases of extreme sensory overlapping where numbers are perceived as

⁷⁴ This is a widely reported piece of information in the internet. The world's quietest room is supposedly in Orfield Laboratories in Minneapolis, USA. The room measures about -9 decibels, while typically a quiet bedroom measures 30 decibels. The only noises in the quietest room are the sounds the person present produces. Apparently even heartbeats can be heard clearly.

⁷⁵ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-2124581/The-worlds-quietest-place-chamber-Orfield-Laboratories.html> Read 25.7.2012.

⁷⁶ Abram (1997), p. 57.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

having individual colours or where music or notes are experienced as colours⁷⁸, but also to the gentle participation of the senses of which we are mostly unaware, unless we deliberately turn our attention to a specific modality. But, Abram writes:

[a]s soon as I attempt to distinguish the share of any one sense from that of the others, I inevitably sever the full participation of my sensing body with the sensuous terrain.⁷⁹

Secondly, the participation of perception does not take place only within us. 'Human experience is a *dance* that unfolds in the world and with others. You are not your brain. ... We are out of our heads.'⁸⁰ As Alva Noë writes, experience and consciousness are not something that happens to us but it is 'something that we do.'⁸¹ Noë is also in agreement with Abram saying that

[t]he conscious mind is not inside us; it is, it would be better to say *a kind of active attunement to the world*, an achieved integration.⁸²

The activity that leads to this attunement is not only mental or something taking place within our brains. It is also the way we, as embodied subjects, move within the world. Movement allows us to see things from different perspectives and distances and in different light, first quite literally but also in the conceptual sense of allowing us to constitute them as objective things.⁸³ For example, from the viewpoint of neurology, it is impossible to see distance. The distance between two objects in our retinal image has nothing to do with the actual physical distance: distance does not form an image on the retina. Instead, understanding distance is learnt through practice, through movement in the environment: we learn to judge distances by traversing them.⁸⁴ In fact, according to Noë, '[v]ision is the process of discovering how things are in the scene from im-

⁷⁸ An anecdote about Finnish composer Jean Sibelius claims that he instructed the fireplaces of his home to be of certain colours for them to sound nice. Apparently certain shade of green was the D-major, and Sibelius had a colour-sound synaesthesia. See Lindqvist, Leena & Ojanen, Norman (1997) *Bringing Art to Life – Turn-of-the-century Finnish Artists' Homes*, Otava Publishing Company, Ltd., Helsinki, Finland, pp. 44 & 50.

⁷⁹ Abram (1997), p. 60.

⁸⁰ Noë (2009), p. 6.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 64. See also p. 47. Merleau-Ponty and Dewey also underlined experiencing and perception as an active doing.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 142.

⁸³ See Shusterman (2008), p. 52.

⁸⁴ See Hoffman (2000), p. 13.

ages in the eyes.⁸⁵ But a considerable amount of this attunement takes place in the peripheral, the subconscious regions of our experience. Or it is through the peripheral that we attune ourselves to the world and the interferences in that field cause us to lose the connection.

Therefore one could argue that for an environment to be experience-oriented, it should entice a visitor and her senses as a synaesthetic whole so that all parts and modalities are recognised and addressed. There should be something we hear (or feel, taste, and so on) in everything we see:

Certain rock faces and boulders request from us a kind of auditory attentiveness, and so draw our ears into relation with our eyes as we gaze at them, or with our hands as we touch them – for it is only through listening that we can begin to sense the interior voluminosity of the boulder, its particular density and depth. There is an expectancy to the ears, a kind of patient receptivity that they lend to the other senses whenever we place ourselves in a mode of listening – whether to a stone, or a river, or an abandoned house.⁸⁶

But for this to happen, there must be something to listen to, and the quote from Abram above is part of a discussion about reading and writing and their role in how, according to Abram, we the humans have severed our age-old reciprocity with nature. I do not think it is simply a question of the ability to listen to the world in a somewhat animistic sense, meaning listening as an attitude of approaching one's environment as a collaborator in the dance of consciousness. It is also a question of whether the environment has something to listen to, feel or taste, for example. If our senses are all synaesthetic, then should there not be at least something to hear and to feel in a visual perception of an environment that is meant to be engaging? Certainly creating such a multisensorial exhibition environment or supporting such synaesthetic depth would contribute to the experience of reciprocity and engagement?

⁸⁵ Noë (2009), p. 157.

⁸⁶ Abram (1997), p. 30.



PIC 3.5

One of the light wells between minor galleries in the Scotland gallery, The National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh. While interesting in a photograph, these wells are frustrating in life. Why is the access through blocked with vitrines so that I am forced to walk around if I see something interesting at the other end? The access promised in the visual is empty in reality.

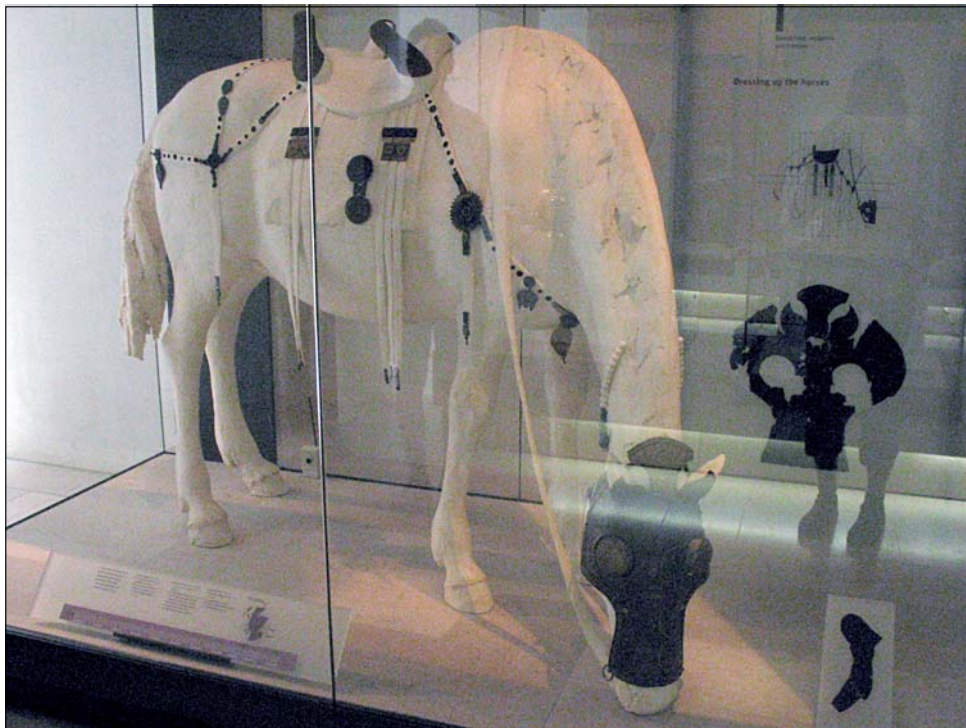
3.5 The Earth as Path

How does it feel when that silent conversation ceases? What is the experience of an exhibition when that connection has been lost or was never achieved? The Scotland gallery of The National Museum of Scotland⁸⁷ in Edinburgh is a beautiful building with a Moray sandstone facade of warm, golden hues. The building is rather geometrical ('Corbusian', is the verdict on the museum's Wikipedia page), both inside and out, and very symbolical with references to various Scottish landmarks and themes like the ancient tower-like houses, *brochs*, and the Half Moon Battery of the Edinburgh Castle. The facade has an appeal similar to old castles inspiring interest and making it clear that something particular is taking place indoors. Inside, however, is a different story. The halls and minor galleries are beautiful and interesting to look at from either an architectural point of view or as pictures, but the experience of actually walking through them is bewildering (3.5). At times during my visits to the Scotland gallery, I

⁸⁷ The National Museum of Scotland was born in 2006 after the Royal Museum (opened 1866 and housing science, natural history, world cultures) was merged with the adjoining Museum of Scotland (1998, Scottish culture & history). The Scotland gallery is the former Museum of Scotland.



PIC 3.6 Detail of a vitrine depicting life in Scotland during the Lower Palaeozoic aeon when Scotland was still submerged. The Scotland gallery, The National Museum of Scotland.



PIC 3.7 A display of parts of a Roman cavalry tack arranged on a puppet so that individual items are on their original place. The Scotland gallery, The National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh.

have become disoriented and lost my way. Usually I can form a mental map of a building as I walk through it, but not in this case. And apparently I am not the only one: the building has had its fair share of criticism, as *Edinburgh Architecture*, a website that introduces sites of architectural interest in Edinburgh, confirms, and the site's judges suggest that they too had experienced difficulties in navigating the building.⁸⁸

Certain parts of the gallery are very engaging, like the lowest level where the exhibitions of the geological and biological history of Scotland are located. But these exhibitions are also a bit difficult to navigate, although for the most part they are very engaging, especially the walk-through vitrines of geological periods (3.6). The vitrine glass reaches straight from floor to ceiling without a supporting frame and with the help of good lighting, the experience is quite similar to walking in one of those clear plexiglass tunnels one can find in many aquariums. Once again the imagination completes the experience as the visitor becomes a part of a landscape that is hundreds of millennia old. The hangings of the reconstructed creatures are almost completely hidden, and while the scene has a slight tinge of a freeze-frame shot, it also seemed to me that right after my exit, the vitrine's landscape with all its creatures could burst into life again. You never know, they just might.

On the floors above, however, things are not the same. Here the space is clean: almost white, smooth surfaces (very nice as such) and mostly cold, impersonal light. The museum is filled with fascinating artefacts which are often displayed in a way that reveals how individual parts and items would have looked like as a complete set (3.7). While the objects are beautiful, interesting, and enigmatic, they also come off as impersonal and detached, as if they were, in a way, floating in their presence and meaning. The whole of the exhibition, in fact, has an impersonal air to it, and as I walk through it, the impersonality turns into a feeling of not-belonging: the objects become items that exist in the gallery, but they do not belong there⁸⁹, and my visit becomes a strange walk through what instead of a gallery resembles a pedestrian underpass, which instead of lingering is meant for passing. The best way to describe the experience is the concept of rooting which has its origins in East Asian martial arts and denotes a state of being in which the practitioner has achieved a state of dynamic balance where her body and mind seem to be rooted into the ground, sharing its strength and stability and thus becoming able to withstand the opposing force with minimal effort and without losing balance. In a way the expression 'deep-rooted' could be used to describe the experience which for the practitioner consists of the feelings of deep belonging and self-confidence. In the Scot-

⁸⁸ http://www.edinburgharchitecture.co.uk/museum_of_scotland.htm. Read 8.5.2013. They too refer to the style of the building as 'Corbusian'.

⁸⁹ This, of course, is true from a certain point of view as discussed earlier: museum objects have been detached from their original existence.

tish gallery, especially in the prehistoric and Roman sections, the objects seem to lie on the shelves, existing without belonging. They, like I, the visitor, are not grounded anymore, a feeling which, I believe, has much to do with the difficulty of maintaining one's orientation and becoming engaged in the gallery. The reason for this is the impersonality of the space. It is, as said, visually beautiful but it is also extremely minimalistic in a clean, monotonous way. I find it difficult to attach myself to the space as there seems to be very little to hang on to. Mainly it is a question of a lack of reference points by which to orient oneself but it is also a question of a limited amount of peripheral sensations. Someone might say that this benefits the objects that, when presented in a minimalistic environment, become the focus of the visit. What you see is what you get, but beyond that – the monotony of light, textures, sounds, movement, and atmospheres – there is no world in which to cocoon myself.

Things – objects and persons – need to be grounded within the aesthetic field since engagement is a situational experience. I do not mean that a person should be standing on or sitting down firmly in her place. Instead I think that there should be a strong experience of a situation as a presence of a set of circumstances. I personally experience this as a kind of a heightened awareness of the world, a revealing of the lifeworld, of being here, in this situation with these things around me and the world unfurling to envelope us. It is an experience of reciprocal presence where I have become able to (more or less) consciously share the lifeworld with the things-of-the-world. And one thing important for this experience is the world experience in the peripheral, in the background, for it is there that much of the constant murmur of the world takes place and if that murmur becomes too quiet, thin or shallow, I lose my ground. Perhaps, in order for an exhibition to be engaging, it should address its visitors from the ground up – perhaps quite literally? The world does not surround us from all sides, it also supports us from beneath our feet.

How to ground the objects and the visitor? How to begin to fill that peripheral field with subtle variation of details so that the space, the environment of the exhibition, is filled with a quiet murmur that addresses the body and yet does it without cluttering the experience? How to bring the objects, the world of the exhibition, and the visitor together so that their lifeworlds merge? Can it be done? Abram makes it clear that different cultures may have different lifeworlds: 'The world that a people experiences and comes to count on is deeply influenced by the ways they live and engage that world.'⁹⁰ Tuan concurs: 'No two persons see the same reality. No two social groups make precisely the same evaluation of the environment.'⁹¹ And not only that but the environment within which a culture lives may even shape the sensory faculties of the people. Rich-

⁹⁰ Abram (1997), p. 41.

⁹¹ Tuan (1990) *Topophilia*, p. 5.

ard L. Gregory underlines this in *Eye and Brain – The Psychology of Seeing* by pointing out how we, the Westerners, live in environments full of parallel straight lines which are good perspectival cues of distance, but that this is not a universal norm. For example the Zulus traditionally used to live in a non-perspective world, in a ‘circular culture’ where houses are curved and fields are not ploughed in straight lines but in curves. Consequently they did experience the Muller-Lyer arrow illusion only slightly and many other such distortion illusion that are based on straight lines almost not at all.⁹² This could be taken as a demonstration of the plasticity of human experience.

Different cultures have different ways of life. Languages are different and reflect the philosophies and environments of different peoples. Some differences are superficial, surface aesthetics of sorts, but others are so profound that it is mind-boggling to try to see them from the inside even for a moment. Coming from a Finnish culture, I find it difficult to view the world from a mindset where past is imagined to be situated in front and the future behind us, as the Aymara people of the Andes do.⁹³ Yet that way of seeing things has a crystal clear logic behind it: the past is known and therefore visible, in a sense, but the future is unknown, unseen in a sense. Still the mindset remains difficult to internalise. I cannot force those shoes to fit. Recently I was reminded that the North American native cultures, or some at least, believed they lived in a paradise made especially for them. I live in a culture that believes that the paradise – the worldly and the otherworldly – is somewhere else or even lost. How would it feel to live in a world that *is* the paradise, in a world that is perfect and complete? How profoundly would that change the way I experience life? As Abram continues, despite all the differences in and the wide diversity of beliefs, we are able to share the life-world and not even with just other humans but also with other species: a dog can become a member of our family and we can become its pack. Abram refers to Husserl’s description of the lifeworld as layered:

underneath the layer of diverse cultural life-worlds there reposes a deeper, more unitary life-world, always already there beneath all our cultural acquisitions, a vast and continually overlooked dimension that nevertheless supports and sustains all our diverse and discontinuous worldviews.⁹⁴

⁹² Gregory (2005), pp. 150-151. The Muller-Lyer arrow illusion is the one where two parallel lines of similar length are made to look like being of different length. One has its arrowheads pointing the right way, i.e., away, but the other’s arrowhead endings are turned around to point towards the line.

⁹³ See e.g., Núñez, Rafael E. & Sweetser, Eve (2006), ‘With the Future Behind Them: Convergent Evidence From Aymara Language and Gesture in the Crosslinguistic Comparison of Spatial Construals of Time,’ *Cognitive Science*, no 30, pp. 1-49, Cognitive Science Society, Inc., Austin, TX, USA.

⁹⁴ Abram (1997), pp. 41-42.

This layer is, according to Husserl, the earth itself, 'the most immediate, bodily awareness of space, from which all later *conceptions* of space are derived.'⁹⁵ The experience of earth is the same or close enough for all of us. It establishes two cardinal directions, up and down, giving cosmological meaning to such sentences as 'Stand up straight!'⁹⁶ Alphonso Lingis continues on these lines in *The Imperative*, calling it the ground:

Our awakening is terrestrial; we feel the stability of the ground, even when we try to imagine ourselves trying to get our feet on a sphere whirling around empty space at twelve thousand miles an hour. The ground is not – save for astronauts and for the imagination of astronomers – the planet, an object which viewed from distance is spherical. We do not feel ourselves on a platform supported by nothing but feel a reservoir of support extending indefinitely in depth. ... Once we have made contact with terra firma the force of the ground extends indefinitely before our steps. The ground is there when we assume a posture and support ourselves upright to move and when we no longer position ourselves and abandon our limbs and organs to its repose.⁹⁷

And

[t]he ground rises in incessant presence... It extends its support before us without retaining upon itself, like an object becoming more consistent as we turn about it, the accumulating force of its past support, and it is there without guarantees for the future.⁹⁸

The intuitive awareness of ground, or earth – meaning our ever present orientation towards the earth manifesting as the almost automatic knowledge of up, down, and the horizontal plane – seems to be so readily accepted by most of us that it is seldom acknowledged. It is primeval: we are born with it as gravity's influence sets to mould us already in the womb. However, it is not only the effect of gravity on us, which is not generally experienced as a pull. The awareness of earth is more comprehensive, more embodied and internalised. This shows, for example, in what we list as the senses in the Western everyday tradition: touch, smell, taste, vision, and hearing. All these senses can be described as exploratory as they are more oriented outwards, towards the world. They are

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 42. Abram refers to Husserl's 'Foundational Investigations of the Phenomenological Origin of the Spatiality of Nature,' trans. Fred Kersten, in Peter McCormick and Frederic A. Elliston, eds., *Husserl: Shorter Works*, 1981, Harvest Press, Brighton, UK.

⁹⁶ See Bell (2009), p. 99 where Bell refers to this Bourdieu's suggestion in reference to ritualised body, environment, and movement.

⁹⁷ Lingis, Alphonso (1998) *The Imperative*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN, p. 14.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 15.

the senses of measuring, used to describe and determine, though some more accurately than the others. On the one hand, measuring as the fundamental scientific method is a way of trying to compensate for the possible fallacies of sensorial observations. It is an attempt to provide us with information through objective, repeatable experiments. On the other hand, measuring – as the act of taking measurements, as measuring world and its things against our bodies – is at its core an act of touching, especially in the sense of coming into conscious contact with an object. Measuring is the act of making something tangible and handleable. In the *Star Trek* scene discussed earlier, captain Picard is touching *The Phoenix* in order to make the earlier experience of the legendary spaceship real, or more accurately, to solidify or to justify it, while the android Data's touch is an act of measurement. Yet, at its basics, the information Data gains by touching the ship is not that different from what a human could gain. We too can have a spectacularly accurate and fine-tuned ability to measure the temperature, weight, shape, and movement of objects. It is more a question of concentration and practice than of mere ability. Anecdotal evidence tells, for example, of individuals in paper manufacturing and printing industry who can tell the weight of a sheet of paper by touch alone and of butchers who can, without thinking, cut the precise amount of beef the customer wants. The principal difference between the captain and the android is not so much the ability itself, but the inability for feelings on Data's part and the lack of set scales on the captain's. Of course an android could and would be fitted with a superhuman sensory apparatus, but that is beside the point. We humans tend not to express the information we receive through our senses as clearly or as measuredly as Data. We do not usually describe and differentiate the various aspects that make up the experience. For us it is freezing, smooth, tangy, screeching, mouldy, or simply lovely.

However, in addition to this exploratory sense we have other, more inward tuned senses that are also more dependent on gravity, or are in relation to the earth. All senses have their internal range, they all can tell us something about the internal state of our body, but some senses are acutely internal. Of these senses we are less aware, as I have come to discover when teaching riding and Tai Chi. For example, we have an ability to know the posture and the movement of our body internally through the senses known jointly as proprioception, such as the sense of relative position of the parts of our body and the effort used to move them. We know instinctively where our hand is without looking at it, but to accurately observe the *exact* relation of the hand to the rest of the body and the earth without resorting to looking is surprisingly perplexing. It is a different thing to know that the hand is risen than it is to sense, observe and make judgements of the hand in its risen position without looking – that requires practice. The average human can always say without looking that her hand is held up but not how high it is without being aware of its relative

distance to the plane she stands upon. Yet we know the hand is there, we expect it to be there. Just like we expect the ground to be there.

Trust in the reliability of touch is widely experienced and held but nevertheless somewhat misguided. It is the solidifying effect of touch that I believe has led us to hold it as the most trustworthy of our senses, and not the idea that touch is infallible even when it seems to be. There are numerous visual illusions that tell us about out the sense of vision, but in *Visual Intelligence*, Donald D. Hoffman tells about one reported case of tactile illusion.⁹⁹ This contrast in amount of illusions has, however, more to do with the amount of study put into the research of vision than with the actual reliability of these particular senses. In fact, when tactile senses fail us with misinterpretations, the results may be even more earth-shattering or transforming for an individual than permanent visual misinterpretations. When upon boarding the Fram my senses beguiled me into thinking that the ship was still sailing the high seas, my reason was helpless in front of what my body thought itself to be experiencing. For an even more extreme example, although it is not strictly speaking a tactile but a proprioceptive illusion, think of phantom limbs. In bodily experience, the limb may be as real and alive as it can be with all its pains and itches Tactile experiences in the missing limb can be produced by stimulating other parts of the amputee's body. We may even lose the sense of a limb belonging to our body, an experience that must be horrifying: to find an arm in your bed that does not belong to you.¹⁰⁰ Some tactile illusions are misinterpretations although they can profoundly impact our outlook. We may, for example, have a strong conviction of an object's apparent weight only to have that conviction shattered the minute we pick the object up and experience its true weight. This does not result from an illusion but a miscalculation of the weight based on the object's visual appearance and our previous experiences. Perhaps mistaken judgements like these are why we put so much trust on touch.

We are connected to each other through what could be called our awareness of the earth. It is one of 'the basic structures of the life-world that are shared, elements that are common to different cultures and even, we may suspect, to different species,' as Abram suggests,¹⁰¹ and it is an element common throughout all ages. We say that we should not judge someone before walking a mile in her shoes. The saying implies that through walking it is not only possible to experience someone's life from her perspective, to see what she sees, hears, and feels,

⁹⁹ Hoffman (2000), pp. 180-181.

¹⁰⁰ Hoffman describes phantom limbs in Hoffman (2000), pp. 173-184. Oliver Sacks has appointed the whole first section of his book *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat* (first published 1985) to various cases of losing, including the cases of the disembodied lady and the man who fell out of bed to whom I am referring here.

¹⁰¹ Abram (1997), p. 41.

but to take on the feel of her life journey. Putting on someone else's shoes can help us empathise with the comforts and discomforts of her life by bringing us in contact with the earth through her life-shoes, through her personal history.

The contact through the soles of our feet is not all there is to it. The sense that communicates with the ground is the sense of balance, the sense we tend to take for granted.¹⁰² Balance orients us against the earth, and the awareness of the earth helps us experience our bodies as the navel of our worlds¹⁰³. A grounded person, meaning a well-balanced and sensible individual, can be described as having a good understanding of her place in the world. She has roots in her culture, and the awareness of earth, of her cultural background, her horizon, helps her to establish her body schema. Lying down, standing up, crouching, bowing, crawling, and jumping are all experienced in relation to the ground; our thinking, habits, values, and perspectives gain meaning in reflection against our culture.

The earth, or the ground, is usually experienced in the peripheral field and it usually remains in the non-conscious. It takes particular effort to focus our senses on our experience of the earth. Teaching and practicing Tai Chi, I have noticed that often when performing a balancing stance or movement, paying attention to one's contact with the earth can be confusing. A good awareness of it is needed in order to perform a relaxed movement on one leg. One has to step the supporting leg on the ground, to stand actively *on the earth*, not just on one's foot, in order to balance oneself, but thinking too much about the ground, especially at first, will make it shift making you aware only of your imbalance. All the irregularities and the tilting under your foot becomes obvious. Suddenly there seems to be myriad things pressing against your foot, where there a second ago was just grass, and a single tiny stone is enough to unroot you so that a simple movement of your eyes is enough to topple you. The hardest part of the practice is to learn to be conscious without paying attention, learning how to perceive the world indirectly through the peripheral, an ability that is held in high regard in martial arts and requires considerable practice. I see this as evidence of how much we are influenced by our contact with the earth without being aware of it and how fundamental it is for our experience of the lifeworld. We acquire a considerable amount of information about our environment through our awareness of the earth even when we are utterly unaware of it, and this tacit knowledge impacts the way we are, not just the way we perceive and experience. The level of the earth, meaning the ground or the floor, is fundamental for the experiences of situation, presence, and encounter – and therefore for engagement. Because of this I believe that it is possible to nourish the feeling

¹⁰² See Robinson, Ken (2010), *The Element – How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything*, with Lou Aronica, Penguin Books, London, pp. 30-32. I wonder to what extent this overlooking of balance is a contemporary Western thing.

¹⁰³ Pallasmaa uses this expression in Pallasmaa (2008), p. 11.

of belonging and to keep up the silent conversation between the visitors, the subject matter, and the objects through the ground. Also, as the senses of touch and proprioception – or the senses of the tangible or the contact, one might say – are closely connected with the awareness of the earth, the ground is also the way of addressing the sense of touch without enabling the actual handling of objects and other things of the exhibition because of the synaesthetic and unfocused nature of the awareness of the earth.

The trouble is that we cannot literally offer the shoes of a person from the past, an artist, or a zebra for the visitor to wear, but we can offer a path in and through that life or homeworld. As I mentioned earlier, Quantrill stressed the importance of the horizontal plane for architecture and especially for city planning in *The Environmental Memory*. A path leads us through a city, our mind travels ahead and follows the path we see opening before us. A path offers us enticement, 'a view and opportunity for movement from one space to another whose features are only partly revealed'¹⁰⁴ but we can anticipate, feel their existence just beyond the corner; they are available for us. According to Arnheim, the horizontal surface is 'the principal dimension of action' and '[d]uring physical movement the mind sees the world ahead as a map of potential paths'.¹⁰⁵ On the characteristics of old European towns Arnheim wrote:

Such an environment is in the nature of a texture rather than a design; it is held by its homogeneity, which refuses to assign to any element a particular place determined by the structure of the whole and assigning individual sights their proper location within that order, *the mind derives from circumstances an order of its own. It records the linear sequence of sights, which unfold, more or less unpredictably, as they would in a film.* The conditions for such an experience are created deliberately in the so-called stroll gardens of traditional Japan.¹⁰⁶

Although very much a practical, material thing, a path is also a poetic, metaphysical creature and this is the core rationale behind the routes and paths in a Japanese garden. Life can be seen as a path; every life follows its own path like the Taoists say. Choosing and following the right path is important. Life can take a person somewhere she could not anticipate; someone's path took her to her ruin. A student of history can follow the path of a nation from occupation and oppression to independence and prosperity. Hoping to get closer to God, Christian pilgrims retrace the route of Jesus carrying his cross to his place of execution. The emperors of China followed the ceremonial route from the Forbidden City to the Temple of Heaven, under the strict guidance of tradition, in

¹⁰⁴ Hildebrand, Grant (1999) *Origins of Architectural Pleasure*, University of California Press, Berkeley/Los Angeles, USA, p. 55.

¹⁰⁵ Arnheim, Rudolf (1997) *Dynamics of Architectural Form*, University of California Press, Berkeley/Loa Angeles, pp. 54 and 155 relatively.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 114-115.

order to guarantee the harmony of the universe for yet another year. When the emperor became too old to endure the long walk, it was a matter of life and death to find a solution that would fulfil the needs of Heaven, for even the slightest deviation from the route could cause the ritual to misfire. And in museums, the idea of a path through the subject matter at hand is by no means a new one, but some museums have already taken it to a new level (or an old one that at one point had fallen from use) by reconnecting the poetic path to the concrete and factual one, the one that in its materiality addresses the body directly as the visitor walks into another country.

3.6 Walking in the Medieval World – The Floor of the Museum of Medieval Stockholm.

The exhibitions of the Museum of Medieval Stockholm, *Stockholms Medeltidsmuseum*, are entered through a long straight vaulted corridor which is followed by a kind of an ante-exhibition that offers information about the period and creates the setting. The rest of the exhibition is built into a large underground hall, and it is this part of the exhibition on which I will concentrate here. Some of the other features will be discussed in the next chapter. The main hall is divided into different sections but the visitor will retain a sense of a continuous space throughout her visit. Although the space available is limited, the museum has had the courage to allow for free space and areas throughout the exhibition, which has left ample room for visitors to approach the various components of the exhibition at their leisure. The exhibitions are arranged into different sections: the market square, the town, the harbour, the graveyard, the cloister, and outside the authentic town walls is a kind of a shipyard with skeletons of long-boat type of vessels found during excavations. Temporary exhibitions are usually displayed in an adjoining room.

Practically everything in the museum is a reconstruction. Only a few of the large exhibits, such as the town wall and the boats, are authentic historical objects. Almost all buildings can be entered and although they are built to smaller scale, they do not have a dollhouse-like feeling to them. There are very few clear boundaries – rails, glasses, and such – guarding the exhibits from the visitors. Boundaries are created either by using fencing and partitions natural to buildings and towns: you look into the bakery through a window and observe the cloister's gardens while standing in an archway. What railings exist are minimal in their design. They do not stand out stating a forbidden zone, but gently emphasise other more subtle boundaries existing in the fabric of the exhibitions (see e.g. 3.8 for subtle railings).



PIC 3.8 Section of the first view into the Museum of Medieval Stockholm's main exhibition hall with the remains of the original city wall in front with the reconstructed buildings behind it. Some natural light gets in through the skylight just visible on the right. The current exhibition.

The exhibition was refurbished and extended before reopening in 2010, and several features have been changed. Some sections have been relocated, some removed altogether, and some new features have been added. The principal features of the exhibition have, however, remained the same, including the way the horizontal plane of the floor has been utilised. A number of the changes have influenced and altered the ambience and the impression the exhibition makes, some quite considerably. However, I will not mention every change nor concentrate on the changes made, except for the ones that have influenced a feature or an experience relevant to my argument. Also, for the time being, I will not consider myself with the layout of the exhibition, with how the buildings and other features are situated within the space but focus mainly on the main exhibition hall's floor as the ground for a path. Later sections and chapters will build on what is said here in order to elaborate on the significance of this exhibition.

The floor space of the main hall is a continuous but not uniform level opening before the visitor. This openness is both visual and created by the sustained flow of the floor under the visitor's feet. Visually the scope of the main hall is evident to the visitor as soon as she enters the hall (3.8). The dark coloured and shaded ceiling with lighting and sound systems domes over the exhibition, defining on its part the extent and the boundaries of the hall. It has a feeling similar to the sky, although a closer inspection reveals the ceiling to be cluttered with technical instruments, but the darkness and the height of the ceiling compensate for this distraction, helping the eye to concentrate on the lighted areas. Also, in *Life Between Buildings – Using Public Space*, Jan Gehl points out that sight

is distinctly horizontal, since '[t]he horizontal visual field is considerably wider than the vertical'¹⁰⁷, which most likely does make it natural to focus our attention on the expanse of a vista. Furthermore, it seems to me, based on the reflection on my own experiences and observations, that if a surface or another visually continuous plane extends high enough in my visual field, I tend to assume that it keeps rising further up, much like the sky and I take its presence above me as granted. Perhaps all this makes it possible to let the ceiling of the main hall slip away from my consciousness and become something sky-like.

The relationship between the town and the ceiling is reminiscent of a movie theatre, where the reality of the theatre is literally enshrouded in dark paint and the silver screen is the only source of light creating a stark contrast. It seems that when the peripheral visual field is dim enough and the contrast between it and the frontal section of the visual field is stark enough, the mind is more eager to let those parts of the world left in the peripheral slip away from consciousness. Also, the visitor's first view of the main hall is a panoramic prospect hinting at what she can expect to encounter as she walks further in. This turns the view into a proper prospect, a vista of possibilities. The visitor has entered the hall by arriving at what Jay Appleton calls in *The Experience of Landscape* a primary vantage point, a view commanding a direct prospect, a point of observation from where many if not all possible views are directly observed.¹⁰⁸ The view of the exhibition hall also complies with Appleton's description of a vista: 'a view which is restricted by conspicuous bounding marginals.'¹⁰⁹ The view from a primary vantage point offers prospects of further discoveries and of secondary vantage points, promising a chance to see what for now remains unseen and hidden. In essence, the view indicates possible routes and expanses, creating a sense of continuity in the landscape. Standing at this vantage point, the visitor can envision a route to take, plan, and, most importantly, imagine. It is elemental that everything is not revealed at once and some sections are left in the shade. A mystery must be maintained, something must be withheld for a view to remain interesting. "'Withhold" is the key,' writes Hildebrand in *Origins of Architectural Pleasure*, 'obviously a lot of infor-

¹⁰⁷ Gehl, Jan (2001) *Life Between Buildings – Using Public Space*, trans. by Jo Koch, Arkitektens Forlag, The Danish Architectural Press, Copenhagen Denmark, p. 65.

¹⁰⁸ Appleton, Jay (1975) *The Experience of Landscape*, John Wiley & Sons, London, p. 85. Appleton's prospect-refuge theory is often used in connection to experiencing architecture, and I also find his thinking inspiring, but it has to be asked if is applicable on an individual level. While sensible on cultural and species level, it appears vulnerable when dealing with individuals, since like any ecology-based systemic theory, it is based on averages and statistical probabilities. The behaviour and preferences of single individuals, however, may not always be explained through such theories. Therefore it is likely that some readers may find that their personal experiences of, for example, light and darkness are quite the opposite.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 85.



PIC 3.9 Town wall at the right facing a reconstruction of a building site demonstrating Medieval building techniques. Current exhibition, The Museum of Medieval Stockholm.

mation awaits discovery' as '[w]e feel compelled to find out more about whatever is partly revealed, partly hidden from us in such a view.'¹¹⁰ Hildebrand also mentions the importance of enticement, 'a view and opportunity for movement from one space to another' which 'reveals, but only partly reveals, an information-laden scene; discovery of further features depends on exploration...'¹¹¹

The floor follows the natural logic of the exhibition. It begins at the entrance and under the introductory part of the hall as a typical floor of any contemporary commercial building. The surface is hard and dark blue-grey in colour with soft semi-gloss polish. The colour seems uneven but this may be a result of the polish and the lighting. The floor feels solid and smooth under the feet, understated in its standard look. It is quite neutral, both as a visual element but more importantly as a physical sensation as it is easy and familiar to walk on. It does not challenge our balance or our visual field but creates a firm, reliable and predictable level. This blueish hue connects and merges the floor with the shadows of the ceiling and the columns supporting the vault, thereby buttressing the sense of an observation point: the main point here is not so much the informative exhibits at the entrance but the world and landscape opening in front of the visitor.

¹¹⁰ Hildebrand (1999), p. 51 & p. 52. Appleton's theories play an important role in the book.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 55 & p. 66..



PIC 3.10 The view from the steps towards the harbour and past the town. The town wall is barely visible on the right; on the left open the church doors. Current exhibition, The Museum of Medieval Stockholm.

Visitors can choose which way to turn next, but to me the route leading left and clockwise through the hall seems most natural. The blue-grey floor continues this way alongside the exhibit surrounding the original town wall (3.9). As it continues around the town wall, the blue-grey floor leads the visitor into the actual exhibition, narrowing where it meets the first building reconstruction, the building site, which it passes as a path. After passing the site, the floor widens again to support two vitrines depicting war and weaponry. Then the floor meets with three steps and moves around them to lead the visitor to the town and past it were she to so choose (3.10).

The blue-grey part of the floor is the neutral ground or zone. It has a feeling of being outside the reconstructed parts of the exhibition. It maintains its status as a vantage point, a viewing platform reserved for a more objective or observing gaze. By remaining on the neutral floor, the visitor creates and maintains a removed position and therefore a distance between herself and the world of the exhibition. Although the blue-grey floor is not quite as secluded and removed as such floors can be, it still is a classical museum exhibition floor space; it still is the ocean the visitor navigates. The level of detachment has been reduced partly because the boundary between the blue-grey floor and the exhibits is minimal. Railings, where there are such things (in 3.10 on the right around the wall), are quite low and subtle and the visitors are mostly free to leave the neutral ground at will. The only boundary is the narrow strip of metal protecting the seams between different floor materials. But these are, in fact, more a mental and visual than a physical boundary, and the photograph distorts the effect, making it seem more prominent than it actually appears. In real-



PIC 3.11 A street in the reconstructed town with its cobble stones and bricks. The current exhibition in Museum of Medieval Stockholm.

ity, and in contrast to the picture, the boundary line is left outside the field of focus as the visitor approaches it, making it an easier line to cross as it is likely that one does not even pay much attention to it. Stepping over it, nevertheless, does make a difference.

The floor is different around and between the buildings, where it ceases to be a floor and becomes a street. Approaching the town from this direction, the visitor first arrives to the market square. The ground here is cobbled with stones of about the same size, but between the buildings the cobbles change their shape and size to reflect the doorways and arcades (3.11). The ground feels uneven and its contours can be clearly felt on the soles of one's feet. It posits a casual challenge to one's sense of balance. It does not make one feel unstable and walking on it does not demand any particular effort, but it is more *there*, more present, as it offers a greater amount of sensations in comparison to the blue-grey floor. Although the cobbled floor is far less tiresome than the real thing it simulates, it is still capable of eliciting experiences of real cobblestone streets that anyone visiting Stockholm and especially its Old Town is bound to encounter. This connection to the real, contemporary world outside the museum brings a touch of realism into the experiences of the exhibition, as the lanes of the reconstructed underground town echo the cobbled streets of the real overground town. In this way the change under one's feet does not bring about a new, unfamiliar sensation but a familiar one which is thereby easier to accept. As something already familiar to the visitor's body, the mock cobbled streets are more

likely to remain in the peripheral where they are able to contribute to the overall experience of a place as the real enters the visitor as a sensation of familiarity through the soles of her feet. The same sensation must also be true to those visitors who visit the exhibition in wheelchairs or as otherwise assisted, although a person in a wheelchair will probably find the streets of the exhibitions more easy to move on as the exhibition is built with accessibility in mind – something I suspect will not go unnoticed.

Of course it can be argued that the state of engagement in this museum is a matter of considerable immersion as the visitor is surrounded with and she enters into a convincingly realistic staging. Everything around her has been created with great care. Enormous attention has been paid to the details: there are even footprints of animals in their pens. The lighting is purposefully affective. The soundscapes entice imagination and bring the scene alive as seagulls bicker in the harbour and the crows call in the graveyard. Besides the ceiling cluttered with modern contraptions and the visitors in contemporary attires there is, especially in the reconstructed town, very little there to remind the visitor of the world outside. But take the cobbled floor away and stretch the blue-grey floor from corner to corner and something will certainly be lost. Even if the concrete floor was dressed up in a photographic rendering of a cobbled surface (see later in this chapter), it would not be as engaging. We may not be particularly prone to look at our feet when there is something on our eye-level to see – not that we even see our feet without looking down – unless there is something particular to see. But it does not mean that what is left under our feet escapes our senses and our sense of place. All in all, a continuous visual pattern is less engaging than a tactile pattern, especially one that varies gradually and keeps creating new contrasts and alterations in our sensations.

In addition, the cobbled floor supports the continuity and the flow of the phenomenal field. It complements as a visual surface the stone and brick walls of the reconstructed buildings, reflecting their knobby, rugged forms. There is less contradictory contrast between the floor and the buildings, but a continued flow from one surface to another: a smooth floor would cut off the buildings at the foundations. The buildings are rooted to the ground; they are built instead of just placed there. This solidifies the appearance of the town, and so does the fact that the tactility of the cobbled floor continues in the walls of the buildings. The sensations of the floor rise to agree with what our eyes perceive: that the walls are made of stone, that they are coarse to touch here and smooth there. Pallasmaa's words are fitting:

Vision reveals what the touch already knows. We could think of the sense of touch as the unconsciousness of vision. Our eyes stroke distant surfaces, contours and the edges, and the unconscious tactile sensation determines the agreeableness or unpleasantness of the experience.¹¹²

Tuan also writes about this:

Most tactile sensations reach us indirectly, through our eyes. Our physical environment feels ineluctably tactile even though we touch only a small part of it. Reddish fluffy surfaces are warm (...).¹¹³

In the case of the Museum of Medieval Stockholm, the sensations of the ground beneath my feet not only contribute to the pleasantness of the feel of the walls. Moreover, in what I see, as my eyes stroke the walls, I experience a reflection of the sensation underneath my feet. The experience in the peripheral is carried over into the focused and, as Pallasmaa suggests, the tactile and the bodily experience becomes reinforced by the sense of sight¹¹⁴ but also vice versa. The environment around me deepens as a variety of sensations reach me through my senses, addressing them as a system and not just as singular modes of obtaining information. The conceptuality of the Medieval is countered with a more concrete, material, and tactile insight into the life between the buildings of Medieval Stockholm. Never mind that the buildings are not built to scale; the materiality, the bodily feel of the Medieval town seems veracious: the narrowness of the passage through, the roughness of surfaces, the maze-like network of the alleys and lanes. This, of course, is partly born out of my expectations and my idea of what a Medieval town would be like, an image based on what I have read and experienced in actual towns such as the Old Town of Stockholm, which dates back to the Middle Ages. Perhaps even more influential are the interpretations of the environment I have seen in period dramas and adventure films and series, the worlds of Robin Hood, Arthur and Merlin, Ivanhoe, and history documents. The Museum of Medieval Stockholm confirms enough of my ideas and preconceptions to make the world it reconstructs more acceptable and accessible to me. Would I buy into the world of the exhibition so eagerly if it had proven my preconceptions wrong and shattered my ideas as mere fanci-

¹¹² Pallasmaa (2008), p. 42. It might be uncalled for to say that the unconscious tactile sensation *determines* the quality of the experience. It might be more prudent to say that the unconscious tactile sensation affects, confirms, agrees with, or supports the experience. Pallasmaa is rather polemical in his writings concerning architecture and the tactile, but his poetic expressions often manage to catch something fleeting in the nature of experience.

¹¹³ Tuan (1993), p. 43.

¹¹⁴ Pallasmaa (2008), p. 26.



PIC 3.12 The view from the aft of the ship towards the main entrance and of the lowest floor. The floors on the other side of the ship are closer to it but the bulk of the ship is there so close to the visitors that it is virtually impossible to capture the view there without a wide-angle objective. The Vasa Museum, Stockholm, Sweden.

ful notions? Probably not. At least the exhibition would have to work its magic extremely hard and yet comfortingly to open up my mind again.

3.7 On Board – The Floors of Vasa Museum and the Kon-Tiki Museum

The Museum of Medieval Stockholm is not the only museum in the city to utilise floor materials as a way of creating an aesthetic field for engagement. Like the Medieval museum, the Vasa Museum is particularly multi-sensorial, addressing the whole body without ostensibly trying to do so. The museum, quite like the Medieval museum, is built around its object, the great warship Vasa, that sunk on its maiden voyage in 1628 and was salvaged in 1961. The huge ship rests in the middle of the building and the exhibition floors rise around it, reaching up from the keel all the way up to the upper decks. The masts reach through the ceiling of the building and stand in the open air thereby making the museum noticeable from afar.

Here too the floor materials change depending on how close any particular section of the exhibition is to the ship itself. The exhibition spaces right around the ship are not only spatially closely linked to the ship but also by the themes addressed in them: ship building, life on board, the construction and the decorations of the *Vasa*, results of the archeological research within and around the ship, and the preservation of the ship. The spaces further out describe life in the 17th century Sweden and Europe and other pertinent issues like the art of sailing at that time.

The general areas of the museum – the entrance area, the shop, and the restaurant – have, like in the Medieval museum, rather ordinary commercial or public building type of floorings of dark grey stone-like slate. Upon entrance this floor, like the building itself, has a somewhat cathedral-like feeling. There is a feeling of solemnity in the colours and spatiality, but also in the tactile perception of the floor, which I find very hard to describe. Although the floor is absolutely smooth, it has the same feeling as the slate floors of Gothic cathedrals where the stone floor slabs are worn smooth by centuries of walking and cleaning, and where the sound of one's steps seems to communicate the substantiality and the weight of the slabs. Contrary to most the Gothic cathedrals I have visited, the indoor temperature of the museum is not particularly cold in spite of being rigorously monitored and maintained for the preservation of the ship. I must note from the point of view of preservation that the visitors do not enter a museum but a vitrine wherein the ship is kept. This creates considerable demands on maintaining a suitable environment for it. In any case, much like a medieval cathedral, the space feels cold upon entry. The coldness is more in the materials than in the air itself and it is not the coldness of emotional rejection or indifference, but a matter of ceremoniousness, stateliness, and of dignity and self-respect. As the ceiling rises when the visitor arrives to the vast space of the exhibition, the stale floor becomes like a salver presenting the visitor to the exhibition or elevating her to the view. A cathedral is the only parallel I can think of: the building and the ship soar in front of the visitor like the pillars and the altars of a cathedral.

Around the ship, the exhibition branches out to occupy several floors which seem to follow the distribution of the ship's decks. Whether or not this is the case, it is the impression it gives. The floors circle the ship, coming at places considerably close to it, but there are no proper views inside the hull. The hull, although close by and seemingly within reach in its massiveness, feels closed off, out of bounds. The way it once separated the ship from the sea, it now separates the ship from the visitors. Some effort has been made: around the ship the floors are made of timber, of raw-looking planks resembling a deck of a tall ship like the *Vasa* and so they do offer a link to the ship. But somehow the connection is not complete. As I leaned on the rail thinking about the ship, its destiny, and the failure caused by cravings for glory, I look at this unfamiliar other that

is so close and yet remains withdrawn and turned away from me. It rises up in front of me but it does not rise to meet me.

The timber floor around the hull is almost as smooth as a parquet but the structure of the planks is expressed as a gentle undulation of individual boards that can be felt under ones feet. The planks used in Vasa Museum are knotted, and the knots too rise to meet the soles of the visitors's feet. Wooden floors always have a certain feeling of softness to them, in spite of the hardness of their surface; the feet of the walker seem to connect with a wooden surface more sympathetically than with other hard materials, and it has a distinct sound to it too. This way the plank floors resonate with the ship just like the cobble floor in the Medieval Museum resonates with the buildings there. The continuation of the material does help to bring the visitor into a closer contact with the ship. This physical link is augmented by the structure of the floor that allows for the planks to yield under the visitors' feet. The boards sink and rise and creak and groan softly as one walks on them. It is possible that this effect, especially the sounds, becomes prominent as the floor ages. Like in an old house, this gives the space a distinctive character, making it feel covertly animated, as having a secret life: think how alive an old house feels when one walks the rooms in the darkness of the night. The floor also enhances, though ever so lightly, the sway of the steps on it. When I realised this and concentrated on it, it made me associate it with the movement of a sailing ship as waves roll under it. Do other visitors experience this? I would think that most do not notice this sensation actively – I might be more prone to do so as I am familiar with plank floors and have a preference for them – but this does not mean that such a sensation would go unnoticed – after all, it did occur to the designers to choose the planks. If anything this kind of a wooden floor is distinctly reciprocal as it takes in and returns the motions of the visitors. It also communicates the actions between visitors: other visitors are not only seen and heard but felt as the motion of their gait gets carried over to others through the floor. This makes the other visitors more animate in their presence as I am not secluded from their activity physically but that my body reciprocates it in a soft, subtle manner. In a crowd I am forced to make room either for myself or for others, as individual bodies are forced into a conflict over space. But here – the museum has never been overly crowded when I have been there – on this floor, visitors are able to experience each other bodily over the comfort of a distance. The contact is more of an acknowledgment of each other without any particular demands.

A planked floor does not have to be like the deck-experience in the Vasa Museum. It does not have to mimic a real-life structure or experience, but the same properties – the comfort and the yield – can formulate the reciprocity of the lifeworld as ground in any case, as just a floor. In the Museum Gustavianum, the University Museum of Uppsala, in Uppsala, Sweden, the exhibition hall of



PIC 3.13 The exhibition hall displaying artefacts from the ancient Egypt and other Mediterranean cultures in Museum Gustavianum at Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden.

their collection of ancient Mediterranean artefacts has a pale grey, limed wooden floor. The construction of the floor follows the general appearance of an age-old building. Some parts of the building date all the way back to the Middle Ages but its contemporary look reflects its 18th and 19th century appearance; the museum itself celebrated its centennial in 2007.

The floor of this exhibition hall has been made, I assume, more to maintain the period characteristics of the building and not to meet the requirements of the exhibition, but it nevertheless enhances engagement. Here too the floor is animate: it creaks and yields under the visitor's feet and it feels soft and uneven to the foot. Though understated and casual, it is not without character and ambience. On another kind of floor, the exhibition would quite likely come across as more or less impersonal, perhaps much more like a storage room than a collection of intriguing, enigmatic objects (3.13, compare with 3.1). Part of this is due to the overall feeling of the hall. Its contours, colours and materials have the intended feel of neoclassicism and therefore not only the objects are interesting but the whole space – and indeed the whole building. I am not here to see individual objects in a collection but to see, to experience the whole thing. Much like I would not visit a historic manor house to see only a particular object but to experience the whole grandiosity of the place. Any interesting, peculiar objects I might find there are a part but not the whole of that experience. This attitude naturally affects how I encounter the exhibition, but I dare to claim that even without it, the floor plays a prominent role in engagement.

The floor is in fact quite mobile, so to speak. I think this may be because of the structure of the floor, assuming it truly follows period construction. I have encountered equally yielding floors in period buildings elsewhere. In fact, the floor is so yielding that some of the vitrines on it shiver ever so slightly as one walks past them. Not only the other visitors but the objects, the space itself reciprocates your movements. The floor animates the stationary things on it; the floor brings me into a bodily contact with the untouchable artefacts and they appear as more subjective bodies in the lifeworld I perceive. To tell the truth, I must question my memory here. Does the floor really relay my motions so readily? Did my feet

really make the vitrines shiver? It seems unwise and against museum logic to place fragile items of pottery on such a floor. What ever the truth may have been, I did walk very carefully around the room. The floor made me careful, acutely aware of my path amongst the artefacts. It was the floor, I am sure, that made me pay more attention to the situation, to the encounters I had. My memory of that space is very rooted, the presence of the floor is considerable in comparison to other rooms in Museum Gustavianum or in most other museums. The plane of the floor felt like a unifying element, a common ground for coming together. The sounds of the floor may have enhanced this experience as I could hear other visitors moving in and beyond the periphery of my vision. The slow creaks disclosed their presence and the contemplative manner of their movement and consequently, the nature of their mental state, or so I imagined.

A floor itself does not have to be so responsive for it to create an expression of movement, as my experience of the ship *Fram* demonstrated. The Kon-Tiki Museum right next to the Fram Museum takes visitors on the adventure-



PIC 3.14 The view of the Ra II from the entrance area in the Kon-Tiki Museum in Oslo, Norway.



PIC 3.15 The Ra II seen from the back of the first exhibition hall of the Kon-Tiki Museum.

like expeditions of Thor Heyerdahl, a Norwegian anthropologist (1914-2002), around the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans. Though the museum is named after Heyerdahl's first vessel, the balsa wood raft *Kon-Tiki*, the visitors are greeted by his third vessel, the papyrus raft *Ra II* (2.14, prev. page). It is an impressive sight and functions well as an introduction to the exhibitions: it captures the imagination and attention of the fascinated visitor.

It feels safe to assume that most of the first time visitors begin their visit by walking along the *Ra II* as it will engage their attention. The vessel is engrossing in its size and its unfamiliar structure; it seems amazing to think that such a thing could have been built from simple papyrus reeds. It is loaded with different kinds of containers and gears for the expedition. The exhibit is enhanced with lighting and with a perplexingly simple and obvious arrangement of cloth as an analog for oceanic depths, but on first sight it does in fact feel like the raft was moving on them, rocking gently on the waves. The effect is graceful, fluid, and definitely more a sensation than a full experience. It exists more in the character of the vessel than in the experience of movement; it adds a touch of lived life to the oceangoing nature of the craft, making it seem like it was at sea than instead of being in a museum. It is as if instead of standing next to the *Ra II* in a museum, the two of you had met far out on the high seas and were watching each other pass.

The lighting of the *Ra II* helps create the impression of an ongoing voyage. The colour of light changes gently and with time from the warm yellow sun-

shine of the day into the cool bluish moonlight of the night. The change is so smooth and gradual that I did not realise it at first, but felt baffled as I turned back towards the ship only to find it somehow significantly different from what it was on my first look. It seems somehow silly, but I could not put my finger on what the difference was until the light changed in front of my eyes. But lighting is not the key to the sensation of a voyage. It is, again, the floor. Here the effect the floor creates is not produced by the material of which the floor is made. The floor here is smooth and made of modern material, very much like an airport floor, but around the *Ra II* it does create an impression of movement through its structure. The raft comes alive only as the visitor walks along it for the floor is in fact slanted, leaning in gently towards the back of the exhibition hall. It not only slopes but rises and falls in a wave-like manner, although only just enough to be felt without creating any hindrance. A visitor is not likely to take much notice of this at first, if at all. There is no danger of tripping and falling over: the contour of the floor does not require any special attention from a walker. This subtleness of the contour is, I believe, an essential quality: a more pronounced roll would distract the visitor and guide her attention to the floor as the visitor might feel unbalanced and a more gentle roll would probably go completely unnoticed. I suppose that some visitors might not necessarily notice the wave at all. Having said that, this does not mean that it would not still add something to the experience of the *Ra II*.

I cannot help but wonder how much was my experience on board the *Fram* influenced by my experience with the *Ra II*? Before turning to the left and the Fram Museum, I did think a lot and had thought a lot about visiting the Kon-Tiki Museum and the experiences I had had there. Was my mind preset to the experiences of seafaring? It must have been, but to what extent? How about the ferry ride over to the museums? Most visitors probably do arrive on the ferry as it docks right by the museums and there are waves in the fjord even on calm days. It is likely that the movement of the ferry leaves an impression, a memory trace, into our consciousness, and that even a slightest hint is enough to make our bodies assume that we are, possibly, on-board again. If this is so, and I see no reason why it would not be likely, it goes to show how early on the experiences preceding an actual museum visit begin to influence our experiences.

All the floors are embellished to address us bodily, through our senses of balance and touch, rely on our sympathetic ability. It could be said that they are invocations of sympathetic magic used to entice our imagination: the cobbled floor is like the real, contemporary cobbled streets which in turn are like the cobbled streets hundreds of years ago. Their success requires the visitor's ability and willingness to form and experience instinctive associations and parallels. 'The world is reflected in the body, and the body is projected onto the world,' writes Pallasmaa in *The Eyes of the Skin – Architecture and the Senses*. 'We

remember through our bodies as much as through our nervous system and brain.¹¹⁵ During our lifetime, our bodies collect and record a vast collection of bodily experiences for future reference. When we experience something that is even slightly familiar or something that has enough similarities with a previous experience, it is not only our mental memory that reacts but our whole body. Is this why some places we visit for the first time feel so familiar, why we feel so at home in a new environment? Is there something in the environment that hints familiarity through our subconsciousness? Because of memories evoked by scents and sounds and sights, we are able to say that this tastes like the soup Granny used to make, sounds like uncle's bike, or looks like a bowl we had back then. But are we not less skilled in recognising and describing the bodily experiences of the past? We may remember the massiveness of a rock we used to climb as a child only to discover, to our disappointment, that it never was the mountain we imagined it to be but a puny stone. These kinds of instances reveal how much our bodily state affects our experiences: our bodies still remember the mountain, its height and the effort it took to ascend it, even when it now barely reaches the height of our hips. This, the body's memory, can be addressed through subtle cues in the environment and beguiled into projecting onto the world sympathetically.

3.8 Creating the Thickness of a Place

In *Place and Space – The Perspective of Experience*, Yi-Fu Tuan defines a place as a pause in space, as 'a special kind of object. It is a concentration of value, though not a valued thing that can be handled or carried about easily; it is an object in which we can dwell.'¹¹⁶ If we are to establish a museum exhibition as a habitat, a place known and lived as natives and not merely as outsiders, as tourists, we must be able to create in an experience this concentration of value. Tuan continues:

An object or place achieves concrete reality when our experience of it is total, that is, through all the senses as well as with the active and reflective mind.

Long residence enables us to know a place intimately, yet its image may lack sharpness unless we can also see it from the outside and reflect upon our experience. Another place we may lack *the weight of the reality* because we know it only from the outside – though the eyes as the tourist, and from reading about it in a guidebook.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Pallasmaa (2008), p. 45.

¹¹⁶ Tuan (2008), p. 12.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 18. Italics my own.

The exhibitions that I have discussed so far fulfil the requirements Tuan mentions in the first quote: they all are places that are experienced through all the senses, even the sense of smell which usually receives rather little active attention in the execution of museum exhibitions in general. The Vasa Museum has a particular scent to it due to the presence of the preserved ship and the *Fram* reeks of diesel and tar¹¹⁸, but even that is more of a side-effect or something that just comes with the ship. Nevertheless, even the faintest scents can carry profound meaning and be crucial for the atmosphere and the sense of place. In every other way these exhibitions are total experiences; they surround their visitors more or less intensely. Tuan goes on to write about long residence and how it enables us to know a place intimately.

When space feels thoroughly familiar to us, it has become place. Kinesthetic and perceptual experiences as well as the ability to form concepts are required for the change (...).¹¹⁹

Tuan appears to be suggesting that familiarity, which I understand as an attribute of a habitat, is something that can be described as *the weight of reality*, meaning, as I understand it, those layers of the lifeworld consisting of the everyday or ordinary tasks, habits, feelings, and experiences that exist on the very surface of the earth. A long residency increases the amount of memories and experiences we have of particular places. This increases, as does the significance of individual experiences, the overall value of that place. Places of value have a thickness to them. Places are accumulations, stratum of experiences. A home, for example, is a larger place consisting of smaller places created by the inhabitants' routines and gaining weight or thickness as their residency continues. Their movements create invisible paths within the space of home as repeated activities become localities, or as Tuan puts it:

¹¹⁸ A friend of mine, who is a museum guide, used to work in a museum that exhibited, among other things, several old wooden tar barrels. She told me that she often let the visitors partaking in a guided tour to smell the tar from a miniature casket she carried with her for that purpose, for the old barrels no longer smelled of tar. Every once in a while, however, a visitor would enter the room only to turn around on her heels and explain that she was extremely sensitive to smells and scents, and that the barrels had such a potent smell of tar that they would give her a migraine were she to enter the room. I would imagine that there are many visitors to *Fram* who leave feeling nauseous because of the stench: it was almost overwhelming even to me. Smells are hard to manage and some allergic people may react to scents, which makes the inclusion of smells into an exhibition difficult.

¹¹⁹ Tuan (2008), p. 73.

Remove the walls and the roof and it immediately becomes apparent that such local stations as desk and kitchen sink are themselves important places connected by an intricate path, pauses in movement, markers in routine and circular time.¹²⁰

In other words, if we were to mark all our movements on the floor plan of our homes and then remove the image of the floor plan, we would be left with a picture of our residency as a web of paths in which the position of local stations could be seen as an increased overlapping of paths, as thickness of the line.¹²¹ The paths of our co-inhabitants could be added on that plan in different colour, and suddenly the structure of our tribal life would become visible. The distribution of the footmarks would indicate which local stations function as common areas, which as more private ones; which two individuals tend to share their space; and which inhabitants take most care of particular household tasks. In this way there is a pattern to our lives.

The previous examples in this chapter have their potential for engagement in their heightened tactility, and I have suggested that such floors are somewhat successful attempts to merge the lifeworld of the visitor and the subject matter of the exhibition. The situation, however, is not as simple as this. While a smooth-surfaced floor may be less palpable than a textured one, it nevertheless can act as the earth, as a level of encountering, as a path in the grass of the exhibition.

One of the permanent exhibitions in The Museum Centre Vapriikki in Tampere, Finland is *Tampere 1918*, an exhibition about the Finnish civil war and in particular its biggest battle and, indeed, until then the biggest inland battle in northern Europe, that engulfed the city of Tampere in April 1918.¹²² The civil war was fought between the socialist forces supported by the Soviet Russian Republic, or Reds, and the non-socialist government forces supported by the German Empire, or Whites. At the beginning of the war the Reds took hold of southern Finland as most of their troops consisted of industrial and agricultural workers of that area. The Whites were left in control of the more rural and sparsely populated western and northern Finland, where people had more conservative political inclinations. The war was relatively short, lasting from the 27th of January until the 16th of May 1918, merely a few months into independence gained at the end of 1917, but the fighting and its aftereffects that divided the nation – civil wars never seem to end without barbarism and trauma – lasted for decades. Its ripples can sometimes be seen even today. Vapriikki, however, is known for its spirited and daring attitude towards exhibiting. The

¹²⁰ Ibid., p.182.

¹²¹ Kevin Lynch's seminal work *The Image of a City* (1960) shows how inhabitants form mental maps of the cities they live in.

¹²² The webpage of the exhibit can be found at <http://vapriikki.net/tampere1918/en>



PIC 3.16 View from the first part of the exhibition *Tampere 1918* towards its end which is the large screen at the very back of the space. Feet of a corpse with grey, woollen socks can be seen protruding from beneath the blanket in the sleigh. The Museum Centre Vapriikki, Tampere, Finland.

history of Tampere as a modern industrial city is impossible to conceive without mentioning the civil war, for the city was an important Red stronghold. The exhibition won a Special Commendation in the European Museum of the Year Award in 2011 and it truly is an exceptional exhibition. It not only manages to address an issue that is still, perhaps surprisingly, a difficult topic and a source of heated discussions in Finland which means that not many museums have dared to tackle it. Instead of a political side, the exhibition takes the side of human experience and the suffering any war causes on all parties.

The exhibition space is a one long rectangle (3.16). Gentle divisions protruding from the walls suggest the three sections of the exhibition: Tampere before the war, the battle and the civil war in general, and finally the punitive measures and prison camps after the war. There is no obvious, visible timeline in the exhibition or a clear order of reading. The progression of the events is partly a result of the shape of the hall and the fact that there are no side roads for the visitor to take; the general direction of movement is obvious and imperative. The pale, off-white floor is also a clear indication of space available for movement as a level of access.

The creators of the exhibition have taken the floor literally as the ground. They have used it as a narrative tool to indicate the intensity of events and their locations. The floor is composed of photographs of footprints and other tracks



PIC 3.17 The floor of the first part of *Tampere 1918*. Only a few tracks but a greater number of twigs, hay and other small natural objects.

and impressions as well as sticks and other miscellaneous things. At the beginning of the narrative, during the months prior to the war, the floor is white, covered in snow as these were the weeks of winter, with only a few tracks here and there (3.17). However, the whiteness of the floor as snow is obvious to me as a Finn and a habitant of a northern country with four distinctive seasons and a 'proper' snowy winter, but is it obvious to everyone? Probably not since recognising the white as snow and not as blank requires knowledge and experience of a snow-covered ground. But although snow carries particular practical and symbolical meaning to us who are familiar with it, reading it as a blank canvas that slowly begins to fill up with history is not necessarily counterproductive. As the time passes and the distance, time's symbol¹²³, between the visitor and the entrance increases and the war draws nearer, the tracks on snow become more frequent and become increasingly muddled. By the time the battle starts, the snow has become scrambled with the signs of a battle. The disorder and chaos of the tracks can be seen as analogous to the chaos and the madness of the war. It can be seen as a symbol of the mental state of a nation fighting a civil war.

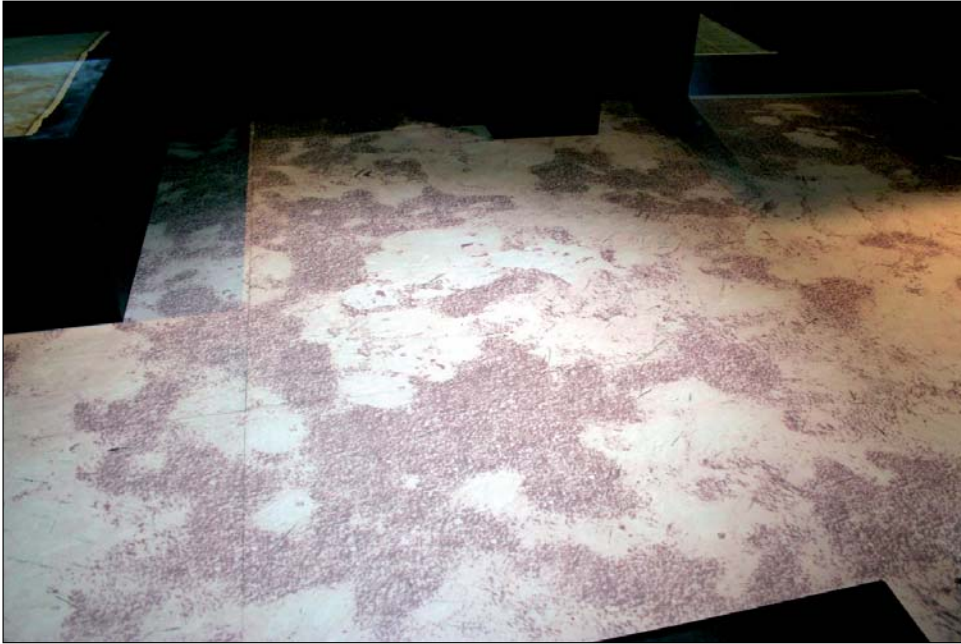
¹²³ See Tuan (2008), p. 119: 'Distance, unlike length, is not a pure spatial concept; it implies time.'



PIC 3.18 The floor of the middle part of *Tampere 1918*. Snow has given way to the cobbled streets of Tampere where, rather interestingly, only a few signs of human habitation can be found.

In the middle of the exhibition, at the point where the battle reaches a critical moment as the White forces push the Reds back and the fighting takes to the streets, the snow has been replaced with the cobbled streets of Tampere (3.18). There are no signs of life in the photographs used to texturise the floor, only hard-wearing, indifferent stones. All the action is now in the vitrines, in the soundscape and in the texts; it has risen away from the ground level to surround the visitor. While in the earlier parts of the exhibition the activities preceding the war were more abstract and immaterial, and indicated more by the floor than the objects, here the actions and consequences are more concrete and require less abstract thought. Individual exhibits here are filled with things that are broken, shattered, and dead. The only clear indication of the events on the floor are the blood stains in front of the firing squad's barrels, the position of the condemned into which the visitor is guided unsuspectingly. The results of warfare are concrete and tangible, and less imagination is required to visualise the war-torn town. In my experience (I have visited it several times), the increased concreteness leaves more room for empathy and other feelings, which increases the power of the exhibition as a lesson in morality and humanity, and also as a politically nonaligned, impartial depiction of the events.

In the final part of the exhibition, the cobbled street once again turns gradually into a more natural image of the ground (3.19, following page). Here the snow is melting as spring progresses and the fighting ceases. The closer to



PIC 3.19 The floor in the final part of *Tampere 1918*. The image of a street is replaced with an image of melting snow and earth mirroring the passage of time. This part tells about the events after the battle in May and the early summer.

the end the visitor gets, the less snow there is on the ground as grass and gravel take its place. The uniformity and constancy of snow is replaced by the visual constancy of the grass and gravel with details getting lost into the multitude. This is a visual relief from the more structured and somehow noisy impression of the cobbles. A world and time of chaos and confusion is turned into spring, a visually more open, optimistic and contemplative space; the soundscape of gunfire and shouted commands is replaced with birdsong. This is in contrast with the events at that time. The end of the civil war was followed with prison camps and hasty, ill-advised military tribunals and death sentences, hunger and segregation that lead to decades of estrangement among the people. The floor relieves the anxiety and sadness of the events. Spring is here and good things will follow. Eventually.

Although the floor of *Tampere 1918* is uniform and monotonous in texture in comparison to the floors of previous examples, it still appears to affect the visitor bodily. It achieves this effect, I believe, mainly through the peripheral field. Firstly, the whiteness of the floor contrasts strongly with the near black walls. This divides the visual field in two: the dark walls that in their darkness withdraw from the visitor, and the light floor which expands into a level or a plane as it pushes the walls further back, forming a kind of a plateau on which the

events unfurl once the visitor steps on it. Secondly, the photographic, somewhat ornamental floor contrasts with the featureless walls, and the eye is drawn towards diversity, even the peripheral vision. This is not an articulated gaze or perception but more of a subliminal acknowledgement, a feeling of something being present. There is something more to the floor in the exhibition than to an ordinary floor, a visual firmness, perhaps. Overall, the floor seems to be more there in this exhibition than in many others. As shown, it has more symbolic value and thickness to it as the paths of the past still show on it. Its visual weight has come to indicate the weight of reality.

The third reason why the floor of *Tampere 1918* has a certain tactility beyond the ordinary smooth floors is that it plays on the integration of senses. As Tuan pointed out in an earlier quote, most tactile sensations do reach us indirectly through the eyes. It is very hard not to interpret a visual observation of, let's say, a couch without including tactile interpretations and qualities to it; we almost unavoidably see its softness, feel the touch of the fabric, and imagine the sensations of sitting in it. We do not sense the sensory data but the world and its objects. It goes without saying that the more tactile, embodied experiences we associate, however unconsciously, with an object of our visual perception, the more tactile is our experience of it even without touching. Similar kinds of forces are at play in case of a ground or a floor. Much of what we perceive under our feet goes unnoticed by our conscious mind, but it seems to me that we pay a lot of unconscious attention to the surface we walk on. Our movement, after all, depends on our ability to adjust our steps to the shapes of the ground. We don't usually look where we walk but we can still avoid stones, rubbish, and such. The signs that indicate a change on the surface of the ground are picked up by the peripheral of our senses; it takes note of things we do not see. If I walk along a forest path in the dark, I will not see its obstacles and curvature if I look at it directly, but if I look slightly too much ahead with my focused vision, my light sensitive peripheral vision can easily discern the stones, roots and other forest floor debris that threaten my step. It requires practice and courage to trust that you can see without looking, but it is a trick worth trying. The peripheral plots our course as we carry on the conversation with our friend on our walk; it tells our body to adjust. A good design of a single step on a floor or in a garden is indicated by changes just subtle enough for our consciousness to register. If we find ourselves looking purposefully at a step in order to navigate it, something has gone amiss (or we are too tired or old or carrying too heavy a load to rely on our peripheral vision).

Let me illustrate this with an experience of hiking. After my first proper hike in the shadow of the Isle of Sky's famous Cuillins, a mountain ridge, I was surprised how tired I was after walking only about ten kilometres on a relatively level ground. We had followed the paths in Glen Sligachan which leads into the heart of the Cuillins. The route did not demand much attention on di-

rections but it did demand much effort from the mind. The path, while being rather level, is littered with stones of varying sizes, from pebbles to smallish boulders and everything in between. Every step is different. Every contact your feet make with the ground requires new adjustments from your body, making it impossible to find a constant, steady rhythm for the walk. However, the path is not so tricky that you would actively have to think of every step in advance; you do have time to look further away and let your mind wander in the surrounding magnificence. The tiredness that followed that evening was not so much a result of physical exertion but of mental fatigue. My mind had spent so much energy and effort in reading the ground while my focused vision had spent most of its time observing the wider scenery. Even today my memory of Glen Sligachan is earthbound and very tactile, embodied. I suppose that this is because it was my first experience of a ground and my body had to learn how to navigate on such terrain. My memories of later hikes and walks on similar terrain in Scotland are less earthbound and focused on the whole scenery.

The ground, or the floor, is a persuasive and yet a covert way of affecting someone's experience and thinking through the body, specifically through proprioception. Our contact with the ground is so consistent and faithful that in our daily experience we have become accustomed to it to such an extent that we rarely notice its existence, except when it is pushed into our consciousness as an uneven footing, a hard seat, or as a luxurious carpet. The potency of walking has been recognised and utilised especially in the eastern meditation practices where walking on, preferably, an even ground or floor is used as an assistance in the pursuit of a meditative state of mind. The practitioner is supposed to concentrate on the sensation of walking, especially on how her feet come in contact with the ground as she paces, often repeatedly back and forth, becoming slowly aware of the multitude of sensations hidden within this mundane exercise. It is therefore not so surprising that in traditional Japanese gardens, which are very contemplative, a lot of thought has been put on stepping stones, which in western gardening have been considered, as Christopher Thacker put it, 'unconsidered trifles (...), mere means of avoiding the mud.'¹²⁴ Japanese garden designers realised that the way we walk, the manner with which our body moves in space, not only indicates our state of mind but can affect our mind and outlook:

¹²⁴ Thacker, Christopher (1992) *The History of Gardens*, 1st published 1979, University of California Press, Berkeley & Los Angeles, p. 76.

Not only do they [the stepping stones] indicate our path, but their spacing and grouping dictate our pace and attitude. If the stones are small and placed close together, we may, for example, walk carefully, giving our attention to the stones themselves; if we reach a large broad stone, we may stop to look up and admire the new prospect which is before us.¹²⁵

Thacker also pointed out that *roji*, one name for the tea garden within which formal tea ceremonies take place, has several meanings that are all applicable to the garden: 'narrow path or alley', 'on the way', 'while walking', and 'dewy ground or path'.¹²⁶ This illustrates the importance of the tea garden around the tea pavilion. The purpose of the garden is to guide the participants' minds to the waiting ceremony, to help them leave the everyday world behind and to reach an aesthetically oriented state of mind suitable for the spirituality of the tea ceremony. The tea garden and the pavilion form an aesthetic field and in this field the path through the garden, the act of approaching and the route assigned to it, is the key element for the creation of the aesthetic state of mind. Complex rules govern the selection and the laying of the stepping stones for a tea garden, as Thacker reminded:

(...) naturally, the size, texture and colour of the stones become immensely important, since they form the physical basis of the *roji*, the 'dewy path', and are in a literal sense so constantly before our eyes.¹²⁷

The significance of the level of the earth is not just in the way it affects our gait and demeanour or bearing. As said, the concept of earth and our apprehension of it has considerable influence on our thinking and culture. Notions and perceptions of such things as up and down, horizontal and vertical, and here and there exist and function with the level of the earth as their frame of reference – although the experience of gravity does play a part in this. In this chapter I tried to keep my focus *on* the earth and its character as a kind of plane or plateau in space. Just like it is not simply the path of stones that leads to the tea pavilion but the entirety of the tea garden, the engagement in museum exhibitions is affected by the entire architectonics, the spatiality of the place. The floor is, obviously, not the whole picture, but it is the level against which other elements can be studied and understood. The things of the world gain meaning and significance from their relation to the earth and to the perceiving subject, and vice versa. How this takes place and what forms it takes is the next question.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ 'Dewy path' is a Buddhist concept, the place of rebirth 'where one is reborn after escaping from the furnace of worldly desires.' Ibid.

4 COMING INTO THE PRESENCE OF THINGS

The world does not show up as presented on a viewing screen; it shows up as the situation in which we find ourselves.

Alva Noë:
*Varieties of Presence*¹

We do not exist by ourselves on the planes of the lifeworld. We live amongst other subjects, surrounded by things and objects, and these others – whether alive or not – are part of the lifeworld. They are discernible against the world-horizon². How do we come into contact with the things of the world? How do we become engaged with them and the world? The world is present and available to us, writes Alva Noë: ‘It shows up as within reach, as more or less nearby, as more or less present’ but ‘it is not something that happens to us,’ but something that we do and achieve in conjunction with the world.³ The things in a museum exhibition are displayed intentionally, they are actively presented for the visitors to experience. Or in other words, the objects are placed into the museum-horizon.

Noë calls the human experience ‘a dance that unfolds in the world and with others’⁴, but how can a museum stage a setting that can encourage engagement in this dance, for in a dance, by definition, there are no passive, non-participative members? Not even the audience of a dance performance is as passive as it seems. The mirror neurones of the spectators’ motor cortices react

¹ Noë, Alva (2012) *Varieties of Presence*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA/ London, p. 3.

² See e.g., Husserl (2011), p. 133.

³ Noë (2009) *Out of Our Heads*, pp. 141 and 64 respectively.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

to the dancers' movements and allow them to understand and empathise⁵ with the actions of the dancers.⁶ So it seems that we cannot observe dancing without dancing (in a very loose sense) ourselves, but why even assume that viewers are passive in the first place? Furthermore, Noë criticises the traditional concept of perception, calling it misguided in 'the way it presents us as in experience cut off from the world, as confined, e.g., to mere sensation or appearance.'⁷ The traditional way of museum exhibitions seem to follow this thought: the visitor is confined into the space or void between the displays or vitrines, just as her consciousness and perception have been considered to be confined inside her head, in a setting reminiscent of Plato's famous cave. But if Noë is right and we are 'out of our heads', as he puts it, then full engagement takes place in an environment where things are not presented to us, but where we come to be in their presence. Objects and things in museum exhibitions can therefore not be framed simply for viewing, but should rather be presented as situations of sharing.

For me, one of the most engaging museum settings is the installation-like display, *The Marine Biodiversity* (4.1), which opens the main permanent exhibition of the Natural History Museum in Helsinki, Finland.⁸ It takes up a fairly small room – long, narrow, and high – and resembles a corridor or a passage in every possible way. It is an introduction to the subject at hand, the diversity of habitats and the inhabiting species, and it performs this task by producing an embodied, embracing experience of encountering, something not unlike a dance.

The configuration of the space makes it difficult to view the whole of the exhibit at once. As soon as you enter, part of the exhibit will always be left behind your back and there is no clear neutral zone from where to observe the exhibit as a whole. In this way, *The Marine Biodiversity* is a moment and a place

⁵ This brings to mind the late 19th century concept of *Einfühlung*.

⁶ 'Mirror neurone', while being a well known and popular concept in neuroscience and cognitive psychology, is not an undisputedly clear concept. While it is true that certain brain activity of an observer mirrors the act of the observed person (say, watching somebody jump makes the neurones linked to the act of jumping fire in one's own brain, without them having to actually jump at all), it is disputable whether or not the neurones in question are a separate class of neurones at all. The phenomenon does exist but its true nature is not yet absolutely clear. However, it has also been suggested that mirror neurones are not there just for learning by imitating but they actually play a role in understanding the intentions of others, in empathy, and perhaps even in language and consciousness itself. See e.g., Cattaneo, Luigi; Rizzolatti, Giacomo (2009) 'The Mirror Neuron System', *Archives of Neurology*, May/2009, vol. 66, no. 5, pp. 557-560 at <http://archneur.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=796996>.

⁷ Noë (2012), p. 4.

⁸ This section of the chapter 3 is partly based on my article 'Artification in Natural History Museums' in *Contemporary Aesthetics*, Special Volume 4 (2012).

PIC 4.1

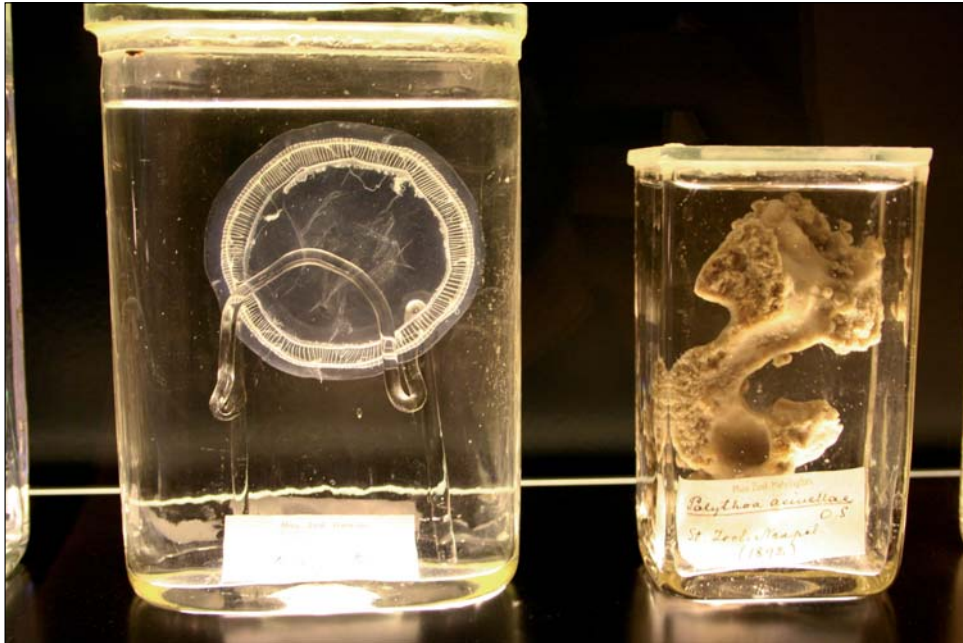
The multitude of sea creatures of the Marine Biodiversity exhibit baffles a visitor in The Natural History Museum, Helsinki, Finland.



where the world of the *Wildlife of the World* exhibition is connected to our daily world through a narrow passage. At least I experience a concentration of meaning as a beginning of a process, as a physical act of entering a place of particular attention and presence by moving through the passage. Much of this effect is due to the proportions of the space in comparison to the proportions of an average human: the height of the ceiling makes it feel more like a dome than a regular ceiling, a sense of an expanse rather than a confine; the width of the space is narrow enough to always bring you into contact with something in just a few steps so that you are constantly aware of your spatial position. It is a width that cocoons. Movement in this place is very much like a dance: it always brings you into closer contact with objects while making you aware of the increased distance to the objects left to your peripheral world. Even the slightest shift of weight from one foot to another can cause the view to change.

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The right-hand side of the exhibit is strikingly plain with an unassuming map of the world, a few light-coloured lines of writing and two stuffed fish and a porpoise placed high above the map. The arrangement is so modest that I needed to check the photographs I had taken to see whether my recollection of the stuffed creatures was truthful. On the left-hand side is *The Wall of Sea Life*, as I like to call it, with its surface painted dark and filled with a multitude of sea creatures on clear plexiglass shelves: seashells, coral, fish, all kinds of dry and wet specimens from floor to ceiling – a swarm of creatures that is almost over-



PIC 4.2 Some of the strange, other-worldly creatures inhabiting *The Wall of Sea Life* in the Natural History Museum, Helsinki.

whelming. They are all lit by a mysterious light that seems to come from nowhere in particular, yet leaves every specimen lighted for the viewer's convenience. From the ceiling, high above the entering visitors, hangs a further set of stuffed sea creatures which move gently in the flow of air conditioning. At the end of the hallway is a habitat diorama with a polar bear reaching deep into a hole in the ice, trying to grab an escaping seal – a very dramatic and lifelike arrangement, the affective power of which lies in placing the visitor underneath the ice sheet with the seal (see 4.1). In this space the visitor is clearly positioned as an oceanic creature.

The most impressive and engrossing part of this introductory exhibit is *The Wall of Sea Life* (hereafter referred to as The Wall). It is a swarm of beings arranged into groups that initially allude to the classical natural historical way of exhibiting. The sea shells are arranged in a way that is closer to a still life than to a scientific categorisation. There are weird glass-like creatures of transparent bodies floating in liquid (4.2); corals and starfish – one of which seems to wave its arm at the visitors; fish, crabs, medusas, and in the bottom right-hand corner the tiny sea turtle babies in glass containers, a pair of them in one jar hugging each other in their death (4.3). The Wall is captivating in its plenitude, its overwhelmingness engages the mind, making one want to turn towards it. Somehow everything, even the most repulsive creatures, is transformed and made fascinating. This may be partly because the huge vitrine is so narrow that you can see every creature within reach so close up that even tiny details become

PIC 4.3

The jar containing two juvenile, approximately 10 cm long sea turtles, detail. The Wall, The Natural History Museum, Helsinki.



discernible. A visitor may enter the creatures' intimate space, the distance typically reserved for the most personal encounters. Or it could be described as the portrait painter's distance to her subject, the distance defined by artist Maurice Grosser in *The Painter's Eye*:

At this distance the painter is near enough so that his eyes have no trouble in understanding the sitter's solid forms (...) Here, at the normal distance of social intimacy and easy conversation, the sitter's soul begins to appear.⁹

Grosser did determine this distance as between four to eight feet but with the Wall, visitors have no choice but to get even closer. Grosser called this distance the sculptor's distance, the distance of touch:

(...) at touching distance, the sitter's personality is too strong. The influence of the model on the painter is too powerful, too disturbing to the artist's necessary detachment, touching distance being not the position of visual rendition, but of motor reaction of some physical expression of sentiment, like fisticuffs, or the various acts of love.¹⁰

⁹ Grosser, Maurice (1951) *The Painter's Eye*, Rinehart & Co., New York. Quoted in Hall, Edvard T. (1969) *The Hidden Dimension*, Anchor Books/Doubleday & Co. Inc., New York, p. 78. No reference to original page numbers given.

¹⁰ Ibid.

In the case of *The Wall*, it certainly seems to hold that there is no room for necessary detachment. Every time I see *The Wall*, I feel the need to study the creatures, to peer into the jars. Somehow I am convinced that there is always something new to see and discover, as I feel the pull of the oceans. I study the features of the creatures, try to peer at the specimens on the shelves above my reach and become frustrated as I cannot make out the details. Emotions and sensations become more prominent. Especially the baby sea turtles – I do not wish to call them juvenile or by any other expression more scientific and detached – engage my soul and my imagination. The baby turtles are, as all reptilian offsprings are, tiny copies of their adult forms, if only ‘cuter’ by proportions. I find it – even when looking at the photograph – very difficult not to let them affect me even when I try very hard to see them exclusively as specimens and not as tiny, dead babies, but to no avail. The two turtles embracing in the pale liquid of a single container are particularly moving and engaging; they glow in the warm light in a gentle searchlight emanating from beneath and framing them against the dark background as if to suspend them in the oceanic depths where they should be. In my eyes, in my sentiments, they become individuals, sadly dead like no specimen in a natural history collection should ever be. In fact, it has become impossible for me to see those turtles as specimens. I can no longer study their features and see them as examples featuring the shared attributes of all sea turtles. For me those features are now faces, and my imagination conjures up stories of their short lives and the lives they could have lived.

This sensation of closeness and of an encounter on a personal level applies to most if not all the specimens on display, providing that I explore them with time and in sufficient detail and have the necessary access to them. How deep or far-reaching, both figuratively and quite literally, this experience is depends not only on the physical setting and the presented information, but on my personal scope of knowledge, knowing and imagination. Certainly, the baby turtles appear as ‘cute’ to me because I am human and as such I have sensitivity to such ‘baby cuteness’ hardwired in my being on a biological level. However the skill, if you will, to imagine the dark depths of the ocean is not a similar ability. The depth and the reach of the engagement, the fact that I can experience, in a way, the oceanic world behind the baby turtles, is a result of my prior knowledge and familiarity with the oceanic habitat through books, documentaries, and lived experiences of it. I am able to access the larger concept of the (oceanic) world because I have a particular set of tools for doing so. On this level, my personal experience is not readily applicable to all visitors, it cannot serve as a universal model, though I am certain that any visitor who knows what an ocean is and can read or have someone read the labels for her is able to come up with a similar train of thought. This must be kept in mind during this chapter: while my experiences are certainly coloured by my personal history, they spring from

seeds that are shareable. Some of the seeds form the knowledge prior to the visitation while other seeds are planted in the situation and through the architecture in particular. Not all of this architecture concerns the building, the room, or the space; much of it concerns the structure and the structuring of the situation which, of course, is often achieved through space and placement.

4.1 Depth and Presence

Before presenting examples of engaging encounters and pondering upon how they have been designed, I find it necessary to elaborate on a concept I have already mentioned on several occasions, including the title of the previous chapter, namely 'presence'. Engagement is crucially about presence, about being in the presence of things, objects, and the world. This is, as said, a reciprocal state of affairs, an ecstasy in the sense of the ancient Greeks, to use Csíkszentmihályi's description. Describing presence in this way gives it a mystical, even otherworldly tinge which may make one sceptical. Mystical and spiritual experiences often include, for sure, a sensation of a presence or of oneness with the world, for example, but the experience of being in the presence of things is not in itself necessarily mystical. What I mean with 'presence' is being present or in the presence both physically, meaning that I am physically present in a situation, and mentally, that my mind is directed towards the situation and its objects. It is an instance of encounter and connection that manifests physically, mentally, and emotionally; it is triggered, first of all, by the experiencer being open to the experience, but also by the environment.

In 'The Power of Presence: the *Cradle to Grave* Installation at the British Museum'¹¹, Camilla Mordhorst analyses and describes an exhibit quite similar to *The Wall*, with the exception that the *Cradle to Grave* (from here on *The Cradle*) by the art group *Pharmacopoeia* is an established art work, an installation that is part of the popular, award-winning exhibition, the British Museum's *Living and Dying* gallery.¹² Mordhorst's article includes a detailed description of the installation, but for my purpose it is sufficient to say that *The Cradle* is a 13-meter-long, low, table-like glass case containing two lengths of fabric, one representing the life of an unknown woman, the other that of a man. On each fabric over 14000 tablets, pills, capsules, et cetera have been arranged chronologically

¹¹ Mordhorst, Camilla (2009) 'The Power of Presence: the 'Cradle to Grave' Installation at the British Museum', *Museum and Society*, November 2009, vol. 7, no. 3, pp. 194-205.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 194. www.cradletograde.org offers a detailed representation of the installation, including some photos of the exhibition space itself.

to represent the medication an average British citizen takes over their lifetime. Situated along the lengths of the fabric lay various ordinary objects from photographs to condoms. All the items are intimate and personal. Handwritten captions provide explanations for each particular photograph: 'Dec. 99. Terry's beads trim by Rosie – probably 4 weeks from death from cancer at this point.'¹³ All this is surrounded by the rest of the exhibition, by objects and artefacts of life and death from all around the world in airy glass-and-steel-vitrines.

Despite the fact that one is recognised as a work of art and the other is not, *The Cradle* and *The Wall* have much in common. They both rely on the act of laying out a representative part of the components of a complex system – the medical life history of a person and the biodiversity of oceans, respectively. Both display a visual organisation that represents and visualises something non-visual – the passage of time/life and the taxonomy of oceanic species/ecosystems. Both have adopted a visual style that bears resemblance to the way objects of scientific interest are often displayed. Both, though they do include scientific information as texts – names of the medicines/species – have an air of silence or muteness about them. And finally, judging by the visitors' reactions, both are engaging and well-liked.

Mordhorst suggests that the success of the exhibition and the installation can be explained through 'presence,' a concept she draws from the literary theorist Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht. According to Mordhorst, the installation allows a visitor to perceive the course of life as an extension in space instead of a more conventional understanding of life as an extension of time, where '[t]he abstract ordering of the life course in time is replaced with a concrete physical length of a fabric in a room.'¹⁴ This happens, according to Mordhorst, because the installation makes the visitor 'enter' the life course when she walks along the lengths of the fabric at her own pace and choosing.¹⁵ One no longer looks into the installation from the outside or over a distance. The life course one observes flows and evolves precisely because the visitor moves and as new things become first visible and then encountered, and as things already seen are left behind.

In Mordhorst's view, with which I concur, it is this self-directed interaction with material presence that creates an experience of life more through senses than through abstract acknowledgement.¹⁶ She draws her inspiration from the geographer Johannes Gabriel Granö's argument that if a landscape is to be understood properly, it is 'necessary to identify the perceived landscape in its *im-*

¹³ Ibid., p. 197. There is probably a spelling mistake in Mordhorst's original caption. 'Beard' would make much more sense.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 196.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 197.

¹⁶ Ibid.

mediate incalculable presence (...),¹⁷ that is, as material life experienced and comprehended (or understood as Noë would, perhaps, put it) through the senses. Also, neither *The Cradle* nor *The Wall* offer any particular explanations for the cause of the objects' existence, 'but simply expose[s] the presence of our composite medical consumption,¹⁸ or the presence, or the existence, of the abundance and complexity of sea life.

Gumbrecht sees this presence as an instance in which a cultural phenomenon becomes tangible, impacting instantly our body and senses through its tangibility.¹⁹ This is the dimension of presence and its effects, which, according to Gumbrecht, have been overlooked in humanities because of the emphasis given to the act of interpretation as the means of knowledge production.²⁰ I believe, however, that Gumbrecht's position and reasoning is applicable to a field of human endeavours which is wider in scope than the domain of humanities alone. We are accustomed to expect depth from our observations and the things we observe; we believe there to be more than meets the eye and that information can be obtained by penetrating the immediate, material presence of things. This conceptual information produced through interpretations, as opposed to the immediate sensory reaction, is here conceived as something with depth or conceptual meaning. Generally we have come to value the dimension of meaning over that of presence. As Gumbrecht writes, we tend to attach positive value to this depth and consider as superficial those incidents, meaning our immediate sensory reactions, that lack the qualities that would give them depth.²¹

But hold on. What if *The Wall* actually has no depth in the sense explained above? If interpretation is, as Gumbrecht puts it, an act of looking beyond the material surface of things to find the meaning beneath the material actuality of the object²², and we are somewhat conditioned to seek interpretation, would it not be confusing to find *The Wall*, or *The Cradle*, to be superficial with no hidden meaning to be discovered? To find that this encounter would not lead further into an exploration? What if, after spending an enthusiastic moment exploring the creatures of *The Wall* with aesthetic preferences, I then referred to the conventions of natural history exhibitions and began to look for an intellectual meaning *behind* this particular exhibit, but found only very little that would be subject to interpretation? If the objective of a natural history exhibition is to

¹⁷ Ibid. Orig. J.G. Granö (1929) *Reine Geographie*, Publicationes Instituti Geographici Universitas Aboensis, Helsinki. Mordhurts does not include page number for the quote. Italics my own.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Gumbrecht, Hans Ulrich (2004) *Production of Presence – What Meaning Cannot Convey*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, pp. xi and 17.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 2.

²¹ Ibid., p. 21.

²² Ibid., p. 25.

communicate scientific knowledge by utilising specimens for their illustrative value, and art of exhibiting to entice interpreting, is the presence effect of The Wall counterproductive? Does it not go against the scientific principles of objective, distanced observing and reasoning based on quantifiability and repeatability? And how could The Wall function as an introduction to the main exhibition if it did not have depth as something which through interpretation would lead a visitor further both physically and mentally?

Is engagement without depth possible? It is, in my opinion, reasonable or at least defensible to argue that our contemporary culture has come to bypass the immediate material presence of things and attention paid to it as mere surface and something superficial, facile, or in a word, shallow. Concerning the extent to which contemporary (popular) culture does appreciate the appearance of things and the aestheticization of surface, it is understandable that we shun attention paid directly to the immediate material presence. It is easy for us to slip past the surface quickly to find depth, to justify our interest in the matter. Settling for the surface, for the immediate material presence without *depth*, can also sound disinterested to a degree. Engagement, if kept in mind that it takes place in a situation that includes a wider world than what is immediately present, is profoundly deep and profoundly present. In engagement, objects can have depth and an effect through their immediate incalculable material presence. In fact, I would argue that these kinds of objects and things would have not only depth but also breadth.

To explain what I mean, let me backtrack a little. Traditionally the visitor is the observer looking interpretatively into the exhibit from her own separate space. The look is expected to be directed at the exhibit; it does not seem conceivable for the exhibit to look back. In engagement, however, the exact opposite is required. In the case of The Wall, its strength in numbers gives me the feeling that I am not looking at or observing an exhibit, but that I have come to a meeting with the representatives of the oceanic world. As I am looking at the creatures on the wall, they look back at me. I am standing *along* or *amongst* them and the gap between us, that is not only the distance that is often associated with the intellectual, analytical objectivity but also the physical reality between my life on land and theirs in the sea, has somehow disappeared or at least reduced. As this gap shrinks, my role as an active producer of knowledge shrinks with it. The specimens find their own voices, which instead of an interpreter makes me listener. It is as if the tiny turtles themselves tell me their short life histories and the same level of *personality*, as both individual character and a sense of personal and private, is present in every specimen. They confront me as individuals of a species, travelling on their individual evolutionary roads, as a system of diversity and I more sense than see a glimpse of the interconnectedness and the changeability of the world. I know nothing of the actual personal lives of the specimens, but I understand that they are here, with me, and at the

same time somewhere out there. Most importantly, I experience their presence as a *good* thing, an attitude vital for the environmental values museums like this strive to promote. Gumbrecht describes moments of presence like these as moments of intensity, where the state of being-in-the-world suddenly appears to us.²³ They also bring into mind Benjamin's concept of aura, as the authenticity of the creatures becomes more tangible. In that intensity of presence, the intuitive comprehension of the world seems possible.

A quick word on interpretation. Though I hold Gumbrecht to be right in that we do tend to put too much weight on interpretation, knowledge, and information, I am not about to discard them. Museums are very much about knowledge and information, it is in their essence. To disregard interpretive endeavours, the look that penetrates the surface of things and sees what lies behind, is not without purpose and value. Interpretation is a tool of learning, not the only one, but an important one. We do need to ask the specific questions of what, how, why, where and when, but we also need to allow room for the mind to be open without actively and constantly probing into things. Meaning – interpretive is not the only kind of meaning – can rise without interpretation. Experiences of presence are not without depth or meaning but laced with them. It is the physical, immediate presence of the preserved turtles that sparks a deep, meaningful experience in me and entices my imagination. This imaginative experience then guides me further into something that I do not experience as interpretations or acts of interpreting but as realisations or moments of intensity, following Gumbrecht's cue. To borrow an expression from Noë, I find myself in new situations that lead into others. I gain new perspectives; new situations, perspectives, and ways of presence become available. I become engaged, not just as a state of being-in-the-world but as being-*with*-the-world. And even if I would hold the view that immediate material presence can carry no meaning as such – meaning as history, as articulated information, or as a message that can be read – it carries *significance*²⁴, its immediacy affects us as it guides our movement and attention in ways that will then affect our interpretations and experiences as we will see later on.

²³ Ibid., pp. 97-99.

²⁴ On 'meaning' and 'significance' see von Bonsdorff (2005), pp. 99-102 & 139.

4.2 Presence of the Absent

There is still another aspect to the notion of presence. When I experience The Wall as an encounter with the oceanic world and claim the key element for the experience I have to be the way the specimens and, indeed, the whole Wall is materially present to me, I also open the door for a question that may turn out to be problematic. The actual oceanic world is not physically there and materially present in front of and around me. There is only a tiny, infinitesimal selection of all the species and other elements that make up the actual oceanic world and not only that. The water, light, temperature, oceanic events such as the currents, pressure, and all other physical characteristics of oceans are not there for me to experience, nor can I ever experience them as a creature of the oceanic. The specimens are physically removed from, or even pried apart of their original context of meaning. Yet I experience the actual, existing oceanic world as being present to me.

Why would this be relevant in this context? Because if a museum or a museum exhibition is to be successful in its educational aspirations, or indeed in any of its functions, one thing it needs to achieve is connecting what it displays and communicates – information, knowledge, issues concerning identity – with the world outside so that those things can be carried over to the everyday life of the visitors. If, for example, the Natural History Museum in Helsinki hopes to make its visitors aware of the importance of protecting the oceans, then it must, somehow, make or enable the visitors to understand the relevance of what they see in the exhibition for their lives and futures. To wit, museums must refer to the bigger picture. Not only is this important for successful communication between the museum and its visitors, but museum exhibitions function on this basis. A history museum must connect the objects in its possession with the past and the present, otherwise their objects would be utterly meaningless. A science museum or centre must connect its instruments with actual natural phenomena or else they remain mere gadgets. An art museum, it can be argued, does not necessarily have to have a particularly strong connection – many art works certainly can be appreciated somewhat independently – but art can and often has a strong context outside the gallery walls, and especially a strong conceptual, spiritual, mental, or philosophical context, without which much of art would be nothing but surface. All in all, museum objects have a strong identity of evidence as something referential. In light of this, the importance and the relevance of their material presence and existence for museums is self-evident.

Most often museums seek to make this connection through interpretation. For example, texts for exhibitions are often, in my experience, written to be

interpretive.²⁵ Guides act, more often than not, as interpreters translating the meaning and importance of what is seen by the visitors. All this, of course, has its use and place, but it is not the only way of connecting an exhibition with the world beyond. Not all understanding comes from intellectual endeavours, from comprehending as a conceptualising activity.²⁶ When I go to see The Wall, or even think about it now, nobody explains to me the meaning of what I see. Not even the labels, for they only tell me the species or the genus of the individual specimens. Only the Finnish name of the exhibit, *Merten monimuotoisuutta*, points to a larger world beyond what is shown, translating roughly as ‘a selection of the diversity of oceans,’ but this title is situated high up in the upper left corner of The Wall, so close to the ceiling that it is easy to miss it or to write it off as unimportant. Otherwise there is not much information present beyond the specimens and their presentation. I did try to find something that would explain the intention behind the display, but the only public mention that I could find was on the museum’s Finnish website stating: “Upon entering the exhibition, a monumental wall of wondrous lifeforms from seas around the world opens up before the visitor. Both colourful corals and peculiar looking fish can be found on the wall.”²⁷ This descriptive text says nothing about the science behind The Wall, but the wording seems to connote a more aesthetic objective. And despite the lack of interpretive texts or other guides, I do make the connection, I do find my way into the larger context. How? Because the immediate material presence of The Wall (or of the things that constitute it) makes the presence of things that are not materially there available to me. This is not, as was said before, a mystical, otherworldly experience (though it might feel so) but, inferring from Noë, a natural characteristic of human experience.

²⁵ See Beverly Serrell’s excellent book on writing exhibition labels, *Exhibit Labels – An Interpretive Approach*, 1996, AltaMira Press, Walnut Creek, CA, USA, which opens the pragmatics of interpretative texts.

²⁶ Intellectual endeavours refer to Alva Noë’s concepts of experience and understanding. He writes in ‘On Over-Intellectualizing the Intellect’ that, ‘But what is over-intellectualized, in this line of criticism, is the intellect itself – *as if the only legitimate exercise of the understanding was in a deliberate act of bringing things under concepts.*’ The criticism Noë refers to is the one guided against his ‘conception of experience as thoughtful and active’ where perceptual experience is neither prior to thoughts nor independent of them. Noë advocates a view that understanding, knowledge, and skill are fundamental for our perceptual consciousness but that this does not mean that perception (and experiencing) is judgemental and categorising. Noë (2012), pp. 114-133, quotes p. 117. Italics my own.

²⁷ Originally: “Saavuttaessa näyttelyyn sisälle, katsojan eteen avautuu valtava seinällinen maailman merien ihmeellistä elämää. Seinältä löytyy niin värikkäitä koralleja kuin omituisen näköisiä kaloja.” My translation.

'Perceptual presence is availability,' writes Noë in *Varieties of Presence*, the world is there for us to grasp.²⁸ We do not see only what is visible but also what is available, what the world affords, to use Gibson's terminology with which Noë agrees and which he develops further.²⁹ Noë argues that our '[p]erceptual experience extends to the hidden. In a way, for perception, everything is hidden. Nothing is given'; 'Vision is not confined to the visible. We visually experience what is out of view, what is hidden or occluded.'³⁰ He uses the example of seeing a tomato: when we see a tomato, we do not only experience visually the side of the tomato that is facing us. We experience the existence of the side hidden from our view, the backside of the tomato: we experience it as a whole tomato. 'You don't merely *think* that the tomato has a back, or *judge* or *infer* that it is there. You have a sense, a visual sense, of its presence.'³¹ It is not that we *see* the back side of the tomato or the parts that are out of view. Instead we see that something is hidden. We intrinsically understand that things of the world are complete – even when we see only a small portion of them. We assume, even take them to be complete. For example, we know that the movie set of an Old West town is not a town with actual houses and other buildings, but a cleverly designed street with mere facades. We understand that the scenographer and the set builders have built only the skins of the buildings and often only the visible parts of the walls. Yet when we watch the film, even after we have just seen a making-of documentary, we have an experience of a complete town. And were we to visit the set and walk through the doors of the saloon only to step right behind the scenes and see the frame supporting the facade, we would experience bewilderment as we find that the hidden side of the set is not what the front promised. What you see is not always what you get.

In other words, I cannot know for certain that the tomato is whole, but I do have a sense of the presence of the part of the tomato that is not visible, but which yet exists. It is present to me exactly as *not* visible: 'the tomato's back show[s] up in experience when we manifestly do not see it'. This is, following Noë's thinking, because we as perceivers have mastered the skill and understanding necessary for achieving the world. This skill is basically our ability to understand the relation between us and the object. Noë stresses, in both *Varieties of Presence* and in *Action in Perception*, the importance of sensorimotor understanding. 'To be a perceiver,' Noë writes in *Action in Perception*, 'is to understand, implicitly, the effects of movement on sensory stimulation.'

²⁸ Noë (2012), p. 19. Noë discusses this also in *Out of Our Heads* and *Action in Perception*.

²⁹ Noë discusses Gibson's affordance, its critique and relevance for his thinking in *Varieties of Presence*, pp. 120-124.

³⁰ Noë (2012), p. 19 & p. 15 respectively.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

(...) As perceivers we are masters of this sort of patterns of sensorimotor dependence. This mastery shows itself in the thoughtless automaticity with which we move our eyes, head and body in taking in what is around us. We spontaneously crane our necks, peer, squint, reach for our glasses, or draw near to get a better look (or better handle, sniff, lick or listen to what interests us.) (...) our ability to perceive not only depends on but is constituted by, our possession of this sort of sensorimotor knowledge.³²

In other words, I experience the *whole* tomato as present to me because I have the understanding, an understanding that I have achieved through living in the world I can access it by changing my position, by picking the tomato up or by turning it, which does suggest that in Noë's thinking our senses create the world for us, and that the world is not already there prior to our investigating senses. Nevertheless, as said when I see a tomato, I do *expect* it to have a backside, I regard the concept of 'tomato' as well as the actual tomato as a whole that I can perceive as a whole. I can then pick it up and experientially either verify or falsify this. In this sense the experience of the presence of the oceanic world is unlike this. I cannot pick it up and manipulate it, I do not have a view of it in the museum, it is completely hidden from me. All I can see are single specimens and even if I could turn around the jar containing the baby turtles I would not see the ocean I experience as existing behind them. A tomato in my view is *the* tomato in my view, but *The Wall* is a synecdoche of the oceans in their entirety, they stand for the whole concept of 'oceans'; in a way *they* expect *me* to imagine the oceans out of sight. Also, I am a not particularly experienced ocean-goer and have a very limited personal experience of actual oceans, while at the same time I do have a slightly romanticised cultural knowledge of them. Yet, in my experience, the ocean is no less present to me than the backside of the tomato, but I can access it. The tomato I can pick up but I also know that oceans exists, I know their location, and I know my own location in relation to them, which means that I know how to access them physically. The oceans are accessible not only to my *thoughts*; I do not just think about them as I might think about Jacques-Yves Cousteau. The oceanic world I experience is present to me perceptually, through my imagination: I *feel* the water and its temperature, I *see* the abyssal darkness into which the dead baby turtles sink from the sapphirine waters of the surface. My imaginative ability affords me to experience the weight and the pressure of oceanic depths for I am able to connect with and grasp all this quite vividly and in detail as *The Wall* couples my imagination – my ability to form images and concepts of absent, external objects – with my knowledge of oceans. Noë argues for this using an example of his friend Dominic in Berlin:

³² Noë (2004) *Action in Perception*, The MIT Press, Cambridge/London, pp. 1-2.

Consider, for example, the case of my conscious thoughts of my friend Dominic in Berlin. I don't mean the thought *that* Dominic is in Berlin. I mean something else. When I think of Dominic in this way, he shows up for me in my thinking; he has a certain presence, he is present to mind. Not that he *is* present. He is in Berlin. And not that it seems to me as if he is somehow here. He is present to my thoughts, now, but not as *here*; my sense of his presence, such as it is, is a sense of his presence as far a way, *there*, in Berlin. Sartre (1940/2004) calls this kind of intentional act conscious thought about someone imagining consciousness.³³

Compare this with an experience of an old friend with whom you have lost contact. I have no idea where my friend Heidi from my early school years is. I lost contact with her years ago. I know that she became a midwife and that back then she still lived in the city of Oulu, but I have absolutely no knowledge of her life since. When I think of her, I experience her as lost. I cannot determine her relation to me. If I think of Oulu or if I visit Oulu and come to think of her, she remains absent. She is *not there* or anywhere else; she *used to be* in Oulu. She has become lost and is only present in my childhood memories.

How then does The Wall function to produce the presence of the oceanic for me? In *Varieties of Presence*, Noë discusses the problematics of pictures, representation, and presence. He comes to the conclusion that pictures are not representations but *representatives*.³⁴

Pictures have a distinct presence-in-absence structure; they enable us to encounter the presence of what is in fact absent; *they give us access to a world beyond our reach*. And moreover, they give us a kind of sensual or perceptual access.³⁵

The Wall certainly is not a picture and in certain significant respects it is not comparable to a picture. Neither is looking at it comparable to looking at a picture. Pictures and looking at and seeing them 'are a central problem for study of perception and consciousness' as Noë points out.³⁶ It is a complex issue but its finer points are not of interest here, although considering museum exhibits as pictures would be an interesting topic in itself. What is of interest is the statement emphasised in the quote above: they, pictures, *give us access to a world beyond our reach*. This also applies to museum exhibitions, with the possible exception of art on certain occasions, in the case of industrial design perhaps, and to occasions of engagement. In engagement we gain access – though we may not be acutely aware of this – to the affective forces constituting an aesthetic experi-

³³ Noë (2012), p. 26. His reference is from Jean-Paul Sartre (1940/2004) *The Imaginary*, Routledge, London.

³⁴ Noë (2012), p. 97.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 86. Italics my own.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 82. Noë tackles the question in 'Presence in Pictures', pp. 82-113 in *Varieties in Presence*.

ence, the social, the historical, cultural, and other such contextual conditions which Berleant recognises as essential to such experiences.³⁷ Could it not be said that in an aesthetic experience the present, both as the time and as what is accessible to us, appears to enlarge or deepen?

Noë explains the pictures' ability to grant us this access when they function as representatives or models of things not materially present. 'The basic idea is simple,' he writes,

If I want you to see my house, I can either bring you to my house, or I can bring my house to you. But if I can't bring my house to you, because it is too heavy, or because it is bolted into the earth, or because I can't afford to do that, then I can bring you a miniature, a copy, something that can *stand in* for the house, something that can serve as a substitute. Niceties aside, that's what pictures are. They are substitutes. A picture of a house is a kind of *ersatz* house. More precisely, it is a model.³⁸

The specimens used to create *The Wall* are of course not *ersatz* in the sense that they are not artificial or fake but real creatures or parts of real creatures. They are not full substitutes in this sense. It is a complete dried starfish that is there, sans the water in their bodies. It models the appearance of a living starfish, and it is a model for all starfish, representing all starfish of its kind. A stuffed animal, on the other hand, could be considered to be *ersatz* since only its skin is genuine, while all the other parts are artificial. It is not a real animal but a stuffed skin of an animal made *to appear* as realistic and alive as possible which is by no means an easy trick. But they all stand in for living – or once living, now extinct – individuals and species. They stand as representatives, and the construction of *The Wall* models the biodiversity of the oceanic habitat. *The Wall* as a whole definitely is *ersatz*. While the individual specimens are real, the composition of *The Wall*, which is the depiction of the diversity and the habitat, is inferior to the reality of oceans: it is far too simplistic in many ways to capture the complexity of real oceanic ecosystems. But, nevertheless, it serves its purpose:

Models are tools for thinking about or investigating or perceiving something other than the model itself. We explore the model in service of exploring something else. And so we are able to explore something remote and difficult *by* studying the model.³⁹

³⁷ Berleant (1991) *Art and Engagement*, p. 49.

³⁸ Noë (2012), p. 97. Noë recognises the significance of Gombrich's essay 'Meditations on a Hobby Horse' for his own thinking regarding the idea of pictures as stand-ins. However, not all pictures, such as works of art or documentary news photographs, are *ersatz*.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

It must be said that 'model' is a slightly confusing concept as it seems too general a term in the context of this dissertation. In general terms, many things that stand for something else can be considered as models, but conceptually there are numerous kinds of models that differ from each other – from symbols, metaphors, and other linguistic concepts to physical models of miniatures, scale models, and so on. All in all, here it would seem more accurate to talk about metonyms and synecdoches than about models, especially concerning *The Wall* which is clearly a synecdoche or even a metonym for the oceanic world. Noë does not say so directly, but I am prone to think that when he uses the word 'model', he is putting more emphasis on models as aids of thinking and comprehending than models as representations of things in the real world, for example a scale model of a building or a city map. Noë has a background in cognitive neurosciences and much of his work deals with the philosophy of mind and phenomenology, and I get the feeling that here and there this scientific background shows in his use of terminology, despite the philosophical perspective of his books. Noë's models could just as easily be called by some other name suitable for the situation and denoting such ways of representation where something is used to point at, to suggest, or to refer to something else – they could simply be signs. However, when Noë writes about models, he uses the term not just to describe the class of an object or the sign value or the meaning of the object but to include or to gently emphasise how we use such models to think about things. 'Metonym,' for example, of course does include this semiotic aspect, but in Noë's 'models' the conceptual, cognitive aspect is emphasised. Perhaps it could be said that the physical object of his model is something around which the conceptual model is formed. At least this seems to be what his writings emphasise.

Models have, as Noë notes, an ability 'to transport the mind of the perceiver through space and time to [the] remote, perhaps no longer existent or even nonactual (...),'⁴⁰ which is what museums hope their objects and exhibitions would also manage to do. When I experience *The Wall* visually and bodily, I also explore, through the access it grants me, the oceanic world that is not here but *there*. Through *The Wall*'s immediate material presence, and with the help of my understanding and sensorimotor knowledge, I am able to reach something that is present as absent. In this sense, museum objects have a double character. They have their immediate material presence and their character as individual, independent objects, but they also have, especially if presented in a suitable situation, their character as models in the sense defined by Noë. Sometimes an exhibit or an entire exhibition possesses the ability to bring the visitor into the presence of the objects or their absent by engagement. Sometimes an exhibition may prevent or hinder this experience of presence. The rest of this chapter will examine the architecture of these situations, of coming into

⁴⁰ Ibid.

contact, into the presence of things present and absent. Each following section will address a certain aspect of exhibition architecture through a set of examples, but without an attempt to draw a decisive, all-including picture. These examples and my dwelling on them are instances of exploration, models through which I can approach larger theories.

4.3 Entrances to Other Worlds

It is not inconsequential how we approach and enter an exhibition, an exhibit, or any situation for that matter. Not only does our knowledge, expectations, inclinations, and skills affect the outcome but so does a large group of external factors such as the weather, the time of day and the season, how we feel about yesterday, and what we expect from tomorrow. It is not only impractical but impossible, physically and time-wise, to take in account all possible factors in a single treatise on the matter. As said, my focus is on the exhibitions as architectural systems bodily experienced, and I have chosen to disregard the overall architecture of museums as buildings, meaning that I will not pay any particular attention to their external appearance or even the spatial relations of internal spaces *unless* either one happens to have a specific, fundamental role for an exhibition. In other words, I will treat exhibitions as if they were independent, almost free-floating, from the building and the location within which they happen to be located. It could be argued that this will distort my analysis as there is much taking place before a visitor enters an exhibition that has a strong effect on her experience of the exhibition. But where to draw the line? Should I begin at home as the visitor leaves for the museum? The moment she decided to go for a visit? At the bus stop, car park, or the sidewalk a block away? Two blocks? Even within the museum, a visitor may get to choose between several routes from the main entrance (if she uses that) to the exhibition. She may choose to have a coffee first. She may be in a wheelchair.⁴¹ It is not my intention to downplay this critique by listing these things, but only to point out the range of possible influences. A line must be drawn, if for nothing else then for practical reasons, and actual exhibition space forms a reasonably clear-cut entity. Nevertheless, I am aware of the influence emanating from the outside and if these influences seem to me particularly significant, I will mention them.

⁴¹ Accessibility is, naturally, an all-important part of exhibitions but as a non-disabled person and with absolutely no qualifications for assessing accessibility, I will not meddle with these issues for they are too important and specialised. Secondly, this is an exercise in descriptive aesthetics and I cannot imagine what it feels like to experience an exhibition in a wheelchair. Therefore I will limit myself to occasional cursory remarks on the matter.



PIC 4.4 The former entrance tunnel to the Museum of Medieval Stockholm had a very tactile feel to it due to the subdued lighting.

Entrances are important. They begin things. They define the tone. They mark a change in perspective, in the overall attitude. Exhibition entrances are what the ‘once upon a time’ is for stories: they alert the visitors’ mind of a special place where an uncommon and not the everyday kind of attention is called for.⁴² Entrance, whether it is the main entry of an exhibition or a doorway between two sections of an exhibition, is the introduction into the world of the exhibition. Like Alice entering the Wonderland through the rabbit hole or the children entering Narnia through the wardrobe, the visitors enter the world of the exhibition.

The Museum of Medieval Stockholm used to have an entrance that I think was particularly successful. The museum, situated on the island of Helgeandsholmen in central Stockholm, has no proper museum building. It is entered through a set of heavy doors on the side of an embankment in a small park. A humble sign is the he only indication that taking the stairs down from a busy street will take one somewhere beyond the garden. That nonetheless is where the descent into medieval Stockholm begins, at the side of a street. On

⁴² See Duncan (2001), p. 11. Originally Douglas, Mary (1996) *Purity and Danger*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, p. 63.



PIC 4.5 First, introductory exhibition space of the former version of the Museum of Medieval Stockholm. The darkness as the sign of the 'Dark Ages' creating a space for the ideology and thinking of the era.

the other side of the street rises the house of the Swedish parliament, and the noise of traffic governs the soundscape. It is clearly a contemporary, industrial world, but once you go down the stairs and through the doors into the foyer, everything industrial is left behind.

The entrance into the actual exhibition is situated at the back of a reasonably sized foyer behind the museum shop and the ticket kiosk. It is a gently sloping tunnel with a vaulted ceiling and stone walls. Before the reopening in 2010, after renovations, this tunnel was lit only from the left-hand side (upon entrance) with modern but torch-like light fixtures that illuminated the tunnel with reflected light (4.4). The light was warm and yellowish, and the way it enhanced the stone walls conjured up a sensation of torchlight. It was not hard to imagine oneself as a guard patrolling the corridors of a medieval castle in the nighttime as the play of light, the relative darkness, and the roughness of the stone fed one's imagination. At the end of the tunnel, where the route into the exhibition turns left, was an illuminated landscape of medieval Stockholm.

Previously the tunnel led into the first and smaller exhibition space that introduced the cultural parameters of the medieval world: religion and beliefs, education and so on (4.5). It was a mysterious, intriguing, and, depending on the visitor maybe even a scary space with a perimeter that was lost in the ob-



PIC 4.6 Illusionary cloister in the Museum of Medieval Stockholm. The entrance to the main hall is seen as a reflection in the mirror.

scurity of darkness. It gave out a distinct atmosphere of a *space* and not a room, and I sensed its volume more than observed its limits. Exhibition objects – only a few of which were authentic – were picked out by spotlights, making them appear, literally, out of that space of darkness. The room was not a physical place, not the actual medieval world, but the mental picture or a state of mind of the legendary Dark Ages. Or the limbo, the intermediate space between the worlds; a liminal space, if you ever saw one, where the visitor left behind the contemporary world and was initiated into the medieval one.

The main exhibition hall was entered through an illusionary cloister created with mirrors on opposing walls that produced an illusion of infinite pillars and arches (4.6). The point of passage was also indicated by the mosaic floor of black and white triangles. Walking through the illusion was an intensive experience after the near formless darkness of the introduction room. Suddenly the space became structured and gained a well defined form that continued without an end. The nature of the infinity illusion made the cloister appear curved as if it encircled the space I had just left behind, as if I had been stepping out of the space between the worlds and times into the medieval one, the brightness of which beacons in front of me.

However, before reopening in 2010, the exhibition was redesigned and renovated. The exhibition was enlarged after the excavations made extending the main hall possible. The existing elements of the exhibition remained mostly



PIC 4.7 The redesigned entrance tunnel to the exhibitions of the Museum of Medieval Stockholm. The passage is lighter, both as more clearly lighted and as a bodily experience; the weight of the walls and time has been lifted.

the same, as was already said in the previous chapter, excluding some new additions such as the monastery and minor reorganisation of the newly extended main hall, but the entrance and the introduction room were completely reworked. The lighting of the entrance tunnel was redesigned and the torch-like fixtures with their warm, flaming glow were replaced with a cold, white light radiating from the fixtures in the ceiling (4.7). I do not know why this was done but accessibility is a likely reason, as the low lighting of the corridor and the first room must have caused trouble especially for the visually impaired. From this viewpoint, the redesign is of course well justified, but on the other hand the atmosphere of the medieval castle's vault has been lost. The feel of the walls embracing the visitors has been, if not completely lost, then at the very least withdrawn. Somehow the tunnel feels less tactile; its roughness has been smoothed out. In the old light – and that it was, not just light from the older lighting system but it felt like an echo of medieval lighting – the wall also seemed to have more substance; it was as if the masses of earth pushing against them could have been experienced as a pressure leaning on them and me. Somehow, I felt that force and weight of stone which made the sensation of passage more profound. According to the Oxford Dictionary, the origin of 'profound' is the Latin *profundus*, 'deep' from *pro*, 'before' and *fundus*, 'bottom'.⁴³

⁴³ Oxford Dictionary (2005)

There is no word more appropriate in this case. I was moving though, deeper into history. As I moved, the cogwheels of time turned to reverse and time flowed backwards. According to Arnheim, this is exactly what movement downwards connotes: merging with matter as opposed to detaching from it; to descend into, 'to dig is to explore the foundations.'⁴⁴ Movement down and through penetrates into the details, into the past. It connotes the increase of knowledge. It is personal. These underlying meanings or innuendos are still there in the present day version of the tunnel, but the previous lighting made it more prominent and the materiality of the tunnel more present. Today, it is more a corridor than a tunnel, a somewhat neutral or impersonal space serving a practical function. Its ability to serve as a 'once upon a time' has been undermined. The thickness or the viscosity of a place has been reduced, and I no longer feel the need or temptation to slow down and soak in the experience but find myself walking through it nonchalantly instead. The tunnel is by no means an unpleasant or an unattractive place. On the contrary, it is beautiful and in some other complex it would work nicely. I am certain that the visitors who have not experienced its former version do find it pleasing, but for me and some others who have seen the old one, the sense of mystery has been diluted. Could the previous feel and experience of the tunnel be recreated without losing accessibility? Perhaps with clever use of lighting that would illuminate the floor more evenly – it is rather blotched which I suspect is not the best result – but leave the walls more obscured.

Perhaps a change even more significant than the lighting is the scene at the end of the tunnel. Previously the dimness of the tunnel ended at a brightly lit and coloured landscape with a clear view of the horizon. Today the tunnel ends in a dark and murky picture the focal point of which is hard to find. To put it bluntly, there is no light at the end of the tunnel. This is not a small matter. First of all, a path from darker to lighter is inviting: it promises a change to see, to observe, a vista or a prospect one could view without being seen. 'The reverse (...) means that as one moves deeper into the space, one is seen without seeing. This is not pleasant.'⁴⁵ We are naturally hesitant, though we do not necessarily notice it, about stepping into a dark room – especially from a brightly lit space. I have noticed that if I am about to enter a dark room, I tend to first reach in with my hand and turn the lights on. I do this regardless of the familiarity of the room. Perhaps it is a primeval knowledge in us, a sense of danger and the possibility of predators or rivals lurking in the dark. It is also common sense: I do not want to step in when I cannot see what the ground is like – or if there even is a ground. Many domesticated animals also do this. Horses, for example, may refuse to go in if it is dark inside, and they shy away from an oil spill on the road.

⁴⁴ Arnheim, Rudolf (1984) *Dynamics of Architectural Form*, p. 33.

⁴⁵ Hildebrand, Grant (1999) *Origins of Architectural Pleasure*, p. 54.

Absolute darkness can therefore be scary and it certainly is uninviting, but mere murkiness, a stage of lighting dark enough to prevent details from being seen, is enough to make a space or route easier to pass through, to make them appear even as uninteresting, especially if there are more brightly lit areas ahead in some other direction. That the current picture at the end of the entrance tunnel has no focal point which would be visible from the opposite end of the tunnel makes it less inviting; it does not offer a goal. It could be argued that a picture unclear from a distance would be interesting as one would want to find out what it depicts, but in this context, concerning the contrast of light, this is not the case. For me to become interested in finding out what a picture portrays, I would need some kind of a visual bait to draw me in. A part of the picture should stand out, but this one is too uniform. The former landscape, on the other hand, displayed clear, interlocking forms and a clear divide between the sky and the ground. The details were minute but even from a distance the properties of the picture promised something to explore. Also, being a landscape, its horizon line suggested a further prospect once you got to it. Combined with the transition from darker to lighter this created a sense of a secondary prospect⁴⁶ as if the picture was a balcony seen at the end of a corridor, and seeing that we are likely to feel a need to find out what views the balcony would offer. Our sensorimotor knowledge, of which Noë writes, would suggest that if we were to move over, we would be able to see what now is hidden; we would become alerted to the presence of something out of view.

What has been transformed completely is the introductory room. The current one is light: it is airy, bright, and it weighs less on the visitor (4.8, following page). The darkness and the dark colours have been replaced with a universally bright light that leaves no dark corners or deep shadows, and the walls are painted in the colour of light sandstone or limestone. All in all, the space feels more like a room or a hall now, as its limits and proportions can be seen clearly. The subject matter has also changed and the exhibits now relate the historical background of the Swedish kingdom during the Middle Ages (this was previously done in the first part of the main hall). This makes sense since much of what was previously presented here has now found room in the reconstructed main exhibition. It is a nice space and a nice exhibition but does not have its predecessor's intensity of feeling. The scariness is gone and so is the sense of mystery. It is no longer a liminal space in an emotional, metaphysical way, but more like a preface, like it is probably intended to be. The sense of movement between the worlds and the states of mind has diminished. It is not altogether gone but instead of invoking the legend of the Dark Ages, it now displays a more informative and educational style.

The route *through* is clear as soon as the room is entered. The orientation of the room, the line of sight lengthwise across the rectangular space makes it ap-

⁴⁶ See *ibid.*, p. 24.



PIC 4.8 A view into the current introductory room from the end of the entrance tunnel. Entrance into the main exhibition hall is at the far end of the room. The Museum of Medieval Stockholm.

pear as a passage, and the arrangement of the exhibits underlines this sensation. The row of window-like recesses on the left, perhaps because of the visual rhythm of their placement, gives them the feel of an arcade. The information stands in front of them do not possess enough visual strength in order to make the passerby stop, and if anything, their protrusive character may guide one to unconsciously drift towards the right-hand side of the room; instead of having gravitational pull, they seem to repel. The placement of the table vitrine also encourages this as it leaves more physical and mental room on the right. The route between it and the recesses appears as narrow and restricted, as demanding more effort physically than the right-hand side. On the whole, the room now feels more like an extension or an annex to the tunnel.

Despite the clear line through and the passage-like character, the entrance from the introductory room into the main hall is elusive, somewhat hiding in plain sight. At the far end of the room, next to the bright red wall hanging, is a mock drawbridge which is, in fact, the entrance into the main hall. The same oversight of light and shadow that has been made in the tunnel is repeated here: in order to take the short gangway from the introductory room to the main hall, the visitor needs to move from a brightly lit, open space into a shady, confined corridor. Although the gangway is not particularly dark as such, it does not *readily* seem as the route to follow. Looking at it from the entrance of the room, the drawbridge seems ambiguous. Its structure is not clear from the



PIC 4.9 The mock drawbridge leading into the main hall in the Museum of Medieval Stockholm.

distance; it is not easy to recognise as a drawbridge, which means that its being a route is not obvious. Is it an unfinished exhibit, something still under construction? Is it for staff only? The bright red wall hanging next to the bridge does not help the situation but, especially from a distance, draws attention to itself and away from the bridge. Also, it is almost like a stop sign at the end of the room: 'No access from this point onwards.'

Perhaps even more consequential than the light-to-dark transition is the exclusion of a view beyond: all that is visible from the introductory room is the plain white wall of the gangway and the clearly off-limits door in it (4.9). The end of the gangway cannot be seen from the right-hand side of the room at all. Only those who approach the drawbridge from between the recesses and the table vitrine and read the information text can catch a glimpse of the main hall. From other viewpoints there does not seem to be anything particularly interesting waiting at the end of the corridor. However, this could have been easily fixed. Though it would be good to get to catch a glimpse of what is to come, in other words to have our destination or part of it in sight, a mere suggestion of it is inviting enough. The main hall was not visible in the previous version of this transition between spaces either, but was seen as a reflection in the mirror (see pic. 3.6) and, more importantly, as a source of light just behind the corner. First of all, as said, we are drawn towards the edge of lighted areas, towards the prospect it indicates. Therefore, if the light-to-dark-transition is visibly followed



PIC 4.10 Two cases of light as an inviting element in the National Museum of Finland, Helsinki.

by a dark-to-light-transition, it appears to us as inviting. Grant Hildebrand calls this a continuum of repeated refuges and prospects, the feature that makes the Court of Lions in the Alhambra in Granada, Spain, so alluring.⁴⁷ This continuum draws the mind in. Hildebrand quotes Kaplan who reasoned, in reference to our evolutionary history, that this effect is due to the fact 'that neither being out in the open nor being in the woods is favored,'⁴⁸ and this kind of a continuum certainly feels inviting as every new edge or borderland thus revealed implies not just a new prospect but a new perspective. In this way the continuum of repeated refuges and prospects speaks to our sensorimotor knowledge and skill as such repeated shadows and lights suggest that exploration is possible by moving in and through them. In simple terms, light reveals that there is something to experience, darkness conceals and turns down. But it is not simply a question of the presence of light. The picture 4.10 shows two cases of doorways and lights in the main exhibition of the National Museum of Finland. In the left one, the door leads into a traditional 19th century house or log cabin, *savupirtti*. These kinds of houses did not have chimneys and as a result the smoke from heating and lighting blackened the walls. With only few tiny windows, the interiors were dark indeed. The exhibit is dark and not illuminated beyond the mock daylight through the small windows so that the visitors would have a realistic understanding of the living conditions of the time. The trouble is that when the visitor first sees the exhibit, the view through the doorway is dominated by the pitch-black shadow in the corner of the room. This, conjoined with the rope, which not only cuts off as a barrier but also as a bright line against the darkness, does not tempt eager exploration as the interior of the log cabin seems empty and too dark for the visitor to see much. There might be something hidden in the right-hand corner right after the door, but the rope discour-

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 26. See also p. 27.

⁴⁸ Kaplan, Stephen (1987) 'Aesthetics, Affect and Cognition' in *Environment and Behavior*, vol 19, no 1 (January 1987), p. 3. Quoted in Hildebrand (1999), p. 27.



PIC 4.11 The world of the murals is extended into and blended with the exhibition space through the three dimensional props and the cobble stone floor in the Wasa Museum, Stockholm, Sweden.

ages the visitor from peeking in. I do experience a temptation to go in and see if there would be something hidden on the righthand side of the doorway, but as the rope hinders me from entering, I am tempted to let the idea drop. The entrance on the right, however, seems considerably more inviting. The light, which also originates from a set of mock windows, reveals the setting and gives a glimpse of what to expect. The dark corner next to the cabinet at the back seems natural. Its darkness withdraws into distance with promises of continued space and discoveries. Here the shadow has a delicate sense of mystery, a sensation of time that has stopped for a moment from the past, and of eeriness. The inviting sensation is also enhanced by the fact that the reconstructed space (and time) begins already on this side of the doorway: the sharpness of the threshold has been dulled into a narrow borderland between worlds. The case of *savupirtti* would also benefit from such borderland. Perhaps some reproductions of period objects – perhaps a barrel, basket, or a stool – could be placed outside the *savupirtti*, for example under the pictures and text on the right-hand side of the door? There they would create a continuum between the world of the *savupirtti* and the world of the visitor (see 4.11).

Let us return to the Museum of Medieval Stockholm. Before saying anything more about the importance of continuum for transitions between spaces, there is something to say about the mock drawbridge itself. Though the idea is wonderfully inventive, it has its drawbacks. First of all, the chains, though ele-

mentary for the bridge's nature as a drawbridge, do hinder movement on and through it. Even if it is entirely possible to step on the bridge from the side, between the chains and the walls, it does feel awkward to do so. It seems, at least to me, that drawbridges are meant to be approached straight on. After all, it is a bridge. Of course, someone who does not recognise it as such would not necessarily be affected by this. Nevertheless, if one was reading the text on the red wall hanging or the picture captions on the left, how fluent would it be to step on the bridge from the side between the chain and the wall? The drawbridge is like a mouth, a gaping maw with one primary line of movement through.

Secondly, if one recognises the construction as a drawbridge and has knowledge of their function, a drawbridge does not necessarily appear as inviting as it might be expected. Though a lowered bridge is as good as a permission to enter, it does also imply that this invitation may be withdrawn, that some of those who approach may be considered as foes and thereby unwelcome. A drawbridge is a machine of defence: its primary use is to shut someone out, to deny access. A basic bridge is a safe way in, through, and over a peril or a hazard, which in the words of Hildebrand 'intensif[ies] the value of refuge by giving evidence of what it protects against (...)'⁴⁹

A crossing place of a river, for instance, by a bridge or a ford, focuses the attention on the opportunity which it presents for circumventing or surmounting the hazard.⁵⁰

A bridge also focuses our attention on the other side and it assumes that we have a reason to cross it, that crossing it will lead us to our goal. But where is the hazard here? To me it seems that if there is danger lurking somewhere, it is either in the shadows behind the drawbridge or in the planks themselves. Are they sound? Is it OK to step on them? The nature of drawbridge also suggests that the hazard might be me, the one who approaches. Tables would be turned if I was looking across the bridge from the other side. There I would be safe, in the shadow, with the drawbridge protecting me. Out in the introductory room, I am either the threatening peril or at the mercy of whoever is controlling the bridge from the inside.

Thirdly, and relating to the second point, the drawbridge feels a bit detached, pointless even. Where does it lead? Why should I cross it? What even are these planks lying on the floor? Do they cover a hole or some other unevenness in the floor? And there does not seem to be anything for me on the other side of it. The questions and the problem of the concealed entrance could be eased off if the planking of the bridge would carry on around the bend into the corridor. This would create a visual and a sensorimotor continuum forward. It would serve as an indication that there is more to see, that this is the way for-

⁴⁹ Hildebrand (1999), p. 69.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 70.

ward; it would indicate the possibility of a movement through. This is the significance of the continuation of features from space to space I mentioned earlier. According to Hildebrand, we are drawn to themes, to alterations of forms that continue from space to space, and we experience this as order.⁵¹ He demonstrates how a part of the charm of the Pazzi Chapel in Florence, Italy, is in the way Filippo Brunelleschi designed a subtle continuation of a theme throughout the chapel.⁵² As the visitor enters the chapel and moves through it, she experiences not only the alteration of spaces but also the maintenance of the theme. People find it pleasing when they re-encounter a familiar theme in the building, and a continued theme can be used to connect objects and ideas in separate locations. The alterations of a theme are like keys that do not need to be explained in order to be used to unlock relations and discoveries. Hildebrand stresses that these alterations of a theme are simple, though they may 'be seen to include complexity as well.'⁵³

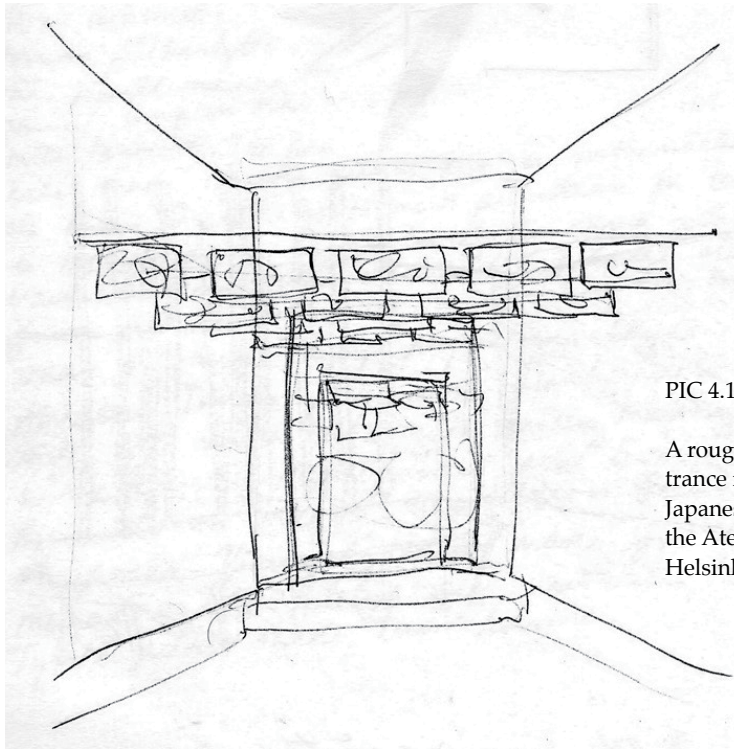
The drawbridge, though I am sure it was designed as almost a literal way to step into the medieval world, comes too late as an variation of a theme. It is not the first suggestion of a reconstructed city. There are small sections of brick floors at the very beginning of the introductory room (seen in pic. 3.8), but these, for some reason, are not enough to create a sense of a continuing theme. This might be because the overall style of the room is a rather ordinary museum exhibition. The former version of the exhibition, however, suggested the medieval environment right from the front door, borrowing from the granite embankment outside. The theme of stonework was carried over with the help of light in the tunnel that emphasised the materiality of the stone, and in the introductory space where many of the illuminated objects were stone or some kind of masonry. Once the visitor saw into the main hall, she was greeted by a view of the remains of the original city walls, as she still is today (see pic. 4.22). Stone, red bricks, and masonry are the main material and tactile themes that continue throughout the exhibition.

One of the most beautifully executed continuums I have seen over the course of research for this dissertation was the entrance into the exhibition of Japanese woodblock prints in the Ateneum Art Museum, Helsinki. The building is Renaissance Revival, in many ways visually opposite in respect to the popular understanding of Japanese aesthetics and style. The architectonic appearance of the Ateneum, both inside and out, is dominating and it easily overtakes such introduced exhibition elements as banners and signs. The Japanese woodblock exhibition was situated in the side gallery on the ground-floor, immediately to the left of the main entrance to the building. This meant that the entrance to the exhibition was in the spatial and visual periphery as the visitors

⁵¹ See *ibid.*, pp. 95-99.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 119. See also p. 122.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 99.



PIC 4.12

A rough sketch of the entrance into the exhibition of Japanese woodblock prints in the Ateneum Art Museum, Helsinki. 13.10.2008.

were greeted by the magnificent staircase rising right in front of them, leading up to the main floor and announcing the magnificence of the building and uplifting the mind. Secondly, the visitors needed to first head to the right and away from the gallery entrance in order to purchase their tickets and to leave their belongings in the cloakroom before heading back to the entrance hall. Something needed to be made to make the entrance to the Japanese exhibition more prominent and inviting.

The solution was simple (pic. 4.12). Rows of life-size reproductions of Japanese woodblock prints in full colour had been hung out on lines of cord in front of the entrance and across the short corridor-like recess leading towards the doorway to the gallery. The prints hung rather close to the heads of the visitors, and I do not think that one would have had to be a particularly tall person to be able to reach them. The low-hanging prints turned the short corridor into a Japanese street, across which the printmakers had hung their work to dry. The formal, slightly distant Renaissance Revival interior had become more intimate and personal as the exhibition reached, quite literally, towards the visitor.

The rows of prints continued inside the gallery, covering the entire ceiling of the first room, equally low, equally present, and moving gently in the draught. Here the papers were blank, unprinted sheets so that they did not draw too much attention away from the original prints on display. The continuation of the rhythm of the papers succeeded as a visual and bodily available

invitation to enter. The paper sheets expanded the transitional line of the doorway into a borderland where the two different worlds of style entwined in each other to alleviate the sharpness of the threshold. Once inside, the cloud of paper sheets felt intimate and protective, shading those who stood underneath them. They gave the gallery a nook-like⁵⁴ atmosphere, a refuge for examining the delicate pages of prints and the nuances of their colours and the lines the *baren* and the grain of the wood had left in the colour. The design gave space and time for the patient and sensitive eye which are needed in appreciating the nuances of the print precisely through its intimacy. A more airy, open space would not have been so successful.

4.4 Descents, Ascents, and Thresholds

Platforms, slopes, and stairs negotiate the vertical dimension. Platforms make a stage, a place apart. Slopes join things gently. Stairs choreograph our movements. They make us especially aware of our presence, as we move up or down, or pause for breath. Because we must fit our feet, they provide a reliable gauge of the size of the whole place.⁵⁵

Entry by descent, as the one through the tunnel into the Museum of Medieval Stockholm, is a strong, meaningful act, an act of meaning-making, as it could be called in the language of contemporary museology and museum education. It becomes especially meaningful when it leads to themes and subjects that are, in some way, mentally associated with earth, unearthing, excavation, penetrating the barrier of time and unfamiliarity, finding something after effort. In the Museum of Medieval Stockholm, the descent leads to an archeological discovery and the realisation that there are remains of past lives beneath the old town which changes, hopefully, the visitor's perception of the city and the life of today.

Another appropriate entrance of this type was the black-painted, featureless, slowly descending corridor that took the visitor into the *Jade princess* exhibition at the Museum Centre Vapriikki, Tampere, Finland, in 2007.⁵⁶ The exhibition displayed artefacts from the tomb of the Han Dynasty (202 BC – 220 AD)

⁵⁴ For nooks see e.g. Tuan (1993) *Passing Strange and Wonderful – Aesthetics, Nature, and Culture*, Island Press, Washington D.C., p. 22.

⁵⁵ Lyndon, Donlyn & Moore, Charles W. (1994) *Chambers for a Memory Palace*, The MITT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA/London, England, p. 53. The book contains a poetic treatise on 'Platforms that separate/Slopes that join/Stair that climb and pause', pp. 51-76.

⁵⁶ The exhibition took place between 16.6.-31.10.2007.

princess Dou Wan, including the famous jade burial suit, a garment made of numerous jade squares that covered her entire body. The exhibition hall (though more akin to a large room, judging by its proportions) was decorated with dark colours and dimly lit, or perhaps more suitably, lighted with subduing light. The vitrines were built in a Chinese fashion with tassels, ornamental roofs, and lacquer red. The jade suit lay on a sturdy plinth as if she was still lying in her tomb. The artefacts found with her were laid out around the room, picturing her needs in the afterlife. The matt black corridor leading into the exhibition hall enhanced the tomb-like impression. It literally felt like entering a burial mound or a catacomb. The featureless-ness of the descent was unnerving even for an adult. Time ceased to exist as I walked through it, and the exhibition hall, the catacomb itself, was frozen in time. The ancient intention and desire to build something that would last an eternity, to create something eternal, became palpable. I could feel the weight of the ages and the mass of the land rising above the catacomb. I had become, somehow, aware of the architectural mass of the Vapriikki's building above (the exhibition was in the basement) and I imagined, without reaching for an analogy, the floors rising above me as the burial mound. With the help of the corridor and the exhibition architecture and my knowledge and comprehension concerning ancient burials, the museum building had become, rather naturally and effortlessly, a model of a burial mound. As Alva Noë writes, models do not have to be exact copies of the originals in the way architectural models, for example, can be. Far less is enough for a model to serve its purpose.⁵⁷ The extent of the Vapriikki building – which is a large, old industrial complex – served as the model of a mound: in its material presence, the absent past and the meaningfulness of the royal burial became accessible to me; I could understand their gravity.

All this would have been possible to achieve also by other means, but the descent and the bold decision to make the corridor simply black without providing the visitor with any hints of what to expect was much more influential in its physicality, as I had to move my body through its resistance. The corridor felt long, although it probably was not, and at one point I wondered whether I had taken the wrong entrance and ended up in a service corridor. But the slowly descending floor drew me further in. Also, it could be argued that having reached a certain point on my way down, turning back and especially back uphill was less inviting than continuing downwards. In *Life Between Buildings – Using Public Space*, Jan Gehl points out that '[a]ll large movements upward or downward require more effort, additional muscular activity and an interruption in walking rhythm.'⁵⁸ Although he concludes that people therefore avoid changing floors or levels, it does not mean that movement upwards or downwards could not be inviting. The required additional effort also separates such

⁵⁷ Noë (2012), pp. 97-99.

⁵⁸ Gehl, Jan (2001) *Life Between Buildings – Using Public Space*, p. 144.

movement from the 'ordinary'; it is precisely the extra effort that makes descending and ascending meaningful. And when confronted with the choice of continuing downwards or turning back and heading upwards, continuing appears preferable. Turning back would have felt like a retreat, and the promise of a treasure waiting ahead (I have seen my Indiana Jones movies) lured me further in.

Would the experience have been so engaging if the exhibition at the end of the corridor had been less like a catacomb? I doubt. I had a certain set of information concerning the subject matter of the exhibition prior to my entry: I knew I was about to see artefacts related to a Chinese royal burial. The corridor sealed the deal as it enticed my imagination to recall stories and images of monumental burials, of mounds, and of heroic archeologists digging into a mystery. In other words, the corridor created and built particular expectations and the air and form of the exhibition fulfilled them. My mind and imagination had become oriented towards mystery, exploration, and discovery. Had the exhibition been different enough in comparison to them, the engagement would most likely have been less intense, or even failed altogether. The prior knowledge and attitudes of the visitors create expectations, and the way the entrance leads into and presents an exhibition also creates expectations, but if these expectations differ too much from the actual form of the exhibition, we are more likely than not to be disappointed. This is because we fail to connect. If what we see, what we discover, is *less* than what we expected, we tend to interpret this as a broken promise, seldom as a surprise. I did not expect much of the Fram Museum and partly because of that, I was amazed by what I found inside. Expectations can, of course, lead to great surprises. The greatest danger of disappointment lies in the situations where one expects the exhibitions to be something particular, only to find them to be something completely different. In other words, it lessens the danger of being disappointed if one's expectations are open-ended, even while feeling excited about the coming experience.

These expectations are by no means necessarily conscious ones. They do not need to be fully formed ideas or utterances. They are not necessarily realised before experiencing their fulfilment or disappointment, nor even afterwards. They can be experienced as a sense of familiarity, of order, or as a fluent flow of things or space. The clues do not have to be as obvious as in the case of the Museum of Medieval Stockholm or the exhibition of Japanese woodblock prints in the Ateneum. A subtle continuation of a theme is, as said, enough. In the Pazzi Chapel, it is achieved with a round window above the entrance, the form and placement of which is repeated inside above the arches that themselves mirror the size and form of the entrance. Likewise the rhythm of the columns of the facade are repeated in the pilasters behind them and even inside

the building.⁵⁹ The building flows changing as the visitor moves through it, yet it creates an air of familiarity by remaining the same and becoming more of a place. Moving through a building such as this creates a sense of layers, a thickness that is familiar even if the themes themselves are left obscure. It might even be better for them to remain unnoticed to the conscious mind because of the way tourists, according to Tuan, experience the environment they are visiting: '[t]he visitor's evaluation of environment is essentially aesthetic,' by a 'canon of beauty' and '[v]isual appreciation, discerning and reflective, creates aesthetic distance,' notes Tuan in *Topophilia*.⁶⁰ Here Tuan seems to be in contradiction with his later work, *Passing Strange and Wonderful – Aesthetics, Nature and Culture*, where he describes vision not only as a sense of seeing but as a sense through which we can also have tactile sensations.⁶¹ But Tuan is simply aware that there are degrees of looking, some more surface-oriented, so to speak, interested rather in the beauty of the environment in the classical sense of beauty as something pleasing to the eye, as something pleasing to look at. In other words, what I understand Tuan to mean is that a visitor or a tourist tends to perceive her environment as an outsider even when she moves in it. She is not as deeply invested in it as a native but encounters the environment more through expectations that are often surface aesthetic, that is, more about style: 'That is so *French!*'; a tourist has come to *see* the French-ness of the environment, to see how things are in France. Here orientation, her attitude with which she approaches the environment that can easily guide her eye to be more discerning and her involvement with her surroundings more detached. This is not necessarily disinterestedness in the same sense against which Berleant has argued, but something perhaps less intentional and more connected to being a tourist. The practicalities of an environment are different for a visitor, and the experience is easily governed by unfamiliarity which gets contrasted with sudden moments of highlighted familiarity when she encounters something that is 'just like at home.' A tourist or a visitor has come to see, to view the environment she visits. She has come to discern the differences, similarities, and oddities; she has come to see the different and strange things she has heard about. While highly directed towards the environment, she is also less involved with it, as the necessities of ordinary everyday life have no bearing on her and there is no need for her to perform those tasks. For example, I find the plumbing in older houses in Britain to be unpractical, but as I do not have to concern myself with it in my ordinary life, I am simply left wondering about it without much involvement. If an exhibition aims at an engaged experience that opens to a sense of 'authenticity', or in other words, if a visitor is supposed to gain a glimpse or an engaged

⁵⁹ Hildebrand (1999), pp. 116-122. He has beautifully illustrative pictures of the continuation of themes in the Pazzi Chapel.

⁶⁰ Tuan, Yi-Fu (1990) *Topophilia*, pp. 96 & 64 respectively.

⁶¹ Tuan (1993), p. 43.

sense of the past and the distant, especially as is intended in Stirling Castle, then she would, it seems, be more successful if she was more like a native, an inhabitant, than an outside visitor. If what Tuan writes is true, then immersion in the environment and the situation is a moment which opens the view of the native for the visitor; only then she will not only look at things but feels their materiality as her gaze follows their contours. Of course, a visitor cannot easily and suddenly become an inhabitant of the environment, but subtle themes of familiarity on a tactile, embodied level – such as the cobbled streets of Stockholm's old town and the cobblestone-like floors in the Museum of Medieval Stockholm – will help create a sense of belonging.

In my experience, descent as a direction of movement is more involving and, borrowing the term from computer graphics, immersive than an ascending movement. As a direction of movement, descent – laying oneself low, going down, and sinking – carries with it the connotations of becoming closer to or even joined with something. I tend to associate the words 'going into something' with downwards direction. This association is probably created by my everyday experiences with that direction. Swimming I go down to the water, I lower myself into it, and it does not rise to meet my body unless I am swimming in waves. Going to bed I lay myself down and cover my body with the warmth and comfort of the duvet, unless I sleep in the upper cot of a bunk bed. I sit down to be with my friends. More often than not I bend my body down to see something of interest in more detail. I hunch over a captivating book. In general, my line of sight tends to be more in the downwards direction in situations where my involvement with something increases. As to how common this association is, I do not know, but I assume that to some degree it is a shared experience.⁶²

It seems that the metaphysics of upwards movement, however, is not as straightforward as that of going down. There are two sides to it. Arnheim pointed to this in *The Dynamics of Architectural Form* as he wrote that while moving up and down are the same geometrically, they are not that physically and mentally.⁶³ Upwards movement is spiritual and symbolical. It is a heroic, even a liberating act. It is movement towards a higher value, plane, or existence. It is

⁶² Looking down when concentrating, however, might be just a learned habit. Looking intensely down especially while thinking about or concentrating on my body and its movements is a mannerism of mine as my riding instructors keep reminding me; while riding a horse I tend to look at my hands or at the neck of the horse instead of looking where I intend to go. On the other hand, many other riders share this tendency, but not all of them. To me this suggests that not everyone associates downwards with thinking and getting involved as intensely as I do. Nevertheless, many 'thoughtful' figures, like Rodin's *Thinker*, do look down.

⁶³ Arnheim (1984), p. 33.



PIC 4.13 Charles Sandison's work *Sinuhe* in the Mika Waltari hundredth anniversary exhibition in the Ateneum Art Museum, Helsinki, Finland. View from the stairs towards the main landing and the entrance to the actual exhibition at the end of the stairs. Copyright Charles Sandison, 2008.

noble. Ascending, Arnheim wrote, is sublimation, it connotes superhuman values and enlightenment. At the end of the ascent waits an open, free perspective to things and the world.⁶⁴ Although going up or climbing is physically as demanding as going down, it is not, however, an equally visceral or bodily experience in mental terms. In going down, there is always a more prominent danger of falling.

An excellent example of utilising an ascending staircase was found in the exhibition celebrating the hundredth anniversary of the Finnish author Mika Waltari (1908-1979) in the Ateneum Art Museum, Helsinki, Finland, in 19.9.2008 – 18.1.2009. The visual arts were one of Waltari's passions and he befriended many recognised artists during his lifetime. The exhibition displayed various book covers and other paraphernalia relating to Waltari's books and other works together with paintings and other artworks by his favourite artists and from his own collections. The exhibition itself was not exceptional in its design, but the entrance to it was. As I mentioned earlier, the main exhibition floor of the Ateneum is not on the ground floor but on the first floor, and the visitors reach it through a massive staircase rising in front of them immediately upon

⁶⁴ Ibid.

entering through the main doors.⁶⁵ After ascending the first flight of stairs onto the main landing, the upper part of the stairwell opens above the visitor like a dome. This open space, which in itself can already be seen to connote the free spirits of arts and the realm of imagination, had been used as a screen for the Finland-based artist Charles Sandison's work, *Sinuhe*, (4.13) on which Sandison had projected words from Waltari's international best seller *Sinuhe egyptiläinen* or *The Egyptian*. Sandison's computer program caused the individual words to move freely and apparently randomly all around the walls so that the words constantly formed new combinations and new meanings. I had the privilege of visiting the exhibition in advance, during an annual seminar for museum professionals, and got to see it without the masses of people that followed when the exhibition was opened to the general public. I had the chance to sit, at times completely alone, on the stairs to the second floor and watch in solitude as the cosmos of Waltari's words and imagination played above my head like the stars on the firmament.

The design of the entrance to the Waltari exhibition was very much like a ritual route into a ceremonial site designated to celestial themes. The route began at the street in front of the building where the visitor took a short flight of stairs to the main doors. She passed through a set of heavy doors between stone columns through which she felt she had to squeeze herself. After the first doors, she pushed herself through a set of revolving doors and rather suddenly found herself at the feet of the main stairwell in a pale, neoclassical space. There the physically demanding and constricting zone of the steps from the street level and through the main doors is contrasted with the open, uprising, and more freely flowing space of the stairwell. The stairs lead the mind up, drawing the body along with the eyes as they followed the stairs up where in the soft darkness glowed the symbolic cosmos of the author (and the mind of an artist's, as we romantically think, is a mystical being on its own). She ascended the stairs, fulfilling the ritual act of realising the hero's journey as she took on with her body a struggle similar to the struggle the author had gone through while labouring with his art. Ahead of her, at the end of the stairs, was the bright gate that led into the world of the author where his thoughts and creations had found their material form. The gate glowed within her reach, but first she had to pass through the cosmos of the author's mind and soul and only then she could – perhaps – see the objects on display in the same light as the author did. A glorifying reading, no doubt, but the setting left very little room for anything but an admiring, spirited experience. Much of this effect, and the impact of Sandison's art work, was due to the upwards movement on the grand staircase. If the exhibition had been held in a set of adjoining spaces on the same level, the mystifying, even transcending effect of the design would surely have been di-

⁶⁵ The floor plan of the Ateneum can be seen online at <http://www.ateneum.fi/en/floor-plans>.

minated. Now it recreated a route familiar from many tales of heroes and deities: the acceptance of the task and the initial struggle (entering the museum building); the difficult journey through the world that demands and facilitates a change (the stairs); the cosmos behind the hero's journey and the heavenly muses moving on it (the stairwell and the words); and finally the fulfilment, access granted to the hero because of her troubles and perseverance and achieved only because the journey has changed her. The aspirations of any museum exhibition where thus clad in a grand appearance.

The character of the stairs – their steepness, the rhythm of the steps, the twists and turns, and so on – are fundamental for the creation of an experience like this. In a lyrical examination of built environments, *Chambers for a Memory Palace*, the renowned architect Donlyn Lyndon describes the affective qualities of different kinds of stairs:

The steeper a stair, the more likely it is to provide access to private places, to sleeping rooms and attics, for instance; or as in a Mayan temple, to signify unapproachability. The wider a stair, the more generous and free the movement it accommodates, allowing for the companionable ascent of several people at a time (...). Stairs with frequent landings are especially gentle, offering moments of rest and visible connection points along the way. Stairs that twist and turn can provide shifting vantage points within the space they traverse (and, coincidentally, the opportunity for staged appearance), highlighting the opportunities for the choreography. Spiral stairs usually require so much attention to the placement of your feet that arriving at the top is a surprise.⁶⁶

The affective power of the grand staircase of the Ateneum and the power of this particular exhibition rises from its spatial design. The stairs from the busy and noisy street are a steep but short ascent. The stairs rise against the massive, symmetrical Renaissance Revival facade. The building pushes against the ascending visitor as its facade shoots up from her feet; the rustic ground floor is like a stone wall the visitor is about to breach. It is all very much about upwards direction.⁶⁷ The doors are tall but narrow, hiding in their recesses. The whole first stage of entering the building is a heavy physical task, connoting, as Lyndon suggests, an access to a special place. Inside the visitor finds herself at the feet of the grand staircase, and the narrowness of the entry is suddenly replaced by the affording wideness of the space as its generousness opens to welcome the visitor. The space is divided into three landings: the first at the feet of the grand staircase and at the top of the entry, one at the middle of the grand staircase, and the third at the end of it (see 4.13). There the stairs fork left and right seemingly ending there, but the flights of stairs leading up from the third landing are in fact hidden from the visitor almost until she has arrived at the top.

⁶⁶ Lyndon & Moore (1994), pp.72-74.

⁶⁷ See Bloomer, Kent C. & Moore, Charles W. (1979) *Body, Memory, and Architecture*, Yale University Press, New Haven, USA/London, UK, p. 2.

They are not 'the opportunity for staged appearances' as grand staircases of stately homes and grand manors often are. Their staircases are the way for the master and especially for the ladies of the house to make their entrance and descend from the heights of their private lives to join the admiring ranks of guests. The direction of such staircases is towards the main floor, but in the Ateneum, the staircase leads upwards and onwards, away from the mundane and the everyday.

The second landing in the middle of the stairs is like a halfway mark on a scenic route on the way to the top. Here, and especially during the Waltari exhibition, the visitor can pause to admire and wonder at the dome spreading above her head. She can choose to head towards the adjoining galleries on the first floor and turn away from the main ritual route which would take her upstairs. It is a point on the path that requires decision but at the same time it is a moment that affords contemplation, however small and quick it might be. If she continues all the way up to the second floor and the main landing, the entirety of the main staircase now drops behind her. The narrower staircases on both sides of the space seem small and slight in comparison to the main ones. The height of the stairwell gains a different perspective when viewed from the uppermost floor. She has now left the everyday behind her; she has reached the domain of the Arts.

Movements up and down are seldom as spectacular as in the case of the Ateneum. Such grand entrances are naturally limited to large-scale museum buildings and probably own their contemporary existence to the old palaces and stately homes that have at some point in their history been turned into museums. However, a single step up or down can be enough to change the perspective and to redirect attention and attitude, a method familiar from garden design, especially in Japanese gardens. Somehow our bodies are particularly tuned to the level of the earth and a single step is enough to move us above or below it. In Vapriikki, most of the exhibitions on any floor are on the same level. The *Tampere 1918* makes an exception. Its first phase, a kind of a title space, is on the same floor level with the floor of the main exhibitions and it is easy to meander into this space from the common area. Here the walls direct the movement of the visitor towards the actual entrance but the two or so steps separating the title part from the main exhibition make entering the exhibition a more conscious act. Of course the two parts have a different look and feel to them but again the stepping up on a different level and floor causes the visitor to slightly hesitate. One single step would be enough to create the thought of going in as there is a clear difference between being in front of a step (it does not matter whether you are on the upper or lower end of it) and taking it. There is always a decision involved when one faces a step up, down, or over and either takes it or

turns away. We either remain in the space and the world we are in, or move into another one; I either become a part of something or turn it down.

Let's stop at the threshold for a while before moving further in. An entrance may, as in the case of the Museum of Medieval Stockholm, be a process that has length, duration, and stages. In a way, an entrance could be described as the process of approaching, crossing and leaving behind a border or a threshold. Humans have a strong sense of borders and perimeters. We react intuitively and emotionally not only to the encroachment of our personal space but to the way it is done and to the way we are approached even from afar. We have a comprehension, though a culturally guided one, of the spatial extent of the personal space around others. We normally hesitate to cross the line to the private area. These lines are sharp, and being approached by another person (or an animal or an object) creates pressure. Some of our social customs, such as greetings and handshakes, are ways of negotiating this pressure. It also works the other way around: when we approach another person, animal, object, or even a space, we push against a pressure that increases as we get closer. We are certainly not fully aware of this pressure or resistance, but experience it as hesitation, unapproachability, an unwelcoming feeling, or some kind of rejection, instead of as a welcoming, inviting pull. Built environments, whether outdoors or inside, not only reflect our habits of perimeters but may also make them more clear or more moderate. Think about the ordinary front door of a home. A door without a window is more closed and protective than a door with a window. A door that is made entirely out of glass is less shielding and more exposing – as it forces the inhabitant inside and the caller outside to meet face to face – than a door with a small window or windows that offer some sort of cover (they seem like peepholes). A few steps in front of a door make it appear more inviting than a door without any. A porch is welcoming, and a veranda running along the facade makes the indoors blend into the outdoors and gives the house a more comfortable look. Sometimes buildings can unintentionally create barriers where there are none or unduly strengthen the already existing ones. In my experience, this often causes feelings of awkwardness, discomfort, or uncertainty or a desire to move more or less directly past or away from it.

Crossing a boundary is a strong, embodied mental act. Stepping onto or down to something, moving through, across, or over can mount the metaphysical significance of the bodily act, and the gravity of portals and thresholds can be seen reflected in the way different cultures treat them in their architecture, belief systems, and folklore. In architecture it is, of course, a basic practical fact to put some emphasis on the doors and entrances so that they can be easily noticed, but there is more to it. We tend to think that something of the overall importance of a building can be told by looking at its main entrance and the facade which frames it. Gardens may have gates even when there are no fences.



PIC 4.14 The gold miners' hut in the Arctic Museum Nanuq, Pietarsaari, Finland. There is nothing preventing the visitors from entering the huts as they please or prohibiting them from sitting on the beds etc. The fence in the front of the picture is there just to prevent a careless visitor from slipping into the rather deep pool.

In Finland, and elsewhere too, it is not uncommon to see large trees stand on both sides of a driveway leading from the street to the yard. The most iconic portals might be the Japanese Shintoist red-painted gates that stand in the ocean or perched on a monolithic boulder: they lead to nowhere in this world, and yet walking through one would not be a meaningless act. In the Forbidden City in Beijing, specific doors were reserved for persons of specific status: the one in the centre of the main south-north axis was reserved for the emperor and his empress-to-be, and on very special occasions to certain deserving subjects. The further away from the centre of the axis you entered, the less important you were in the court hierarchy. All this was indicated by the number of great round metal studs on the doors. All said and done, moving through a portal or over a threshold will change your perspective and status.

Because of our sensitivity to thresholds, it is fairly easy to create them in an exhibition, but it is equally easy to overplay them. I have already mentioned some examples of borders and barriers in the previous chapter, but they deserve more attention. Demarcating the public, or the space open for visitors, from the space reserved for the objects alone is, as said, crucial for most museum exhibitions. Not all museums need them. Children's museums, for example, seldom need to do that and it is the same with science centres, for in these kinds of museums the touching and handling of objects is often the point. The St. Louis City Museum takes this approach a step further with its chutes, skywalks, and other

structures that invite the visitors to engage actively with the museum building itself. In Finland, similar freedom can be experienced in the Arctic Museum Nanuq in Pietarsaari, where almost all the buildings, excluding the main exhibition building, are completely without any access restrictions; there are no ropes, fences, or any other types of barriers separating the visitors from the arctic hunting lodges and their accessories (4.14).

The Arctic Museum and others like it trust their visitors to keep the place in order and in shape and this seems to be enough. Where borders are needed, they need to be open and friendly. The way to do this is to recognise the embodied presence of the visitor in the exhibition space. As Brian O'Doherty argued in *Inside the White Cube – The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, the white cube, the supposedly blank gallery, is the space of a disembodied eye.⁶⁸ It is as if the eye of the mind of the visitor floats in the exhibition space free from bodily restrictions and handicaps. While this approach can certainly work, and especially some artworks might even call for it, its foundations are faulty. We all have a body and we cannot escape its presence and effect. First of all, our bodies get tired of standing, especially on hard concrete floors, and our minds get tired as we engage with the objects on display. But mental exhaustion is connected to that of the body: they feed on each other and reinforce each other. There is no point in forcing the body to endure the museum visit unassisted, if you will. It is simply counterproductive. Secondly, although a visitor might not see it as it is, disregarding her body means disregarding her as an embodied being. It is easy to experience and interpret the disregarding of an aspect of being as disregarding the being as a whole. An exhibition that treats its visitors as disembodied eyes can easily come off as unwelcoming and difficult, withdrawn and wearing to approach and engage. Again, this is not necessarily experienced directly as disregard of the body but as resistance and, most importantly, as distance. It is as if the exhibition would want to keep the visitor at arm's length. This is why the vitrines and other glass cases are often seen as separative, unbridgeable barriers, even if they do not need to be such. As humans we are by nature sensitive to this kind of 'body language', although some are more so than others. We can quickly tell if someone wants to be left alone. We are also a territorial species by nature, as Edward T. Hall pointed out in the classic of proxemics, *The Hidden Dimension*. We do not only 'create material extensions of territoriality'⁶⁹ but also react to those we find in our environment. Hall called these expressions of territoriality *fixed-feature space* that

⁶⁸ See O'Doherty, Brian (1999) *Inside the White Cube – The Ideology of the Gallery Space* and Grunenberg, Christoph (1999) 'Case Study 1: The modern art museum' in Barker, Emma (edit.) (1999) *The Contemporary Cultures of Display, Art and Its Histories* -series book 6, Yale University Press, New Haven/London in association with The Open University, London, pp. 26-49.

⁶⁹ Hall (1969), p. 103.

is one of the basic ways of organizing the activities of individuals and groups. It includes material manifestations as well as the *hidden, internalised* designs that govern behaviour as man moves about on this earth.⁷⁰

While there are many different ways in which built environments affect and express our comings and goings as well as our customs and cultures⁷¹, we are, as said, sensitive to them. Because of this, many of us experience the white cube as distant, withdrawn, or difficult to relate to as an environment. It is elitist, as its critics claim: the white cube is, if you will, a tool for a very specific kind of aesthetic appreciation. It is not inherently faulty or disadvantageous but just like any other tool, one must learn to recognise it and its uses before one can implement it. One must learn that this particular environment requires an attitude that is different from our (for most of us anyway) ordinary way of reading and being in a space.

This 'hidden, internalised' sensitivity means that boundaries or any other architectonic components of an exhibition do not need to be particularly obvious. Even small, subtle, and gentle changes and solutions can have a profound effect on how the environment is experienced, but boundaries and ways of addressing the body are where small nuances appear to be particularly effective. Even a small change in a distancing space can make or break the space's connection with the body of the visitor. Although railings and such have a complicated reputation in exhibition design, and the museum ideology seems to wish to minimise their use, if not to expel them altogether, they are a rather simple way of recognising the body's presence in the exhibition space. Without a body, there is no need for rails or barricades. Also, with some kind of a boundary between us, the other we come to meet in an exhibition becomes independent and active. Objects that are within our reach and can be manipulated seem less independent than the ones we can approach but neither touch nor manipulate. There is a difference between approaching another human or an animal and

⁷⁰ Ibid. Italics my own.

⁷¹ *The Hidden Dimension – An Anthropologist Examines Man's Use of Spaces in Public and in Private* is first and foremost an anthropologist's journey, as the full title suggests, into the use and role of space in different cultures. Hall emphasised repeatedly the fact that the lines of private and public are extremely culture-related. I found his description of the Arabic culture and its view on the subject illuminating especially in the present world (pp. 154-164). Especially the few paragraphs on boundaries were thought provoking (pp. 162-164). Interestingly, according to Wikipedia, *The Hidden Dimension* received CIA funding, which might explain the tone of the book and the role the Arabic culture plays in it. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_T._Hall (26.8.2013). Wikipedia refers to an older article on CIA funding social sciences: <http://cia-on-campus.org/social/behavior.html> by Patricia Greenfield, prof. of psychology at the University of California, L.A (first published in *APA Monitor*, Dec. 1977, pp. 1, 10-11, The American Psychological Association.

approaching an inanimate object. I can sit with another human being, talk to her, look at her, and even touch her (and all the things I do, she can reciprocate) but there is an invisible line I cannot cross and which I should respect. Not all objects have this quality, but most museum objects do: they have an aura (of respect, value, and status) that calls for my attention. I must recognise them like I recognise another human, as another autonomous being as I recognise their and her boundaries by their subtle markers. Only then we can engage in a truly reciprocal conversation.

While railings and other impassable boundaries limit the visitor's access, they can also create pauses in space, and as Tuan writes, pauses turn space into a place. When I pause in space, for example as I walk along a fence and reach a point where there is a gate, I probably pause to look on the other side of the fence. I will look over the fence during a walk as I take in the scenery, but a gate creates a sense of thickness on my path. A gate suggests that there is another direction available for me and that I could alter my route here. It also suggests that there is a reason for the gate to be right here instead of being over there, and so I look for that reason wondering, more or less consciously, where the gate leads. Even a locked gate localises me, for a gate is a landmark by which to navigate. I am here, at the gate. I can see into other directions; new views become available. I am here and there are things over there, out of reach but available for me, as Noë would say, even if I do not go for them. What is essential for this availability is the recognised presence of my body. A gate in a fence is, as the fence itself, a recognition of my presence and the fact that as a body I am able to move in space. Barriers of any kind are also a part of the path. Barriers define the path as they guide – not necessarily just inhibit or direct – the walker's route. Just like a cup can function only because of its sides, a path exists only because there is a line that defines the shape of the path.

Pictures from 4.15 to 4.18 are examples of uses of barriers in various kinds of museum exhibitions. Some are more successful than others. For the sake of clarity, I discuss each of the examples separately as if in a picture caption. The pictures are not in any particular order, but loosely grouped according to the exhibitions in which they were taken.

The Bridge over to the Savanna in The Natural History Museum, Helsinki

Habitat dioramas are idealised environments that try to bring the visitor within a close range of the wild habitat they depict. From the very beginning of their history, they have been built to entice a feeling of being in the landscape; they are the 3D film of museum displays. Habitat dioramas are often built to rise from as close to the floor as possible so that their ground level would be on the same level with that of the visitors, making the crossing over to the world beyond the glass seem possible. Habitat dioramas are, as the title of Stephen Christopher Quinn's book on them suggests, *Windows on Nature*, but they are



PIC 4.15 A bridge-like walkway bringing the visitor into a closer contact with the diorama depicting an African savanna. The diorama's landscape extends into the floorspace as a pond under the bridge. In the background, some of the wildlife has escaped from the vitrines. The Natural History Museum, Helsinki, Finland.

also only that: windows that allow us the view but also isolate or, depending on the point of view, shelter us from the elements. They turn nature into an often pretty or dramatic romantic picture such as one of a tiger leaping on its prey or, like here, wild life gracing peacefully in a natural paradise. It is easy to make habitat dioramas depict sceneries of innocent nature untouched by human hand. In short, windows are frames for appreciation from afar – which does not mean that they are something of which museums ought rid themselves. In their ability to move and feed the imagination, they do have their place.

Here (4.15) the designers have tried to increase the immersive effect of the diorama by leading the visitor to stand on a bridge crossing the watering hole that has been extended to continue outside the diorama. The effect is also enhanced by placing plants and stuffed animals right next to the glass, an unnatural situation of closeness one would never encounter on a safari. The bridge is like a small knoll that offers a vantage point over the landscape. Also, being above and across the water it offers safety from the wildlife (there's even a crocodile under the bridge), a refuge from where the visitor can access the prospect of the plains. In addition to that, a visitor standing on the bridge and looking into the diorama is supported by the rail behind her back and between her and the rest of the exhibition. The rail hugs her, creating a more intimate space, rather like a nook within the public floor space of the exhibition. The

bridge not only brings a visitor into closer contact with the diorama, it guides her away from the common area and, as there is room for only a few visitors, by taking the bridge one can enter a more private place suitable for deeper contemplation. As Jan Gehl has suggested in *Life between Buildings*, the rail behind your back reduces the personal territory or space into a semicircle by protecting your back and thereby reducing the chance of unwelcome surprises.⁷² As a ground, the bridge has a distinctly different feel from the floor, suggesting a change of venue; new things are brought into the horizon of the visitor and being a slope, it 'joins things gently'⁷³; the bridge eases the visitor into the landscape. It is elemental that the bridge is offered as a choice just like an open gate; it is a detour that offers a prospect the visitor is not forced to take. It therefore requires a choice which creates a pause in the space as the visitor considers her choices.

The Story of the Bones at The Natural History Museum in Helsinki, Finland

In *The Story of the Bones* in The Natural History Museum in Helsinki, several skeletons of various species of animals have been placed on display at the centre of the room (4.16). The skeletons walk side by side as a group, reminding one of Noah and his ark. The animals are clearly on the same journey and it is up to the visitor to decide whether it is towards the ark or whether they are on the great journey of evolution, but there is no mistaking their determined gait. The exhibit is situated diagonally in the room so that the animals are heading towards the doorway that leads to the main lobby of the building, which creates a dynamic flow in the room. The skeletons are clearly not of this world or time: they tread on single-mindedly, oblivious to or unconcerned by the gawking visitors. They have a destiny to fulfil. The constant change and flow of evolution waits for no one.

The barrier or railing around them is light. Its transparency and low stature make it polite as it does not dictate but asks the visitor to keep her hands to herself. The skeletons are within (a long) reach or at least they appear to be so. It is again a question of a decision, of trusting that the visitors choose not to reach over the rail. A simple bench circles around the exhibit, offering a seat for those exploring eyes that wish to sit down to watch the passing animal parade. Interestingly, while the bench offers the body a rest, it also helps to keep it from the skeletons as it increases the gap between the visitor and the exhibit. It is like the ha-ha, the walled ditch that in the English landscape gardens keeps the cattle from ransacking the garden without the interruption a fence that would pro-

⁷² Gehl (2001), p. 151. Gehl's thinking on this subject reflects Appleton's ideas about the edges between refuges and prospects, i.e., the forest's edge between the unprotected expanses of open land and the seclusion of the forest.

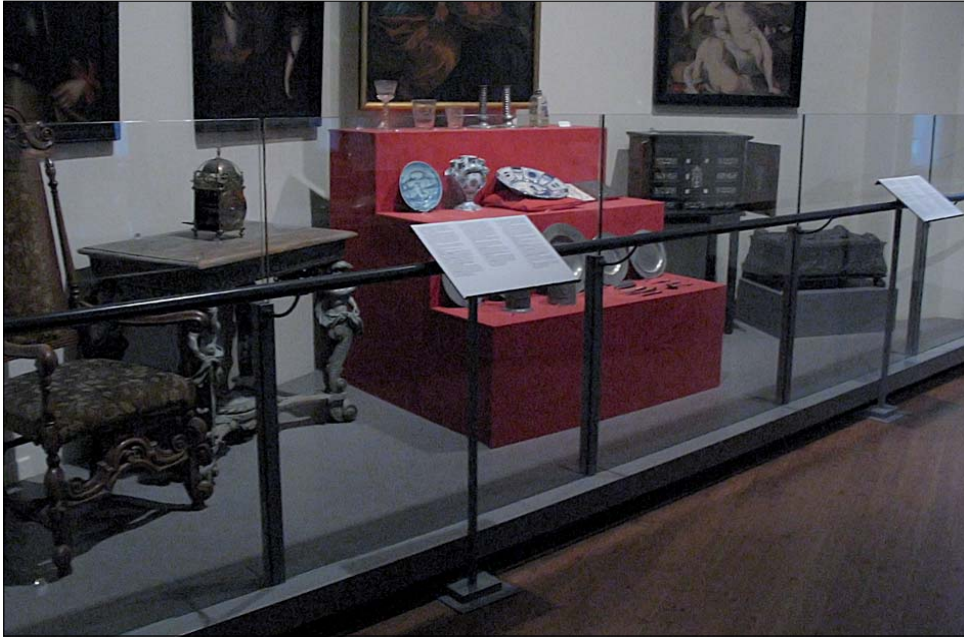
⁷³ Lyndon & Moore (1994), p. 53.



PIC 4.16 In the centre piece of *The Story of the Bones* a parade of animal skeletons journey on their evolutionary path. The Natural History Museum, Helsinki, Finland.

duce a lurch into the flow of the landscape. It is there, as you will realise when you almost walk into it during your stroll, but it is hidden from the viewer at the vantage point. A true ha-ha is truly hidden, but here the boundary is not seen as a barrier that denies, but as a bench that allows. In fact, the bench seems like a window seat where one can sit and enjoy the view but over which one cannot step without falling out of the window.

As said, the animal parade also creates movement in the room. It splits the path from door to door fluently in two, creating two possible routes around the room. Its gentle, oval form does this kindly and dynamically without interrupting the gait or creating resistance; it suggests more than dictates. It pushes the visitors around the exhibit and to the walls, acting both like a roundabout that offers several points of exit towards sights of interest and a way back to the flow on the main path. The curvature of the exhibit also guides the visitor to move in circles so that she is more likely to see all of the room. Roundabouts present the driver with an irresistible temptation to do extra laps, as many a car driver knows, and so does the animal parade. It does not seem too taxing to circle around it, even if you have already seen what lies on the other side.



PIC 4.17 The boundary of the exhibit in the National Museum of Finland's permanent exhibition is too cluttered and thus overly confining. Much less would have been enough to ward off the prying hands of the visitors.

Fenced-off History in The National Museum of Finland, Helsinki.

Fences can easily become barriers; when they do not only recognise the presence of the body but repel it they can turn into obstacles that push the visitor away instead of supporting her movement and pauses. In this example (4.17) from the National Museum of Finland in Helsinki, the basic structure of the railing is very similar to the one in *The Story of the Bones*. The supporting structure is light and unassuming, but the added glass elements are, despite their transparency, obstructive. To me they seem extensive. The metal railings are already a fence, signalling a closed-off area, but the glass that reaches above the horizontal rail adds an excessive tone to the message: 'We really mean it. Stay away!' The glass is an added denial; it gets in the way. A fence of this height usually allows access for the eyes and the hands as it merely stops the body, but here the glass is like a vote of distrust. It is as if its builders had thought that the visitor *will* reach over the fence and their lack of trust does not go unnoticed. The high glass is, of course, understandable as it is a solution to a problem created by the way the space is being used. The original problem with this display is not the glass but the basic dimensions of the entire exhibit. The grey platform supporting the objects is not deep enough, and without the glass the fragile and valuable objects would be within the reach of light fingers. It is a question of a

trade-off: a narrow platform allows a better view of the intricately decorated objects, but it also requires a more effective barrier.

The glass might not by itself be so obstructive, but other solutions affect it. The visual contrast between the platform and the open floor, between the self-evidently neutral grey and the warmth of the parquet is stark, disrupting the visual flow of the earth: it is obvious that the visitor and the objects do not stand on the same ground. This kind of contrast can certainly work, as it does in the Museum of Medieval Stockholm (see 3.5), but combined with the change in height, the railing, and the sleek, metallic edge in front of the railing, it all becomes too much. The definition is clear: the visitor is here and the objects (and their world) is over there. There is no discussion except for the admiring eye that by departing its body is able to touch the surfaces of the objects as if they were pictures. All in all, there is too much going on here, too many objects altogether, making the situation visually crowded. The text stands only add to the clutter. It would had been more 'airy' had they been added straight on the railing, without the legs. Also, removing every second pole of the rail would lessen the obstruction. A quote from *Chambers for a Memory Palace* sheds light on the situation eloquently:

Borders can be thrillingly abrupt when they strike the edges of grand difference; the city and the sea, the protected and the wild, the sacred and the profane. But when they reflect territorial claims that are ultimately negotiable, when they take their place in the midst of human transactions, they should generally be layered and interwoven, thick with opportunities of reconsideration.⁷⁴

The Exhibition of Ecclesiastical History, The National Museum of Finland, Helsinki.

Another example from the National Museum of Finland illustrates the importance of visual clarity (which does not necessarily mean lack of details or oversimplified style) for an engaging environment. Or perhaps it would make more sense to call this quality the harmony or balance of the elements present in an environment. There is, again, simply too much going on (4.18, following page). The horizontal line of the railing collides with the profile of the table top, the trunk and the window sill. In fact, it is difficult to figure out that the window sill is *not* another table with the trunk standing underneath it. There are too many poles supporting the canopies and, come to think of it, why two canopies when the objects are clearly part of the same display and one would do nicely? The canopies are even connected by the single rail. And is there a particular

⁷⁴ Lyndon & Moore (1994), p. 96.



PIC 4.18 Too many visual elements make a mess at the National Museum of Finland, making it hard indeed to figure out what one is seeing.

need for the canopies at all?⁷⁵ The poles, their shadows, and the light escaping from the rolling blinders create too many vertical lines that fail to come together. The text stand is too large since as a white object it shines brightly in the murky space; it commands too much attention. Of course, a text on a light background is easier to read in low lighting, but the plaque could easily have been half of its current size. Again, it could have been attached to the railing at the middle, making it more fluent to move one's gaze from the text to the objects and back. A little bit of editing could have made a big difference.

To me it seems that the transitions between different spaces are hardwired, if you will, into us as humans and into our European cultural background.⁷⁶ We put and experience much meaning in them, perhaps, because we are, as Hall saw it, a territorial species. Maybe it is because the transition from the hunter-gatherer culture to the stable, area-oriented agriculture in our distant past necessitated the underlining of the importance of boundaries, which had sud-

⁷⁵ Perhaps the designer thought that the canopies are a fitting prop for an exhibition of ecclesiastic objects as they are used in churches, for example, to mark sacred spaces and positions (see Lyndon & Moore (1994), p. 125).

⁷⁶ Not all cultures share similar concepts of area, territory and personal space, as Hall explained in *The Hidden Dimension*.

denly become far more important than they were before. Or maybe it is a biological predisposition in us, the orientation towards the prospect-refuge, as Appleton suggested. Whichever way it may be, transitions and thresholds are meaningful. Do we need someone to tell us that an ascent is meant to uplift us? Is an object in an exhibition seen as lit by heavenly light because we have learnt to associate such light with heavenly otherworldliness from religious imagery, or is it simply because sunlight falls from above, from the sky? But perhaps most important for designing museum exhibitions is the fact that we are intimately aware of other people's – and other things' – space and auras. As said, we are often quick to notice when we have trespassed into someone else's territory, but we are even more aware of it when we are approaching someone's territory on purpose. The subtle signs in the environment and in the style of gestures easily make us hesitate if they do not clearly invite us in. Therefore, it is not the boundaries – railings, vitrines, ropes, and such – in museum exhibitions that create a sense of a gap or distance between the visitor and the objects and the exhibition itself. It is not that we could not admire things from afar, without being able to touch them. Touch, while certainly being *the* sense of contact, is not necessary for an experience of contact. Being in the presence of something is the key element of engagement, but, as Noë has shown, presence is not simply a question of physical presence but one of availability. It would be wonderful if museum objects could be touched but sadly they in most cases cannot. They can, however, be made available and more present for us.

Science centres and other similar exhibitions do this all the time. They make immaterial objects, namely different natural phenomena and laws of nature physically and thus mentally available through objects that can be handled and experienced through the body and not just through the remote senses. Their tactics are admittedly different from what an art or a historical museum can utilise, but the principle of bodily availability is the same: it is enough to *suggest* that the objects are bodily available. While a barrier of any kind denies access, it can only deny something that is possible; there is no point in denying access if it cannot exist. Therefore a barrier or threshold always presupposes and recognises the presence of both the visitor and an object. Any barrier or threshold declares that, 'beyond me lies something else. Step over and you will be there instead of here.' In this sense they are also a means of orientation as they determine the directions of both movement and attention.

The trick is to make a barrier or a threshold gentle enough so that it *feels* inviting. A step or two up or down is enough to suggest a different place and approach. A gentle structure stopping one's movement is as effective as a whole wall made out of glass when it comes to keeping people from advancing (I exaggerate here; there is always someone ready to take the step, but they are not that many). The key is to maintain the flow or the continuity of the space so that it does not stop at the barrier but carries on behind it. If something is in the

same physical space with me, I am more likely to experience it as being available to me. If the exhibition design can create an experience of my being able to reach an object but choose not to do so – as in the case of *The Story of the Bones* – I am almost automatically bodily connected to it. I must be, how could I have otherwise chosen *not* to touch it?

Distance in itself is nothing to engagement. In the novel, *Kuningas ja narri* (*The King and the Jester*) by the Finnish writer Jari Tammi, the jester tells the king, who is looking at the stars through a spyglass, that the earth which has been turned into something new by man's hand, is not very beautiful anymore, but something that one leaves alone, even if one could touch it, remains beautiful. And what is beyond reach, is the most beautiful of all.⁷⁷ The question is whether the distance separates or becomes inconsequential for the experience of presence and availability.

4.5 Pauses and the Rhythm of Space

It is beginning to seem apparent that lines and axes, of both movement and sight, and the rhythms imbedded in the space of a museum exhibition are elements upon which an embodied, tactile, and engaging experience can be built. Rhythms and the changes of rhythm seem to reach our consciousness and sub-consciousness (more) directly and readily through our bodies. Our bodies pick up on the rhythms of the space and those rhythms travel all the way through us. There is in us an embodied sensitivity to rhythms.

The rhythm of a space includes a direction of flow or movement.⁷⁸ If a musical rhythm and harmonies are based on a kind of a flat line the undulations of which are interpreted as the rhythm, then the flow and the rhythm of a space could be seen as the undulation of lines through that space. Lyndon and Moore open their book *Chambers for a Memory Palace* with a chapter on lines and axes, and Arnheim also wrote about them in *The Dynamics of Architectural Form*⁷⁹; Lefebvre described a method for the study of rhythms in his book *Rhythmanalysis*

⁷⁷ Tammi, Jari (1991) *Kuningas ja narri*, Kustannusosakeyhtiö Pikku-idis, Turku, Finland, p. 27.

⁷⁸ Rhythm here has much in common with vitality, the manifestation of being alive, as described by Daniel N. Stern in *Forms of Vitality – Exploring Dynamic Experiences in Psychology and the Arts*. He describes vitality as the coming together of five dynamic events or elements: movement, time, force, space, and intentionality or directionality. According to Stern '[w]e are very alert to its feel in ourselves and its expression in others.' (2010) Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK, p.2.

⁷⁹ Lyndon & Moore (1994), pp. 2-27; Arnheim (1984), p. 157.

– *Space, Time and Everyday Life*.⁸⁰ ‘Axes reach across space to draw together the important points in a place’, Lyndon and Moore write at the beginning of the chapter:

They are mental constructs that help us to position ourselves and *make alliances with things, buildings, and spaces*. Paths are where you actually trod, so what happens along the way becomes the important thing. In some of the most interesting places, axes and paths interweave, with the axis allowing the mind to do the connecting, and the path allowing the feet to wander, explore, make choices, and put things in sequence.

And:

*Axes are, after all, an extension of being face to face; when you want to be certain to give your full attention to someone, or to signal that you are doing so, you position yourself opposite them, your bodies roughly aligned, your eyes attending to theirs. Likewise with objects: when we really want to pay close attention, we tend to place our whole bodies before them.*⁸¹

This tendency or practice of aligning in order to be in the presence of an other or to be included or to form a connection might be something inherent to our biological makeup. A friend of mine and I once noticed, while standing in the pasture where her horse, Meira, was grazing, that the horse immediately reacted to the way we aligned our bodies. If we turned to face each other directly, face to face, Meira would immediately stop grazing and come to stand right between us, cutting the visual contact between us. The horse stood between us, signalling disapproval by turning back its ears, whipping its tail, and staying in a generally tense pose until either me or my friend turned slightly away so that one shoulder would point towards the horse and the other one towards the other human. After the alignment was broken, the horse would signal approval by softening its features and walking away to graze again. We decided to experiment on the alignment a little and quickly found out that Meira would remain content and grazed happily if we maintained an alignment where each one of us formed a point of a triangle, so that everyone maintained a constant and equal alignment with each other. The balance was very tender: even the slightest imbalance of the alignment caused Meira to cease eating and come between us, but as long as we stood as a joined group of equals the horse did not feel left out. Or maybe it thought that the humans were not behaving correctly, but were in danger of losing their connection with the herd as we turned away from it, a situation which to a flight animal is one to be avoided at any cost. Meira may have been thinking that as the leading mare, it was responsible for

⁸⁰ Orig. *Éléments de rythmanalyse – Introduction à la connaissance des rythmes*, 1992. English translation 2004.

⁸¹ Lyndon & Moore (1994), p. 5 and p. 7 respectively. Italics my own.



PIC 4.19 The central axis of movement and view is obvious in the exhibition of *The Mediterranean Sea and the Gulf of the Nile* in the Museum Gustavianum in Uppsala, Sweden, and its style suits the neoclassical building and the history of the museum perfectly. Notice the small stools on the far left next to the vitrines. They enhance the 'usability' of the exhibition by offering not only means to see to the higher shelves but to sit too if one so wishes.

us and was trying to teach us the basics of herd behaviour as any responsible older mare would do (Meira was 29 years old at the time, a very respectable age for a horse).

Experimenting with the horse, the bodily difference between standing as a pair and standing as a group of three became obvious to me. It was a perfect example of the affinity between bodies Husserl had written about (see introduction): our bodies responded to each other's movements and gestures. Whenever I and my friend got deeply lost in our conversation, we unconsciously turned to face each other, and subsequently left out the horse. Respectively, when standing as a group, I felt less inclined to engage in more personal topics or to go for a detailed, analytical, or emotional discussion. There was a pull in both directions: a desire to maintain the contact as a herd and to turn towards my friend when the conversation called for it. It seems to me that the simple, easily overlooked gesture of turning one's shoulders towards and away is what opens and closes a connection between individuals – whether humans, animals, or objects. As Lyndon writes, 'An axis is a relationship across space, not simply a path.'⁸²

⁸² Ibid., p. 9.

At their simplest, axes and paths and the ways they affect us are easy to describe and see. Let us return to an example familiar from the previous chapter, the room containing *The Mediterranean Sea and the Gulf of the Nile* exhibition at the Museum Gustavianum in Uppsala, Sweden (4.19). The layout of the exhibition is beautifully classical, complementing the history and the design of the building housing it. The hall is long and narrow with numerous windows bringing light in through the extremely thick walls. The windows are arranged symmetrically, leaving almost no continuous wall suitable for vitrines and such. The largest piece of continuous wall is at the opposite end of the hall from the entrance, and the design and lighting give the hall a rather church-like feel. The only asymmetry is the row of steel columns on one side of the central axis; everything else has been placed absolutely symmetrically, so that there are layers of symmetrical features in the space. The squares drawn by the planks of the wooden floor create the earth for this space.⁸³ The rhythmical placing of the vitrines so that every vitrine of equal depth and of similar height are placed opposite each other so that they stand in pairs on each side of the central axis, as if an honour guard protecting and saluting the visitor's path to the presence of the statue which like an altar waits at the end of the axis.

It might seem at first glance that the space should be rather dull, all symmetrical and ever so predictable; a space that from a contemporary point of view seems something to avoid when the goal is to design interesting and engaging spaces. Grids are boring, aren't they? They are full of repetition and sameness. What could be surprising in a space like that? And it might perfectly well be true. Though I experienced the exhibition as engaging and encouraging exploration, others might not see it like that. But still I dare to suggest that this is more than just a personal preference, for this exhibition is an exceptional example of what Lyndon and Moore probably meant when they wrote that the most interesting places are the ones where paths and axes interweave 'with the axis allowing the mind to do the connecting, and the path allowing the feet to wander, explore, make choices, and put things in sequence.'⁸⁴

Here the statue is like a lighthouse, a beacon to which the visitor's mind connects the minute she walks in. It is hard to imagine someone not noticing the statue as soon as she steps in; the space is built to draw the eye to it. The statue is visible from almost every corner of the room and it is easy to localise or situate oneself according and in relation to it. It is the focal point of the idea of the exhibition, not just of the room. All movement is movement in relation to it, either towards or away from it. *The Mediterranean Sea and the Gulf of Nile* exhibition resembles a maze, where the goal of the player daring the labyrinth is always visible as are the dividing walls that always more or less hide the path while simultaneously drawing it (4.20, following page). What else is there in

⁸³ Incidentally, the square is a Chinese symbol for the earth element.

⁸⁴ Lyndon & Moore (1994), p. 5.



PIC 4.20 The rebuilt labyrinth at Yuan Ming Yuan (the 'Gardens of Perfect Brightness') or the Old Summer Palace, Beijing. As in many mazes, the labyrinth surrounds the goal, the marble belvedere, where the emperor waited for the winning concubine. The belvedere is visible throughout the labyrinth, anchoring the axis between it and the player moving through the maze and establishing the cardinal direction of movement.

this kind of a place but exploration by wandering, by making choices, and creating narratives? This is what Lyndon and Moore held museums to be best for,

[a] building type especially beholden to an understanding of Axes that Reach and Paths that Wander (...) [places where] people move through purposefully or casually, some intent on arriving at an anticipated goal, others wandering, enjoying the pleasures along the way. As a visitor to a museum, you want to be able to loose yourself in exploration, but you also want to know where you are at any given moment. Successful museums allow either mode.⁸⁵

In the present example from the Museum Gustavianum, the maze is evident. The visitor is at all times aware of the cardinal directions of the space, which way she is facing, where the statue is, where is the door. The strong axis or the primary cardinal direction gives every alignment extra meaning as it makes every turning towards and away more pronounced in spite of the actual degree of the act itself. The statue is like a magnetic pole to our internal compass.

This example also helps to explain some of the reasons why The Museum of Scotland's exhibition on pre- and Roman history is so confusing. The basic

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 23-24.



PIC 4.21 The permanent exhibition of Finnish prehistory in the National Museum of Finland leads to expect a climax of the axis leading across the space, but at the last moment, when the visitor should encounter it, there is none.

elements of the exhibition are very similar to those of the Museum Gustavianum: very minimalistic with their light, vitrines with grey painted steel-frames, and the overall low-key design of the space. Although the basic building blocks are the same, the outcome is not. The Museum of Scotland lacks clear axes but is filled with winding, interweaving paths and corridors, much like a system of caves leading deeper and deeper into the mountain and mixing the explorer's head with twists and turns without a chance of orientation.

The mixing of axes and paths also helps to bridge the gap between the visitor out at the sea and the vitrine islands. Axes and paths help to create a kind of a mental map of the space and, as said, the enhanced sensation of turning towards and away from the objects on display help the engagement. It is the lack of axes or more precisely the inadequate strength of the existing axis in the prehistory exhibition in the National Museum of Finland that increases the feeling of disinterestedness as it increases the distance between the visitor and the exhibition. While we usually assume that axes lead us into being face to face with something such as the statue in Gustavianum, it does not have to be so.⁸⁶ It should, however, lead us somewhere. In the exhibition of Finnish prehistory,

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 8.

the axis of the space – a space very similar to that in the Gustavianum – leads nowhere as the partly visible vitrine at the far end of the axis messes up the flow of gaze and movement (4.21, prev. page). The fluent rhythm of the exhibition is suddenly brought to a halt, and while the basic composition of the exhibition suggests an end, a climax, or some other kind of a culmination, there suddenly is nothing but confusion. The sudden dilution of the axis also weakens the possible paths as it does not create the cardinal direction in reference to which all the turning could be measured.

But there is one statement with which these examples seem to conflict. In *Life between Buildings: Using Public Space*, Jan Gehl argued that

[p]eople reluctantly accept large deviations from the determined main direction, and if the goal is in sight, they tend to steer directly toward it.⁸⁷

In these environments I, at least, have not experienced any particular desire to stick to the main directions or axes – quite the opposite. Yet Gehl's principle is true: people do not easily abandon a path through space once their minds are set to it. Perhaps this is true to large outdoor public spaces like streets where almost everybody is on their way to somewhere in particular – to home, work, shop, or the dentist's. I think all of us have experienced the weirdness of noticing a new shop along a familiar route through a familiar part of the town, only to hear from friends that, 'It has always been there; haven't you noticed it before?' It certainly is an arduous task to get passersby to notice, let alone to step into a new shop or to get them to linger on a town square or any other piazza, to turn it into a place of being and not just a space to pass straight through. Perhaps it is not so much a question solely of the design of the environment but a question of goals and motivations, of why people move through it. If they are on their way to somewhere in particular, somewhere beyond the piazza, would it not be reasonable to assume that they do not have the time or the inclination to sit down just now? Not everyone moving within a space or in an environment is able to just follow their whims.

Museums, like gardens, on the contrary to most city spaces, are environments of lingering and meandering paths. It is quite possible that while Gehl's principle holds in the case of city spaces, it does not concern museums as people seldom enter museums with an intention to just have a quick look.⁸⁸ There is another possible reason why Gehl's principle does not seem to hold when considering the present examples: in them the paths are equally engaging, equally appealing, as the axes. Except in the case of the National Museum of Finland and its prehistory exhibition, where the paths have lesser presence in

⁸⁷ Gehl (2001), p. 139.

⁸⁸ Gehl did not argue single-mindedly that people never linger along or deviate from the clear route they have chosen: rich environments encourage us to do so.

comparison to the main axis. So could it be stated that paths can become desirable diversions that do not seem to lead us away from the main goal as long as they are equally strong spatial features as the axes? Or is it a question of the ecology of the situation, that a path can be chosen if the (mental, physical, temporal) cost of taking it is acceptable in comparison to what it offers? Perhaps it is a matter of trade-offs.

4.6 The Gravitational Pull of Objects

Over the course of this study, the exceptional character of the dry stone garden at the Ryōan-ji temple in Katsura, Kyoto became evident. Books on the Japanese art of garden naturally discussed its merits, but I was somewhat surprised to find how often the garden got mentioned in books that do not necessarily explicitly deal with gardens. Unexpectedly many of the contemporary books dealing with architecture, place, and space that I had chosen as my source material discussed the Ryōan-ji temple and its merits. Hildebrand discusses approaching the shrine that is partly hidden by trees and vegetation, and how this play of shade and light creates and maintains a sense of mystery and exploration, although he doesn't mention the famous stone garden.⁸⁹ Lyndon and Moore discuss the garden as a stone garden, calling its captivating design 'a sort of a divine map', the meaning of which can perhaps be realised after long contemplation.⁹⁰ Arnheim, on the contrary, discussed the garden itself in a subsection of a chapter in *The Dynamics of Architectural Form* that deals with order and disorder in balancing elements.⁹¹ Arnheim commented on how balanced the order of five heaps of stones is and how it is impossible to photograph the whole setting from any viewpoint. Moreover,

[w]hat strikes the visitor about this ancient order is its perfection and its *elusiveness*. The constellation of the five units is not definable; they form neither a circle nor a pentagon nor a quincunx. *Their locations avoid any hierarchical patterning, but are determined solely by a delicate weighing of their interrelation.* It is as though five magnets of equal power, attracting and repelling one another, were floating on water, free to find the position in which their fields of forces are in perfect equilibrium.⁹²

Having not experienced this particular garden in situ, my impressions and theories depend solely on whatever pictures and descriptions I have seen and

⁸⁹ Hildebrand (1999), pp. 52-53, 55.

⁹⁰ Lyndon & Moore (1994), pp. 261-262.

⁹¹ Arnheim (1984), 'Balancing elements' pp. 193-198.

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 196-197. Italics my own.

read, but I find Arnheim's words most illuminating in the current context – and in general. I believe that the power of the Ryōan-ji's stone garden is precisely in its elusiveness, in its avoidance of apparent patterns, in its interrelations. Arnheim mentions how the arrangement changes as the visitors walk back and forth along the viewing platform.⁹³ There is something to the design of the garden that is to be experienced through movement.

In *The Art of Setting Stones and Other Writings from the Japanese Garden*, the American born, Japan residing garden designer Mark Peter Keane retells eloquently his experiences of an unnamed stone garden within a temple that most likely is the Ryōan-ji but where instead of restless walking he sits down:

The garden stones are calming; their mute presence somehow reassuring. I sit on the veranda to be closer to them the way one will sit at the edge of the ocean, not needing to enter to be refreshed. The stones cast shadows, marking out dark crescents on the sand. (...) They have been set out in space to develop a tension, an imbalance that gives the garden its visual vitality, like the positioning of the mountains in an ink landscape, scattered in the mist.⁹⁴

It is interesting how these two observers arrive at different conclusions with one seeing the stones in an elusive balance and the other calling it an imbalance through tensions; one moves, the other sits still. Also, David A. Slawson, an American garden designer with a Ph.D. in Japanese aesthetics and landscape garden design and who has studied under noted Japanese garden designers, describes in his most illuminating book, *Secret Teachings in the Art of Japanese Gardens – Design Principles, Aesthetic Values* how 'the Japanese garden is constructed of a network of horizontal and vertical triangles.'⁹⁵ In fact, and contrary to Arnheim's statement, there is a hierarchical pattern in the fascinating design of the Ryōan-ji's dry garden, which Slawson unfolds in his book.⁹⁶ Basically it all comes down to the axes of movement and forces that the shape of rocks and their placement on the horizontal plane, on the ground, suggests in relation to the horizontal, vertical, and diagonal planes. Both utter stillness and dynamic forces are at play in Japanese garden design. Sitting down one senses the tension; moving about one experiences the stillness that shifts with the movement of the visitor. A new dimension to this experience opens when one discovers what the name of the temple means: the Temple of the Dragon at Peace.

⁹³ Arnheim (1994), p. 196.

⁹⁴ Keane, Mark Peter (2002) *The Art of Setting Stones & Other Stories from the Japanese Garden*, Stone Bridge Press, Berkeley, CA, USA, p. 115.

⁹⁵ Slawson, David A. (1991) *Secret Teachings in the Japanese Gardens – Design Principles, Aesthetic Values*, Kodansha International Ltd., Tokyo, Japan, p. 94. See also pp. 97-98.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 94-101. Slawson makes a reference to Arnheim's *Art and Visual Perception* when explaining the sensation of movement and forces created by stationary objects.

Simply watching a photograph taken from the dry garden of Ryōan-ji or a similar place, I gradually become aware of these tensions, of a kind of a gravitational pull between the different parts of the design. The garden's dynamic, ephemeral balance becomes increasingly concrete through my body, although my mind remains unable to put into words the construction of this particular balance. It certainly is a result of the patient contemplation of the designer and the centuries of tradition that have discovered these elusive rules of design through which environments of such allure can be produced. What I know, however, is that what I experience – even when only looking at a picture of such place – is a profound experience of engagement. I am not outside the picture; the picture is not just a two dimensional image of something somewhere else but a place that is there, within my reach. As I said, I have never visited the Ryōan-ji's renowned garden and yet I feel myself so familiar with it that it feels like I *had* sat or stood on that veranda with the stones and the sea of gravel opening in front of me.

Nöe suggests in *Varieties of Presence* that things far away – places, items, and persons – can be present and available to us through representative models and pictures, but this presence can go a step further. We can experience moments of ecstasy, that is to say, we can stand next to these things available to us, be face to face with them. When I watch a picture of the dry garden, or even think about it, what I experience in my body is a sense of belonging to a group, a feeling similar to the experience with my friend and her horse. The garden stands in front of me, face to face and not shoulder to shoulder. There is a feeling of recognition of a presence. I suspect that the power of Ryōan-ji's dry garden is not born of only the internal relations between the groups of stones forming it, but the fact that the design includes the viewer as one of the group. The viewer experiences the axes of gravitation extending between the groups of stones and then finds that she can occupy or take a place in that group, creating her own set of axes between the stones. In other words, she arrives at the setting and becomes a part of it and enters a reciprocal state of conversation with the place; she becomes engaged.

There is nothing new in these kinds of settings that connect through axes; any altar of any religion is essentially such a place. Ryōan-ji's dry garden could very well count as an altar, and perhaps it should be a place of contemplation in a Zen monastery. But the ruling ideology of the field states that museums should not build altars, especially those museums dealing with the history of nations and cultures. Art museums *celebrate* the masters of the Arts and they perhaps can be allowed to be more temple-like than other museums (but that is a matter for another discussion). Museums can be built to commemorate daring explorers of the world and science like museums such as the Kon-tiki Museum in Oslo commemorates the achievements and influence of Thor Heyerdahl. But it is a thin line, easy to cross over into the realm of worship and hidden agen-



PIC 4.22 View into the main hall from the current entrance to the introductory room, after crossing the drawbridge and moving through the conjoining corridor immediately after it. The axis from beneath the mock portcullis draws the eye and the mind forward, enticing the body to follow. Museum of Medieval Stockholm.

das. This makes it tricky to display objects and histories without hoisting them onto a pedestal under a false light.

With this in mind, creating axes facilitates engagement. At their simplest, as in the view from the Museum of Medieval Stockholm (4.22) or in the previous example from the *Mediterranean Sea* exhibition in the Museum Gustavianum, axes are lines of sight, lines of tension that pull the attention of the person standing on or close enough to them into the distance. If you will, they are like the mysterious and contested ley lines of the prehistoric British landscape, not drawn out into the landscape and yet there for the willing mind to see. There is a dynamic flow in them, a connecting energy, a druid would say, that can be experienced in one's body. Some may experience it more vividly than others, some axes create more vivid experiences than others – the Ryōan-ji being perhaps one of the most minimalistic ones in its material existence and yet one of the most powerful as experienced. Yet they can guide even an absentminded walker through a busy town square. Perhaps it is not so unreasonable for people to defend the idea of ley lines crisscrossing the landscape utterly randomly and without any rationale, as some critics of the idea suggest. It may well be that there are none, that when there are enough visual markers in a landscape or marked prehistoric monuments on a map, our minds automatically connect

PIC 4.23

An axis creates a line of movement through the congested exhibition space of the Kilmartin Museum in Kilmartin, Scotland.



the dots like we connect the random spread of stars into constellations. After all, it is habitual for our visual perception to seek out patterns.⁹⁷ The experience of lines connecting different parts of the landscape with the walker remains.

In the small and full but well designed Kilmartin Museum in Kilmartin, Argyll, Scotland, a visual axis assisted by the mock standing stones helps the visitor to find the main path through the cramped rooms (4.23). The space is like a forest with its many walls, corners, exhibits, and stands, but the visual line through creates a direction saving the place from becoming confusing and the visitor from becoming lost. Instead she strolls amongst the vertical lines, the trees that constitute the forest, wandering comfortably in the settings revealed by her movement. Something potentially bewildering has been made into something to be explored.

The Kilmartin Museum may be small, practically community run, and situated in a very small village, but its exhibition makes the most of the small

⁹⁷ For example Arnheim points this out in *Visual Thinking*: 'Similarly complex situations arise in other areas of perception whenever "two and two" are put together, that is, when several items are seen as a unitary pattern.' Arnheim (1997), *Visual Thinking*, University of California Press, Berkeley / Los Angeles, CA, USA, p. 54.



PIC 4.24 The second room of the Kilmartin Museum's exhibition of the glen's prehistory. The narrowness of the room has been turned into a feature by elongating the main axis. The once confined space now extends into the distance giving the room some feeling of spaciousness.

space in its use. It is an excellent example of accepting the limitations of the space available and turning the shortcomings into strengths. All the rooms are small and in some way oddly shaped. Only the last room seems like a proper room instead of a closet or some barely sufficient utility space. And yet the exhibition flows forward like a brook in a deep creek, a burn as the Scots would say. The narrowness of the space and the low ceiling have been turned into a warm, hugging feeling, into a complementing opposite to the rugged expanse of the Highland landscape waiting outside with the rainy west coast weather. The museum is the base camp of the glen filled with 9000 years of history and its remains, offering security and comfort between outings.

The design of the exhibition relies on axes. The second room, the one to which the axis of the first room leads (4.23), is as narrow as it gets, only two or so strides wide (4.24). This makes the room an in-between-space of sorts; it may have previously, in the building's past, been a utility room. It is a narrow rectangle, having more depth than width, and without a proper window that would grant a prospect beyond the cavity of an underground room. If the de-

signer Chris Hudson⁹⁸ had played by the basic rules of expanding narrow spaces, he would quite probably have tried to find a way to make the room seem wider. Instead he decided to turn the length of the room into proper depth, a deepness for the imagination to follow. The diagonal, but not symmetrical lines of the ground-imitating platform, and the walls of the bay of the light well at the far end create a dynamic force that pulls the visitor in. The asymmetry of the lines is crucial: the right hand edge of the 'grassy' platform grabs the eye of the visitor entering the room from the left and guides it in towards the display, where the half reconstruction, half mock prehistoric boat (half of it is just paint on the wall!) extends the line of sight. This line comes to a halt as it meets the back wall on the left, where the shaded wall of the bay leading to the light well picks up the slag and leads the eye further into the bluish light from the hidden window. The mock cliff also pushes the eye and body to the left by the weight of the cliff face it imitates, as does the part of the display left between the boat and the cliff that with its lower stature flows forward into the blue light before seemingly disappearing behind the cliff. The space then continues unseen yet present and available for our imagination. An imaginative mind could well conjure up the idea of a seaside scenery waiting right behind the corner.

The setting of the second room strongly resembles a Japanese garden in its design principles: it takes into account the horizontal, vertical, and depth dimensions of the space, or the ground and the elevational planes, and the depth cues and the atmospheric effects hidden in them.⁹⁹ It is especially the depth cues and atmospheric effects that Slawson lists in *Secret Teachings in the Art of Japanese Gardens*¹⁰⁰ that have been put into play here:

- *Overlapping*: The objects on display overlap each other rhythmically: the free standing displays in front of the main display; the boat in front of the basket and the landscape elements; the cliff face blocking part of the light well. This not only creates a sense of depth (things behind others are further away) but also a dynamic, zigzagging movement into the distance as the width of the zigzag narrows.
- *Linear perspective*: The parallel lines described above – the edge of the platform etc. – seem to converge, which according to our visual logic must mean that in reality they are receding from us. The lines

⁹⁸ The exhibition was designed by Chris Hudson, a British designer specialising in museum exhibition design, and it won the Gulbenkian Prize and was selected the Scottish Museum of the year in 1998.

⁹⁹ Slawson discusses these concepts throughout the *Secret Teachings in the Art of Japanese Gardens* (1991).

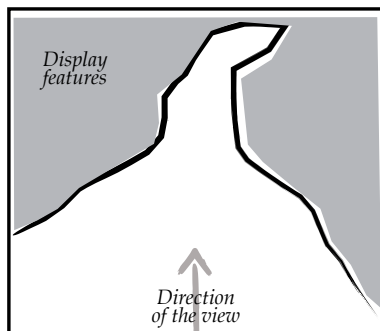
¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

created by the top and bottom edges of the information posters on the longer walls also add to the sensation of a receding space.

- *Size perspective*: Here the size perspective does not only work by the logic that smaller things are further away but through a little trick of proportions. The mock cliff face, which we know can be massive in nature (especially in Scotland), makes it seem as if only a small section of it was visible from the room. Built to rise from the platform to the ceiling, hints at a part that must have been left outside the building. Somewhere out there is the rest of the cliff.
- *Areal perspective*: Could this be any more obvious? The bluish, reflected light from outside is contrasted by the warm, yellowish colour of the lighting fixtures and the walls.

All in all, this room of the Kilmartin Museum has been designed and built as the very image of what Slawson calls a scroll garden: a garden that is to be experienced from one fixed side, to be looked upon almost like an image or a painting.¹⁰¹ In fact, the room follows to the letter the instructions from the classic of Japanese garden design, *Illustrations*, for making a square site appear wider (4.25).¹⁰² The construction of the space plays on the curiosity of the visitor, just like the first room. It entices the visitor into wanting to take a peek at the partly hidden corners behind which you can *almost* see. As said, it promises a prospect, something to see if you just take a few more steps and peek your head around the corner. It plays on promises of discoveries and fulfilment of curiosity. All it asks is for you to get bodily involved, to walk in.

The promise of an opening prospect is fulfilled in the last room of the Kilmartin Museum (4.26). Here the visual axis points to the one window free of any displays standing in front of it, and a path meandering through the room guides the visitors steps slowly towards it. There the visitor can finally let her mind wander beyond the secluded spaces of the exhibition and into the open,



PIC 4.25

An illustration of the basic structure of a room in the Kilmartin Museum, following Slawson's illustration, from *Illustrations*, of the principles of making a square site appear wider. The back corners of the room have been obscured by the display features, which strengthen the principal axis of the room.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 80-82.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 84. A translation of Zoen's *Illustrations for Designing Mountain, Water, and Hillside Field Landscape* is included in Slawson's book, pp. 142-174.



PIC 4.26 The last room of the exhibition in the Kilmartin Museum. The window at the centre of the picture offers a prospect into the glen and its numerous prehistoric sites, especially to the megalithic graves some of which are practically in the backyard of the museum's buildings.

grassy glen. The closest megalithic graves are visible from the window, and so the window brings the visitor face to face in stone and flesh with the history the exhibition has just opened up for her. Such an immediate connection between the exhibition and the actual subject it refers to is a rare treat even in museums with far more authentic and original objects on display than what the Kilmartin Museum at that stage had.¹⁰³ The real museum is not the building or the exhibition but the glen itself. The exhibition is, or this version of it was, like the list of contents and the introduction of a book on the subject.

'Rocks and trees can move,' writes Slawson, 'as well as move the viewer.'¹⁰⁴ A Japanese garden is choreographed like a dance to move its audience:

The classical Japanese garden designer is in this sense also a choreographer, with rocks and trees as his chosen dancers. The geological and biological growth forces already encapsulated in the shapes and grain of these materials may be directed up and down in the vertical plane or from side to side in the horizontal plane, with the

¹⁰³ According to the news on the museums Facebook page, the designs for the redevelopment had, when writing this, reached a point where they were about to be revealed to the public. News posted on the 19th of September 2013.

Ibid., p. 96.

characteristic effect upon the senses that these two planes exhibit, the horizontal suggesting repose and the vertical, stored tension (...).¹⁰⁵

But to turn the garden into something that moves the viewer not only in her spirit, *shén*¹⁰⁶, to reach for a state of contemplation that also guides her body through the meandering path of a stroll garden, requires one more axis, the diagonal. The vertical and the horizontal planes and objects defined primarily by these directions are characterised by a potential that is not necessarily at rest but immobile. The diagonal, on the other hand, 'is characterized by its dynamic quality.'¹⁰⁷ According to Slawson, movement of the potential forces of the vertical and the horizontal becomes possible only when they become connected by diagonal forces. Slawson uses the sign of an arrow to illustrate this: without the end of two diagonal lines converging a – is just a line, but add the diagonals and it becomes an arrow, a line with movement and intention, –>.¹⁰⁸ The same effect is seen in play in all the three examples from the Kilmartin House Museum. The straight visual axes through the rooms in each case is powered by the diagonal paths crisscrossing it. The Axis that Reaches – both reaches to the visitor and pulls her in – and the Path that Wanders are like a spring, a coiling of forces that are ready to spring into action at the presence of a visitor. The pull through space or towards an object is a matter of cooperation of these two. An axis alone can easily stop a visitor at the door, and it can just as easily be a repelling force that pushes against as a single line of movement, calling one forward. A path alone can easily become confusing, creating uncertainty and causing the wanderer to waver without the clear lines of sight that would assure her that she is still heading north. Even a traditional church with the main axis leading directly from the main doors to the main altar is a design more complex than that. The pulpit, the benches, side altars, images, decoration, pillars, and so on create possibilities for choosing a different path, and the human, the sinner, is not forced to meet her maker directly but allowed to choose a path that suits her.

Slawson refers to Arnheim's *Art and Visual Perception* repeatedly in relation to the visual forces and tensions that appear as movement in our perception.¹⁰⁹ Visual illusions that utilise this ability or tendency of our visual perception are a common delight (especially, it seems, on Facebook where such pictures appear

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., pp. 96-97.

¹⁰⁶ In Chinese philosophical tradition *shén* is the spirit, the awareness and consciousness of a person that can be seen in a living persons eyes. Some sources on Taoism and Chinese philosophy cut corners by translating it into 'soul' but the original meaning is not exactly compatible with the Western notion of 'soul'.

¹⁰⁷ Slawson (1997), p. 97.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ See e.g. *ibid.*, pp.98-99.

in the newsfeed regularly) but the same principles also work their magic in our everyday environment. In spite of their popular familiarity as gimmicky pictures in the popular culture, these axes that engage us with our environments, these reciprocal affects of the environment are not particularly easy to explain in words. Slawson's book is filled with not only skilful, but extremely illuminating drawings from various Japanese gardens that with arrows show how particular stones and other features create motion and potential in an otherwise static scenery – especially when it comes to rocks. It is nothing less than awe-inspiring how full of motion a crop of rocks can be! The river of gravel flows and a dry waterfall is still filled with the rush of the falling liquid.

But however well Slawson's illustrations reveal the construction of the garden features, they might not reveal the engaging potential of the joining of diagonal, horizontal, and vertical axes in a room. So I conducted a little experiment in my own home (4.27a-d). I took photographs of the view from the front door, from within the little entry space called *tuulikaappi*, 'wind closet', that in Finnish houses separates the heated area from the front door. These *tuulikaappi* are designed to do just that; it keeps especially the wintry weather from invading the rest of the house and the dearly paid for heat from escaping when the front door is opened. After the entry opens the actual hall from where various doorways lead to the kitchen (seen at the back in the photographs), living room, lavatory, and the bedrooms. I personally find the layout of the space comfortable, but I have also discovered that the little traditional rag rug currently adorning the floor of the hall can have a dramatic effect on how the space feels. But first, few words on the structure of the space itself and on the angle of the photograph. As you can see, there are a lot of vertical lines in the space and only a few horizontal ones, which emphasises the vertical plane over the horizontal. In a photograph, the space also seems more confined than it actually is. In addition to that, the way the hardwood floor is laid makes the movement of the horizontal plane more depth-directed than width-oriented, which in Japanese garden design would probably be considered as poorly balanced. Considering Appleton's prospect and refuge, the light from the kitchen window creates a clear promise of a prospect, and the chair affords a comfortable observation point over that prospect. The photographs were taken in natural daylight just to keep things simple without having to consider the effects of lighting.

In the first picture (4.27a, following page), the rug is where it most often ends up in our family's everyday life. It has turned out to be natural to unconsciously align the edge of the rug with the end of the wall, separating the hall from the kitchen. This, however, creates an abrupt stop in the flow of the space, stopping an entering person right there in the *tuulikaappi*. In this setting there are two axes: one along the rug into the wall and the other beginning behind the closet on the left and ending at the chair, but they do not connect; the main



PIC 4.27 The rug aligned with the end of the wall creates an interrupted axis.



PIC 4.27 The rug aligned with the direction of the floorboards creates a zigzagging path over the direct visual axis from the door to the chair.

axis from the door to the chair is interrupted by the two unfinished axes. It feels that the point of coming in is to go and have a look at the framed picture.

In the second picture (4.27b), keeping the rug aligned with the direction of the floorboards and bringing it into closer contact with the line of the closet doors creates a zigzagging path that crosses over the direct visual and physically available axis leading in from the door and over to the chair and the prospect. The flow of the lines of potential motion and tension within the features is now more dynamic but still awkward or clumsy. It leaves a sense of hesitation in one's body after entering the *tuulikaappi*; it is as if the turn of the path in front of the opposite wall ought to have a point and yet there seems to be none. The framed picture is now left slightly off-track and it feels like you should step away from the path if you wanted to take a look.

However, if the rug is aligned diagonally and pointing directly towards the kitchen, there is a motion leading deeper into the space which makes the house seem more inviting (4.27c). But there is a downside to this alignment too, as the drag towards the kitchen increases and the hall begins to feel even more like a mere linking space mediating access into the different areas of the apartment. 'Go straight in,' the room now states, 'Walk straight through. Nothing to



PIC 4.27c The rug aligned with the visual axis over to the kitchen makes the space seem more welcoming as it creates a sense of inwards motion.



PIC 4.27d A more gentle curve of the path lessens the urge to walk through. A pool is created in the stream through the room and the tensions in the room are relieved.

see here.' If the hall is the conjoining place of a house or an apartment, it should, should it not, encourage and facilitate orientation? Surely it should give a person coming in a sense of the lay of the house? In this setting, the framed picture has become more alluring. It is still left off-track, but now that you are able to walk past it on a diagonal path, it makes you feel like you would want to steal a peek at it, even if the path pushes you past it. This might be because the left front corner and the right back corner of the rug are now aligned with the end of the separating wall. It feels as if there was an invisible fence following that alignment, the crossing of which would make turning back difficult or undesirable in comparison to continuing on the path.

All that is needed to soften the situation is to keep the angle of the rug moderate and to avoid direct alignments with the horizontal and vertical lines in the space (4.27d). In fact, now the rug is more or less aligned with the visible left-hand corner of the kitchen and the front right-hand corner of the *tuulikaappi*, just outside the picture's lower right-hand corner. Here the curve of the diagonal path is soft enough in comparison to the direct axis across. Its gentleness affords thoughts to linger and eyes to wander. One may pause or advance slowly enough for the body to feel more at ease and the person entering can take her

time to orient herself with the layout of the apartment. The framed picture has also become available; one can now stop since the far corner of the rug does not meet with the end of the wall, but gently points towards the picture. This concealed arrow, the fact that the far end of the rug runs along the wall instead of aligning with the end of the wall, allows facing the framed picture. Stopping there, on the verge of leaving the hall, has become a possibility, something that is allowed or even encouraged with very gentle tones. The visitor can, already upon entering the scene, sense an invitation to join the place and its features – an invitation not unlike the one presented by the stones in a Japanese dry garden. The setting affords the forming of a group or bonding with an existing one.

The writings on Japanese dry or stone gardens often use ‘tension’ or ‘dynamic balance’¹¹⁰ to describe the sensation the carefully placed stones and other garden features create in the viewer’s imagination and body. When the balance of the composition is right, it manifests as tension between individual features, almost as a web of vectors of gravitational forces. François Berthier, a French art historian, describes the reading of the Ryōan-ji’s dry garden in *Reading Zen in the Rocks – The Japanese Dry Landscape Garden*:

When one approaches the garden from the left, the eye is drawn first of all to the group of five rocks, which is both the most important and the most conspicuous. Then one’s view *glides* toward a group of two, one of the most modest groups. From there three rocks divert one’s glance toward the right; one’s gaze then *rebounds* from the two others to end up in the final group, which consists of three rocks. But this is only one way of approaching the garden, since one can then sit on the middle of the verandah. From this viewpoint one discovers that the composition follows *an elliptical orbit*. Rather, one comprehends *the lines of force that animate the five groups and connect them to each other*. In this oblong area – as in the illuminated scrolls that flourished from the twelfth to the fourteenth century – one’s reading has to begin from the right-hand side, since Sino-Japanese writing moves from right to left. The three groups at the back consist of seven rocks altogether. This number is the key to decoding *the rhythm that animates the space*. The seven leads to the five, which forms the major group. Then, like a text written in “boustrophedon,” the line turns upon itself, ricochets off in the opposite direction, and ends up at the far right in the foreground, with the last three rocks.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ As has been pointed out in David and Michiko Young’s *The Art of Japanese Garden*, dynamic balance is a general concept in Japanese aesthetics – e.g., painting, ikebana – and not limited only to garden design. Young (2005), Tuttle Publishing, North Clarendon, VT, USA, p. 24

¹¹¹ Berthier, François (2005) *Reading Zen in the Rocks – The Japanese Dry Landscape Garden*, trans. & with a philosophical essay by Graham Parkes, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, USA/London, UK, pp. 36-37. Italics my own. Berthier also notes that seven, five and three have a special meaning in Chinese and Japanese thinking and in Daoism. See pp. 37-38. Boustrophedon is a text written from left to right and right to left in alternating lines.

In Japanese and Chinese thinking, this ‘force’ that animates and connects is the *qi*, often explained as the ‘life force’ within the universe, that the differently shaped rocks and stones direct and store. Berthier quotes a classic Chinese text from the fourth century by Guo Pu to illustrate the thinking of the Chinese geomancy, *fengshui*, that is also at play in the classical Japanese garden design:

Lodestone draws in iron, Amber picks up mustard seeds.
Energy invisible passes. Cosmic numerology mysteriously matches.
Things respond to each other, In ways beyond our knowing.¹¹²

We may freely disregard the notions of numerology and geomancy, but the core of Guo Pu’s words illustrates the way axes and paths affect us even when they are not clearly marked out or drawn into our environment. Things in the life-world respond to each other and sometimes this responsiveness is more a felt than a decipherable experience. Objects in space, like the rocks in Ryōan-ji’s dry garden, are not only there, they are not simply present but have a presence that reaches out from them within that space. There is a sensation, perhaps best described as gravitational pull, when the setting is right. As a bodily experience, the interplay and web of axes and paths could perhaps be best described as a gravitational field in which the objects reach for the person walking through them. Those force vectors are not only felt when we cross them – have we never diverted from our path to take a closer look of an object that has caught our eye as if that object had called out for us? – but they can be sensed in our bodies even just by looking at them, as Berthier’s words imply.

4.7 Animating a Space into a Place

Berthier describes how lines of forces created by the placement of the rocks in Ryōan-ji, or in any dry landscape garden for that matter, animate and connect the rocks and how the rhythm of the design animates the space. As I suggested in the first chapter, reconstructed interiors, dioramas or other scenes of any kind in museums can sometime seem if not dead then at least lifeless. Contrary to the Japanese scroll gardens (to use Slawson’s term) such as the Ryōan-ji, these dioramas can be static and permeated by a lack of potential, as if they were locked in an indefinite state of stasis. They can come off as literal still pictures while a stream made out of gravel in a dry garden without any living features can flow with a life force equal to a real stream.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 92. Orig. Guo Pu, *Eulogy to the Lodestone* as cited in Hay, John (1985) *Kernels of Energy, Bones of Earth – The Rock in Chinese Art*, New York, p. 53.



PIC 4.28 A section of the 360 degrees diorama of the Biologiska Museet in Stockholm, Sweden. Despite of the skilled illusion and disregarding the ageing of the materials there is an uncomfortable stillness to the diorama. A sense of sadness, perhaps.

This is not a question of the level of lifelikeness of the diorama. The old Biologiska Museet in Stockholm, Sweden, opened in 1893 with a full 360 degree diorama unlike anything else. Its illusion of a viewing tower that somehow, as if by magic, is surrounded by uninterrupted scenes of the Swedish natural landscape from all around the country, is perfect. The execution of the reconstruction of nature is stunning. The trompe l'œil paintings that extend the landscape far into the horizon are breathtaking. But time has taken its toll: the colours have lost their depth, furs and feathers have withered from their original browns to smudged shades of white. The scenery has died, which is certainly understandable considering the age of the exhibition and the fact that it cannot be an easy task to keep it in shape. But in some parts of the diorama, the scene seems frozen in a way which makes it seem that it may have been like that from the beginning (4.28). The birds look as if they pose like models. They are not going anywhere, they simply are there to be seen. There are numerous little scenes playing out in the landscape, but they feel staged and unnatural, not at ease as life should be. Please do not misunderstand: the Biologiska is a fascinating and inspiring place, but its current state has an air of sadness and loss to it. It is engaging to sit in the shade of the viewing tower, to feel the planks worn smooth by countless feet, to let your mind wander into the landscape and let the stillness and quietness surround you. But it does not, not to me at least, make one think of Swedish natural landscape and the life in it. What it brings to mind are

thoughts of past generations, of time passing, and how here the past is more like a paused image of a home video. In a way the museum does its trick perfectly and the diorama has some of that ethereal power of Ryōan-ji's dry garden, but was it ever filled with a sense of life? Was it ever animated as a space? Did the rolling scenes ever feel like the places they depict? Did the experience of the diorama ever elevate and deepen beyond immediate awe and wonder of the craftsmanship of the place?¹¹³

Can a still scene in a museum be animated with a sense of life like the Ryōan-ji's garden? Can even a slightly engaging sense of belonging and presence of absent things be created in a museum? After all, that is what museums should do: present objects and absent things and concepts as present and alive so that their meaning can be grasped. Museums – especially ones of history and distant cultures – are, according to their critics, places for dead things. Then again, so is a yard full of stones and gravel and yet it can breathe; it can have a living presence. Answering this requires two lines of approach: the dynamic balance created by axes and paths, and the tension on a smaller scale created by imperfections in the arrangement of the display.

In *The Unreal America – Architecture and Illusion*, an eloquent and sharp analysis of the American love affair with the unreal, Huxtable lamented the loss of ghosts of New York's Ellis Island after the restoration of the Island's buildings by writing that the '[m]emories have been edited:

The shabby, littered halls and abandoned, scattered chairs that still retain the presence of those who came and went, who waited to be processed, received, or rejected, the transience, crowding and anxiety, the sense of endings and beginnings, the untidiness and uncertainties of the historical process, have been reduced to an artfully arranged display of old luggage.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ I am still in awe and wonder at the Biologiska Museet. It is an other-worldly experience to walk up to the building created in the national romantic style of viking houses or stave churches. Every inch of the wall surrounding the entrance is filled with wooden carvings of mythical beasts familiar from celtic codexes and Viking artefacts. It is a formidable building that from the outside seems smaller than it actually is, due to its dark brown colour. The entrance hall is a rather ordinary late 19th century space, clad in simple wood, but when you walk up the stairs to the first floor of the viewing tower, you suddenly lose your sense of being inside a strong, earthy log building as the phantasmagoria of the diorama suddenly surrounds you. The scale seems impossible. How can this all fit inside the compact building I just entered? The Biologiska is like the time machine Tardis in the famous British TV-series *Doctor Who*: bigger on the inside than on the outside. However, this awe and wonder is not what I would think a museum exhibition would ideally aim for but something more sensational and spectacular, though the line is anything but clear when it is compared to the St. Louis City Museum, for example.

¹¹⁴ Huxtable, Ada Louis (1997) *The Unreal America – Architecture and Illusion*, p. 30.

What Huxtable was saying was that even an artful museum display cannot surpass the eloquence of ‘empty and decaying rooms’ when it comes to expressing the impalpable aspects of what transpired on that island and so, following the ‘complete restoration, all the ghosts are gone.’¹¹⁵ Huxtable notes that the only place where she still senses the ghosts is in a set of photographs by Shirley Burden from 1954 and in the buildings on the island, such as the hospital, which have remained unrestored. Somehow in those waning hallways the past and the passage of time is more keenly felt than in the restored rooms. In the neglected rooms the past is acutely present in the sense of absence of the deteriorating hospital which seems more alive in its emptiness than its restored neighbours. How did that happen? What are the ghosts that Huxtable laments?

As noted before, according to its ideology, a successful historical museum is a place where history comes alive and where the visitor embarks on a journey of exploration and discovery. It is one purpose of any given historical museum to give its visitors an engaged sense of past lifestyles, a mindful understanding of history as something that has been made by real people and of the nature of their lives. This is the meaning, but also the challenge, of reconstructed spaces and interiors: to present the recreated environments as lived spaces, not just as arrangements of objects. Ideally a visitor should be able to see herself in the reconstruction. It should be possible for her to project herself into the space and to imagine what the embodied experience of that space – and life – might be. How would it feel to sit in that chair? How would the room spread about me?

In order to come alive, history needs to be lived history. Museums do not exist simply to preserve objects and knowledge of the olden days, but to maintain the past as lived history. Individual objects and artefacts of all kinds are an irreplaceable part of this by being concrete evidence of lived lives and the resulting history, but lived history is more than material things; it took *place*, it happened somewhere, it had actual existence. The ghosts Huxtable aches for is the impression of disappearing life lingering in the Ellis Island hospital. Something similar lingers in the Biologiska Museet; but from there even the ghosts seem to have been long gone. How to animate an exhibition? How to create a sense of presence of a past life? How to engage a visitor, how to draw her in? How to make her a part of the place?

I have also experienced the absence of Huxtable’s ghosts in a reconstructed peat hut in the Arctic Museum Nanuq in Pietarsaari, Finland (4.29). On one visit, the small table by the window, all the beds and various pots and pans in the only room were neatly in their places, arranged almost in the meticulous style of interior design magazines. The hut felt empty, more like a shell than a real hunters’ accommodation. Or like a Scandinavian summer cottage cleaned and prepared for the lonely winter months before the next season. It was not a lived space, or a place that conveyed the history of the hut’s original counterpart as a

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 28.



PIC 4.29 The interior of the peat hut of arctic hunters in the Arctic Museum Nanuq, Pietarsaari, Finland. On this visit the hut was empty with its occupants long gone. Even the enamel mugs on the cabinet are placed perfectly as if for a photo for an interior design magazine.

lived past. It was a thin place, a place of surfaces without profound substantiality.

A lived space presupposes an occupant, someone who experiences the space both mentally and bodily, and so turns the space into a place. In *The Human Habitat*, von Bonsdorff suggests that *genius loci* is precisely an experience of a place occupied by someone.¹¹⁶ An occupant adds to the thickness of a locality by experiencing it and in it, and in turn these experiences and memories give a place value, thereby turning it into a concretion of that value. These are some of the fundamentals of Yi-Fu Tuan's thinking in *Space and Place*, in which he describes places as centres of felt value, pauses in movement within which we can orient ourselves both spatially and mentally, thus gaining confidence in ourselves.¹¹⁷ The felt values also make us feel at home in a place, creating familiarity through memories of experiences. But in museums the visitors seldom have personal experiences and memories of things presented to them. The lives behind the objects are past experiences of someone else and usually of someone unfamiliar. Possible eyewitness accounts may open a window into public or

¹¹⁶ Bonsdorff (1998) *The Human Habitat*, p. 124, see also p. 227.

¹¹⁷ Tuan, Yi-Fu (2008) *Space and Place – The Perspective of Experience*, e.g. p. 4, 17 and 137, and especially chapter 14, *Epilogue*.

natural events, but the everyday life, all the mundane things that rise and pass without much notice and are the very material for the thickness of a place, have often gone by unrecorded. Thankfully there is no absolute need for our own first-hand experiences; the memories do not necessarily have to be ours. We have the ability to identify with and relate to another person's feelings and experiences. Given the right circumstances we are able to empathise and thus share our experiences with each other.

On another visit to the Arctic Museum, the peat hut was in disarray (4.30). The beds were made but hastily, a cupboard door was open, chairs around the table were left pushed back, and three mugs were left on the table. Three people had clearly been there and left in a hurry. Perhaps one of the hunters had returned and hurried the others to join him for there was game afoot close by. So everyone gathered their gear and charged out, leaving things as they were. Maybe they would soon return with their catch. The rather static setting of the previous example had been replaced with a more dynamic one. The changes introduced into it were small: two of the chairs had not been moved at all, but the axes had changed. In the first setting the chairs point nowhere. If people had sat down on those chairs in those angles, none of them would have been facing each other but would have been staring into an empty space behind their companions. People occupying those seats would not form a group, and neither would they be open for a new member to join in. The visitor was either left outside looking in or staring into the distance with the occupants.

In the second setting the axes had been rearranged. Now the chairs, except for the one on the far left beside the wall, most likely unused since there are only three mugs, have been turned towards each other to form a triangle which is repeated in the arrangement of the mugs on the table, much like the triangular arrangements of Japanese gardens, one being the principle form for arrangements known as Triad Rocks.¹¹⁸ The static staring has been interrupted by action. As the visitor arrives at the table and the chairs, she finds herself standing *in the way* of the occupants who have just (or that is what our imagination convinces us) stormed out, as they must have exited along the axis on which she now stands. There is a sensation of movement up and out, and a temptation in the visitor's body to turn around and follow the hunters. This sensation is created by the axis originating from the chair that faces the visitor on the far side of the table. The axis of the two chairs in the front pushes against the first one like the cliffs through which a river rushes forward; they create a tension that speeds up the movement along the main axis, and by standing on that line, the visitor is caught up in a scene of action.

The restrictions of a museum environment seldom allow the visitor to be anything more than an observer, who by definition is not able to experience her

¹¹⁸ See e.g. Slawson (1997), pp. 89-90.



PIC 4.30 This time the hunters are still out there somewhere on the tundra, perhaps after an opportunity that presented itself unexpectedly. But they will certainly return. The Arctic Museum Nanuq, Pietarsaari, Finland.

surroundings freely through her body. Our ability for empathy can nonetheless be put into play. We only need someone to relate those experiences to us, a kind of a surrogate experiencer who is not restricted by the protecting rules of the museum and with whom we can identify and through whom we can experience. Many historical museum exhibitions today are composed to be stories where different personal views and experiences are included to open the past for the visitor on an individual level. This is done by incorporating historic personas, both actual and imaginary, into the exhibition. Their stories are most often told in a very personal and intimate way in the exhibition text and audiovisual presentations with first-person voices or by emphasising the individual's feelings. I see these personas as mediators who form a connecting link between the visitor and the lived past on as personal level as possible to enable an empathetic meeting of the two. Guided tours and demonstrations have been used to achieve this since the early days of the museum, and the amount dramatised tours or small theatrical scenes has increased rapidly. But it is not practical to expect a constant presence of a guide in museum exhibitions in general and it can be disruptive to place comprehensive amounts of texts and audiovisual presentations especially into an interior display. Certainly in places like the Arctic Museum Nanuq, something very intimate and personal would be lost if the approachable individuality and the soft mysteriousness of the various huts and

lodges were invaded by plaques of explanations. But it is possible, as the examples show, to introduce the story and its characters into a still scene.

All living things leave signs and traces of their activity and an attentive mind can pick out and decipher these signs. Like the famous graffiti, 'Kilroy was here,' the traces we leave announce our onetime presence and activity. These trace-signs have therefore a very personal quality as they postulate a proactive individual behind them, and that the given individual's motives and personal traits are to some extent discoverable. These traces are what criminal investigators look for and this is what a hunter reads when following his prey through the landscape. These traces, like the mugs on the table, are indexes with clear causal links to the past events, distant cultures, to what ever the exhibition in question depicts – evidence, in a word. We look for and interpret them. Perhaps because we have learned to do so because of detective stories, or perhaps because humans tend to have an eye for causality. And we know through experience that scenes like reconstructed interiors contain such clues and that if we find and piece them together, we will discover a story.

But these traces have a more complicated nature than indexes: They can also be considered as gestures indicating the intentions and attitudes of their originators. We can refer to the past, present, and future with gestures, suggest an underlying emotion or opinion, or seek for assurances and contact through language and body. Gestures are a powerful medium for engaging with what surrounds us, and not the least because of the intentionality behind them, even if we might not produce them consciously. This intentionality is also directed towards someone, gestures are meant for someone to read as much as they are an expression of our inner state. These characteristics of a gesture – an instigating individual, reference to time or to something internal, and intentionality – can be found in the way some museum interiors have been set up. They are, however, not to be confused with style. Objects have a style: a reconstructed interior demonstrates a certain period and its style such as the Swedish Neoclassicism. Gestures, on the other hand, belong to a living subjectivity and when we encounter them in a reconstructed interior with our tendency to see things as living, the stationary display can turn into a narrative scene.

The peat hut was animated by the gestures created within the scene the visitors are allowed to enter fully. It is a rare thing to be able to do so, to really become a part of the place except in children's museums and in those rare places like the City Museum and Nanuq. But as Ryōan'ji's garden demonstrates, it is possible to become a part of the whole without ever entering the actual group of objects.

In the reconstructed interiors of the Heinola Town Museum, Heinola, Finland, the absent occupants of the rooms remain present through the traces they have left behind: there is a lovely, homely sense of wear and tear in the immaculate

reconstruction. And though the visitor is confined behind the ropes, she is still made a part of the place. Walking through the rooms feels very much as if you were, for the first time, visiting an acquaintance's home and you are given a tour of the house.

Every room in the Heinola Town Museum somewhat resembles a scroll garden with the roped off area being the verandah of the house looking into the garden. There is a point of entering and a point of exiting, and between them an area of opportunities for viewing the scene. But this viewing is not just looking, it is a special kind of appreciation of the view that opens before you, a state of meditation on what is presented to you. You are asked to let your mind wander and wonder, to hold still and yet engage actively, to be mindful of what you encounter.

In a dry landscape garden, the raked sand is the area of imagination and reorientation, a neutral, calming ground for the thoughts and imagination to take root and reach through. In fact, there must be a *space in between* for you to cross and to help maintain your distance if you are to engage in contemplation. The sand creates the balance. Without the sand the axes and paths and lines of power cannot exist. In Heinola this is done through thoughtful use of lights and shadows. Parts of the rooms are left in various shades of shadows while selected parts are revealed by soft yet illuminating spotlights. Shadows – like gravel – are the domain of imagination and meditation¹¹⁹ where thoughts can roam freely and where we can pause to gather them before we continue forward to the next patch of light that beckons us with a promise of new discoveries. The lighted areas are like the groups of rocks in the dry garden, creating centres for gravitational forces to gather. The visitor's eyes and her imagination moves from one location to another, drawing lines of habitation within the space and giving birth to a place. For example, in the drawing room of the house the lighting creates three groups: the main table, the desk in the back corner, and the chest on the left (4.31, following page). The outlines of these groups of objects may not be as sharply drawn as the outlines of the rocks against the gravel but the effect is similar. They make the visitor's eyes move around the room – and a story begins.

In addition to the lights instigating the axes that connect and the shadows that create paths, there is a presence of intention in the Heinola interiors. Whenever a spotlight is used, it is always pointed as if the source of light was not the modern fixture in the ceiling but a source appropriate for the period, which in the case of the drawing room are candleholders. The light always reveals something that would be illuminated for a reason: the main table, the paintings, or an unfinished meal. It doesn't reveal a specific chair in order to let us see a prime example of the period style furniture, it lights up a place where life was lived, where light is to be expected. This kind of lighting also divides a room

¹¹⁹ Hildebrand (1999), p. 49.



PIC 4.31 The drawing room in the Heinola Town Museum, Heinola, Finland. The spotlights create islands in the sea of shadows in a way similar to the rocks and gravel of a dry garden, bouncing the viewer's eyes from one location to the next.

into smaller settings, and the darker spots in between enable us to use our imagination – not unlike in comics where still pictures become alive in the spaces between the panels. As said, the shadows are pauses in space, and as our attention and regard moves from one illuminated locality to the next, it becomes possible for us to imagine ourselves moving through the room.

The experience of inhabiting is also supported by the way the lighted areas are distributed within the room and how precisely the spotlights are aimed: there is only one light on each wall and only the light pointed at the table is aimed precisely on its object, creating a focal point for the room. The two other lights are aimed slightly off the mark, only partly revealing the objects. The light on the back wall reveals only the corner of the table, although rather brightly, and the light on the left seems to be aimed at the painting and is so subdued that it is more like a thought than an act of illumination. It might be because of the preservation of the painting, but nevertheless the difference in the brightness between the spotlights helps to give them different meanings: this is the main area of the room, there is something of importance over here by the side table, and this landscape here is for contemplation and dreaming. The table of the drawing room is like the master rock in a Japanese garden and the two subtly lit areas are its attendant rocks. Together they set the scene through engagement, reciprocating with the whole setting, as Slawson explains:



PIC 4.32 The setting of the blue room in Heinola Town Museum speaks of rest and quietness. The deep shadow of the day bed beacons our bodies to lay down after the enjoyment the coffee and a good book have afforded us.

The Attendant Rocks take their compositional cues from the Master Rock. The Master Rock, however, looks to no other rocks but the entire garden conception (...).¹²⁰

The inviting atmosphere of the Heinola interiors can also be the result of James Gibson's affordances. In the blue room, the day bed is inviting because we recognise in it the possibility of rest and our bodies reciprocate its offer to recline in the subdued light (4.32). The chairs placed unevenly around the table in the peat hut felt inviting and seemed to speak of a gathering of friends. Affordances give us an ability to recognise familiar usages in objects even when they are beyond our reach, enabling us to imagine both in our minds and in our bodies how we could carry ourselves in that environment. Bodily gestures speak to us directly, as Merleau-Ponty pointed out:

I do not see anger or a threatening attitude as a psychic fact hidden behind the gesture, I read anger in it. The gesture does not make me think of anger, it is anger itself.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Slawson (1991), p. 92. There are rules of proportion for selecting and placing master and attendant rocks in the classics, see pp. 93-94 in Slawson (1997).

¹²¹ Merleau-Ponty (1962) *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, p. 184.



PIC 4.33

The white tiled stove of the drawing room in Heinola Town Museum. Why has somebody so carelessly left the door open and the logs lying in front of an open fireplace?

Affordances also address our bodies directly. When I see the chair in front of the table with the tableware laid out, I do not only deduce that coffee has been enjoyed but also feel the pull of the chair inviting me to sit. I find myself in what David Abram calls in *The Spell of the Sensuous*, 'an expressive gesturing landscape, in a world that speaks.'¹²² I am conversing silently, through gestures, with the world. But to see what a chair affords is a question of knowledge and experience. Reading the gesture-traces requires their recognition. I must be able to see the difference between a spoon in a coffee cup and a spoon on the saucer behind the cup and parallel to it. I must have knowledge of the paraphernalia and act of coffee drinking if I am to know what the setting is suggesting. There is an ambivalence to the gestures of an interior display.

There is a white tiled stove in the Heinola drawing room with its doors open. It is so casual, at least to a Scandinavian observer, that it is unlikely to be the first thing to capture our attention (4.33). And it doesn't help that it resides in half-shadow. It is also slightly obscured from the view by the furniture, but eventually our gaze is drawn to it. The open doors allow the dry warmth of the embers of a birch wood fire to radiate into the room. I know this because of my personal experiences of fires and because there are birch logs in front of the

¹²² Abram, David (1997) *The Spell of the Sensuous*, p. 81.

stove. There is something irresistible in warmth radiating from a specific source in comparison to a more uniform heat, and glowing embers especially seem to radiate an aura of safety and rest, of comfort and company. We prefer this kind of radiant heaters over, for example, air-conditioners, even if they can distribute heat more evenly across the space.

The glow of embers alone is not enough to create an atmosphere. The open doors of the stove revealing the embers and the other gestures mentioned above help us experience the reconstructed rooms as a home, but by themselves they do not particularly add to the thickness of the place. What they help summon is the possibility of a home, but not so much a feeling of a lived space. They help entice our curiosity and invite us to embark on an expedition, but they only guide us to find the clues left behind by the occupants. They point us to a mystery, encouraging us to solve it, but by themselves they tell us only that this is a home. The engagement could have more depth.

The traces of everyday life give life to the rooms. For example, there is a chair in front of the open doors of the stove. There are a few logs in front of the stove and a shawl thrown on the chair across the armrest. Beside the chair is a small tray-like table with a candleholder, a small box full of yarn and other tools of needlecraft, and an unfinished embroidery. The table is placed close enough for it to be within an easy reach from the chair, but far enough so that it doesn't get in the way. There is a possible narrative to be read here: a woman has been sitting here sewing. It has been cold, since she has been sitting so close to the stove. The logs suggest that she was prepared to add them into the stove. She left in the middle of her work since the embroidery is left on the table unfinished and in slight disarray. Evidently she knew that whatever interrupted her would take some time. She took the time to blow out the candle and therefore probably did not leave in a hurry, yet she still left the things as we see them. Maybe she intended to return to her work in a while; it seems that otherwise she would have moved the table and chair away from the fire, had put away her needlework, and closed the doors. And she has been gone for a while now, since the burning logs have turned into cinders but yet not that long since the embers are still glowing brightly. There is an air of anticipation over the scene, but with a touch of disappointment: she should have returned by now.

This is, however, my personal interpretation. My Ph.D. supervisors pointed out that they saw the danger of fire lurking in the scene: the candleholder is dreadfully close to the edge of the table. The doors are not usually left open in these types of fireplaces, especially when left unsupervised. It is dangerous to leave logs in front of open fire for a spark could fall on the logs. It was surprising, alarming even, that I didn't see them myself even though I have grown up near all types of fireplaces. I still don't see that danger in the scene, although it seems odd, in a detective story kind of way, that the occupant of the



PIC 4.34 The kitchen of the Heinola Town Museum is animated by things left in disarray after the afternoon coffee. Perhaps the drinkers have gone to take care of some small chore and will soon return to finish off their coffee before starting to prepare the dinner.

chair took her time to blow out the candle but not to close the doors which for me would seem like the natural thing to do.

There are stories like this one in every room of the reconstruction with an equal emphasis on the details, but not all stories are as complex and as personal as the one of the stove. Moreover, the arrangements gesturing a story in Heinola can be divided into three categories. First there are those that are placed within the focal point of the room, such as the unfinished meal in the private room and an open box of chocolates on the dining room table. Then there are gestures that are placed in shadow or are in the borderland of an active gaze and which therefore are not clearly pointed out for a visitor. These gestures, like in the kitchen (4.34) where the cupboard door is left ajar, a towel has been folded on a chair and the chairs themselves are not lined neatly around the table, are very casual in nature. These are gestures of affordances, beckoning us to take notice. Thirdly, there are gestures that are in plain sight, like the closed book on the main drawing room table, but which are so effortless in their manner that it is to easy pass them over. There are in fact several books lying around the rooms but it might even require a bit of luck to realise this. Are the scattered books there to suggest that one of the occupants is fond of reading or that this is an educated household?

The gestures in Heinola have a shared air of incompleteness, of casualness, and, in some cases, forgetfulness. They are familiar from our own lives. They

generate gentle flaws in what otherwise is an immaculate reconstruction. These small gestures indicate, connote, imply and hint, and they help to thicken the sense of place by telling stories, but it is in fact the very human imperfectness that creates the feeling of occupation. Their spontaneity and casualness – compare the two ways of displaying the mugs in the hunters' hut – help us sympathise with the scene by exposing something of the personality behind the gestures. Life and home are seldom perfectly arranged. A little bit of chaos is to be expected. All in all, what appears to be engaging are the small, less prominent solutions that have the quality of a gesture. These are signs of residency, indexical signs pointing towards human presence. They are subtle signs more often noticed unconsciously than picked out on the spot. We experience them as gestures, feeling how their meaning affects the flow of conversation, but realising their presence only after a thought, after we consider them with a reflective mind.

Axes and paths and lines of forces bring us into the presence of these little gestures and objects. They guide us into a meeting, place us face to face with things of the lifeworld so that we can stand next to them in active awareness. The reciprocal conversation with our environment begins when we face it acknowledging its presence with our entire being, not just with our minds and disembodied eyes. But this does not depend solely on us in a museum exhibition. The exhibition must reach for us too, it must respond to our presence like Ryōan-ji's garden responds to its viewer.

5 CONCLUSION

It has been an interesting journey. Years ago, when I first began to look at museum exhibitions with suspicion, I had the artefacts and displaying in mind. When I leaf through the photographs and notes I have taken in exhibitions, most of the early ones seem to be about individual displays and vitrines. I was fascinated by objects and it shows in the material I collected. At some point I left them alone – partly because another Finnish dissertation on the matter of displaying objects in museums by Outi Turpeinen was published.¹ Of course, there is still much that could and should be said about displays themselves, about the matters of arrangement and contexts, but somehow, in a way that is unclear even to me, I found myself thinking about how it *felt* to experience a museum exhibition, to *be* there amongst the objects. Turpeinen's dissertation does include a section on the importance of mood or atmosphere for exhibition design, in which she discusses colours, lighting, and the role of texts. Having read her dissertation, I felt for a while that I could not find anything worthwhile to add. What else could be said on the topic? How to find a new perspective? I felt lost for a while before I realised that aesthetics could tackle the mysteries of encounter and presence – I owe a lot to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi for his definition of ecstasy – which I have since come to consider as fundamental to the entire experience. It is a dimension of first impressions for the visitor. The architecture of an exhibition is the staging of a scene: it sets the tone and defines (some of) the parameters of the world in which the objects appear and become experienceable. It is the same process of building an atmosphere of an exhibition, creating a setting for a spatial experience which Turpeinen refers to only in passing². Only now, as an afterthought, I realise that I have tackled an issue she did ad-

¹ Turpeinen, Outi (2005), *Merkityksellinen museoesine – Kriittinen visuaalisuus kulttuurihistoriallisen museon näyttelysuunnittelussa*, Taideteollisen korkeakoulun julkaisu A 63, Taideteollinen korkeakoulu, Helsinki, Finland.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 175-193.

dress in a few lines, namely the matter of that experience itself, the experience of a space as an atmosphere³. 'Experiencing an atmosphere requires submitting oneself to the spatial experience', she writes. 'It is difficult to put spatial atmosphere into words, it has to be experienced for it is a subtle experience of a space.'⁴ But it is not enough that we 'submit' ourselves, as Pauline von Bonsdorff points out, 'we must receptively *turn towards* it and *attune* ourselves to it.'⁵ In other words, getting in the mood of the place, soaking up the atmosphere, is a reciprocal act, an engagement: '[t]o perceive or sense atmosphere is a synthetic and interactive process.'⁶ Like an aesthetic field, atmosphere is created by the environment and the objects in it, by the experiencing subject and her attitudes, knowledge and personal history, and by the socio-cultural setting. But nonetheless, atmosphere is crucial for the visitor's act of meaning-making. It largely determines the way she reads the exhibition. It is an experience hard to capture in words, as Turpeinen says, but not impossible, as I hopefully have managed to show (with only minor flaws and imperfections). But let us return to these experiences later.

5.1 The Aesthetic Nature of the Museum

Over the course of this study, I have come to understand a museum not so much as a repository of history, specimens, artefacts, or ideas but as a tool for thinking and comprehending our world and our lifeworld, and, indeed, ourselves. The acts of museums are important – collecting, organising, displaying – not the treasures per se. They might be priceless, true fortunes of nations and of humanity, but it is misleading to think that exhibitions and museums are all about static objects and artefacts. I do not think that many museum professionals see their work and the environment in which they work in this light – or at least I hope they do not – but it is the blueprint for our popular conception of museums. They are still, or yet, often seen in terms of truthfulness and reality, just like we once saw photographs and news: anything that was printed in the

³ Gernot Böhme's works on atmospheres would have had much to offer for my work, especially since his *Anmutungen. Über die Atmosphärische* apparently deals with something like descriptive aesthetics. But, alas, my German is nonexistent and he writes almost exclusively in German.

⁴ Ibid. My own translation. Originally '... tunnelman kokeminen edellyttää altistumista tilalliselle kokemukselle. Tilallista tunnelmaa on vaikeaa käsitellä sanoilla, se pitää kokea, sillä se on hienovarainen kokemus jostakin tilasta.'

⁵ Bonsdorff, Pauline von (1999), "'Nature" in Experience – Body and Environment', *Nordisk estetisk tidskrift*, no 19, p. 120. Italics my own.

⁶ Bonsdorff (1998) *The Human Habitat*, p. 142.

newspaper must have been true. Maybe this is why a part of the public is disappointed with some museum exhibitions that do not offer them clear, solid answers but leave them instead with even more questions. But the hard truth is that museums never were a medium of pure facts and truths. They have from the very beginning been the agents of thoughts and images. There has always been an aspect of propaganda to them. They have been used as displays of wealth and power and to wield influence over their selected public. They have striven to sell and instil a sense of nationhood and identity, to tell the public who they are and who the other is, to teach them how to think of themselves. Museum exhibitions have been erected to display evidence for competing scientific theories. The power of a museum exhibition to state 'this is' is a fearsome ability that can be easily turned into a weapon. We go to museums to learn; we enter with a preset notion that we are about to learn something, that we are about to discover new knowledge of the world, something that we had not previously realised or known. There is a strong predetermined and internalised tendency in our culture to assume that visiting a museum is in itself enough and will make us grow as human beings. Going through the process of writing this dissertation has made me even more aware of this side of museums, as I discovered how strong an effect the surroundings had on me already before I came to stand in front of the object.

Although I have held, from the beginning, aesthetic experience to be at the heart of the museum experience, I am still astonished at how profound a role aesthetics and the embodied experience play in museum exhibitions. There seems to be no denying Berleant's remark in his *Sensibility and Sense – the Aesthetic Transformation of the Human World*, 'that an aesthetic undercurrent is present on occasions [even] when it is not predominant'⁷, although writing the notion down makes it seem self-evident, especially in the context of museum exhibitions. Are not all museum exhibitions, regardless of their subject matter, first and foremost aesthetic undertakings? Are not all their acts of displaying and presenting in some sense aesthetic acts? Could anyone ever display something free from the influence of aesthetic experience? I do not think that this awareness was ever lost in the museum world. On the contrary, considering the history of museums, it seems that museum professionals have always been acutely aware of this.

⁷ Berleant, Arnold (2010) *Sensibility and Sense – The Aesthetic Transformation of the Human World*, St. Andrews Studies in Philosophy and Public Affairs, Imprint Academic, Exeter, UK/Charlottesville, VA, USA, p. 4.

5.2 Embodied Experience

Turpeinen is right in that there is an ephemeral, fleeting, difficult-to-grasp nature to embodied experiences that is difficult to turn into words. Something of the experience of coming into contact with the things of the world always seems to escape beyond the world of written words. But difficult does not equal impossible. The matter merely requires a different approach. Reading, out of general interest, a book on Buddhist psychology by the renowned Western Buddhist teacher and clinical psychologist Jack Kornfield, I came across a note on bodily experiences that offered an insight into the difficulties of putting them into words. In *The Wise Heart – Buddhist Psychology for the West*, Kornfield writes on experiencing the body and on the use of the ancient elements of earth, fire, air, and water:

If you close your eyes and feel carefully, you won't feel a "body." *Body* is only a word, the idea or concept level. What you will actually feel are areas of hardness and softness, of pressure, heaviness, and textures such as rough and smooth. This is the earth element. You will also feel areas of warmth and coolness. This is the fire or temperature element. You will feel areas of vibrations and stillness. This is the air or vibratory element. And you will feel cohesion and fluidity. This is the water element: you will need to blink your eyes or swallow to sense it.⁸

After years of practising complicated sports that require excellent motor skills, I consider myself to be a well practised user of my body, and yet I have never experienced my body. I may know my arm, I may know *and feel* its position, its gesture, the direction of its movement, the amount of strength it uses, its speed, if it is tired, hot or cold, whether I am pulling, pushing, carrying, or hanging on. I know the skin of my arm when it comes into contact with something, but it is only then that I know the limits of my arm, its surface. Otherwise I know it is there as it is a special 'skill' of my brain to know that my body and its parts exist, but I have never ever felt my arm as an object from the inside. I can never feel, I am convinced of this, my body as a whole thing of the world in the same way I feel the body of another person in a hug. This is the source of the ephemerality and elusiveness of bodily experience: we cannot describe it directly, we

⁸ Kornfield, Jack (2008) *The Wise Heart – Buddhist Psychology for the West*, Rider/Ebury Publishing (Random House Group Ltd.), London, p. 119.

can only describe the experiences we have *with* and *through* our bodies and only from within. Unless there is some sort of a malfunction in our brain.⁹

It is interesting that in the part of her dissertation regarding atmospheres, Turpeinen writes only about colours, lights, and words as the means of creating atmospheres. As an installation artist she fails to consider the bodily dimension. Spatial experiences are very much a domain of the body, and the body is very much the domain of the pre-reflective, of feelings, and sensations in the sense that our consciousness can be reached and affected directly through our bodies without our thinking mind necessarily realising this. With this I do not mean to say that the body would not be the domain of the conscious mind or that spatial experiences could not be mental or intellectual experiences. What I mean is that the body, its measurements and its alignments, its posture and state, has a central role in these experiences. As Richard Shusterman calls it in passing in *Body Consciousness – A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics*, ‘the body is our primordial instrument in grasping the world (...).’¹⁰ Or as Pallasmaa puts it in *The Eyes of the Skin – Architecture and the Senses*: ‘The world is reflected in the body, and the body is projected onto the world.’¹¹ As von Bonsdorff asserts: ‘(...) the body as our ground (...) situates us. The body is a condition of our sense of place and of reality (...).’¹² Or as Abram argues throughout the *Spell of the Sensuous*, we are engaged in a comprehensive, holistic even, reciprocal conversation with our surroundings, with the world. Through my body, the floor of the Kon-tiki Museum gave me the rhythm of the ocean and enabled me to engage on a journey across the rolling seas. Axes that help our minds to reach, and paths that make our imagination wander work through our bodies by giving it directions, opening new vistas and perspectives by guiding our bodies, by indicating where, in which position in space, we can find connection. The quiet conversation of the world, perhaps the murmur Merleau-Ponty spoke of, it now seems, is conducted through and with our bodies. It is not enough just for our eyes to see the goals of our attention and curiosity, but if we can sense in what we see a way for our bodies to approach and become present with that goal, then the possibility of engagement opens more readily for us.

As said, my research began with objects and displays, with pictures in a way, but as I began to concentrate my attention on the body and the world co-coining it, the objects and displays began to seem as the surface for a deeper

⁹ This is why various fields of neurosciences are interested in dysfunctions of the brain as they help to understand how the brain is organised and how it functions as the existence of some of those functions are revealed only or at least best when they break down.

¹⁰ Shusterman, Richard (2008) *Body Consciousness – A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics*, p. 19.

¹¹ Pallasmaa (2008) *The Eyes of the Skin – Architecture and the Senses*, p. 45.

¹² Bonsdorff (1999), p. 117.

experience underlying it. There are, naturally, different levels and layers to experiences. I do not mean that there are different levels in the sense of value or nobility of the experience, but that there are different levels of involvement, different modes of engagement, and of aesthetic appreciation of equal value and merit, just as there are different levels or modes of concentration. We may appreciate objects rationally, practically, sensuously, aesthetically; by their surfaces, by their individual details; by their colour or by the memories and associations they bring into our minds (we may even altogether forget the object that called forth those memories); or by their apparent meaning or by the currents that flow under their surfaces invisible to the naked eye but perceivable to our empathetic imagination and our bodies. As my research continued, I became increasingly aware of the situation, literally, in which I found myself when visiting various museums and exhibitions, and it became evident that contrary to what many visitors may think, museums are bodily spaces, even the infamous white cubes¹³. Museum exhibitions basically work just like the religious or political rituals that impress the ethical, moral, and cosmological schemes which have been spatially and temporally constructed in the ritual environment 'upon the bodies of participants'¹⁴. Museums too communicate their message 'through the interaction of the body with a structural and structuring environment'¹⁵. This is the unavoidable level of experience, the embodied experience, and I began to realise that this was the aspect of the engaging experience towards which I was reaching.

5.3 Descriptive Aesthetics

Reading a recent issue of *Uppercase*, a Canadian quarterly 'magazine for the creative and the curious' as they describe themselves, I ran into a short introduction to the art of the paper artist Pamela Paulsrud, who carves discarded books into small objects of art that resemble smooth-worn pebbles which still can be leafed through as books. The artist herself describes the origin of her art as follows:

A quiet early morning walk on the beach, a way to start the day – the beauty of seeing the horizon, nature, changes – a place just to be, the tiny stones tufting the blanket of smooth sand and the musical scores written by the lines created from the lapping of the waves. Small stones usually found their way into my pockets to be fon-

¹³ Interestingly, I first wrote 'white cubicle' instead of 'white cube'. An interesting Freudian slip. What would it reveal if we were to follow it?

¹⁴ Bell (2009) *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, pp. 98-99.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

dled, re-examined and sometimes forgotten. Small stone piles began to form in and around my house.

It was the stone dreams, though, lucid dreams about stones and their messages that kept me going back, searching. These stones resonated with me. They triggered stories within me.¹⁶

Although the body can be much more even in our ordinary, everyday experiences, it is easily reduced into what the education critic Sir Kevin Robinson has provocatively called the means of transporting our minds from here to there.¹⁷ But perhaps we are not our minds confined inside our heads, perhaps our consciousness is more than that, as Noë assures. Yet the fact remains that in our general (Western) mindset, we tend to think of the mind and the body as two separate entities, while acknowledging that they are obviously connected to each other. It is a trap that is difficult to avoid, and one into which I have repeatedly fallen while writing this. Thankfully my supervisors have repeatedly pointed out any fumbling, although I am sure the danger was never fully averted. Anyhow, it is perhaps partly because of this way of thinking that the experiences of atmospheres and spaces are difficult to grasp. We may lack the language for such experiences, for those moments when it either is not possible or feels insufficient to say that I see, I hear, or I think – especially in those experiences of *being* in the presence of something, of being present for something. The description-escaping quality of these experiences may be the result of their complexity, of their intricacy, and the wholeness of the experience. I may see something, but the total experience of that process of observation is not just that visual perception and the immediate mental processes related to it, but something that has more scope. Noë suggests that our consciousness is not something confined and springing forth simply from our brains, but that '[h]uman experience is a dance that unfolds in the world and with others,'¹⁸ as he poetically puts it. How do we express that experience in words that are spoken by an I? Can we express the qualities and parameters of that experience explicitly? Do we need to express them explicitly? One of the objectives of this dissertation was to try and use Berleant's descriptive aesthetics in describing and examining these elusive experiences.

Teaching tai chi and riding, I have to accept as a fact that there are skills and nuances to these disciplines that cannot be explained to the students without the risk of having something lost during the explanation or in translation.

¹⁶ Paulsrud, Pamela (2013) 'Touchstones' in *Uppercase*, no. 19, oct/nov/dec 2013, p. 10, Uppercase, Calgary, Canada. The text is originally from the artist's webpage where she uses similar language to describe her other works. www.pamelapaulsrud.com

¹⁷ Robinson makes this remark, e.g., in his most viewed TED Talk at http://www.ted.com/talks/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity.html.

¹⁸ Noë (2009) *Out of Our Heads*, p. 6.

The best I can do is to ask the student to trust me and do, to the best of their ability, what I ask them to do. Often I find myself replying, 'You'll know when you do it right, instantly' to questions about whether or not a student is doing something right. When a movement is carried out correctly enough, the horse responds bodily with a sensation of ease and pleasantness. Incidentally, in both disciplines the quality of the movement is evaluated aesthetically, although both do have clear guidelines for correct movements. In the end, a master rider and a master tai chi practitioner are recognised by the fluency, effortlessness, balance, harmony, and ease of their movements, by their aesthetic values and not the technical correctness as such. The Renaissance knew a word for this state of mastery in which the difficulty of an art – whether it be the social skill of a courtier or the artistic grace of a painter – is concealed with apparent easiness and nonchalance, *sprezzatura*¹⁹. As my tai chi teacher, or *shifu*, reminds his master students, once you have mastered the standard form of the movements you then must find your own style and expression, you need to learn to express, to find adaptations in the movement as well as in yourself.

But tai chi especially is a system of complicated movements that must be described somehow if the practitioners are to talk about them and so different movements and sets of movements have been given names like 'Part the Wild Horse's Mane' or 'The White Crane Spreads Its Wings'. These names may at first glance seem just poetic vocabulary typical to Chinese culture, but they are anything but random or inessential. For a practitioner who knows the movements, they are poetic expressions of the purpose and the execution of the movement. They guide the practitioner towards the correct way of moving, towards the (bodily) aesthetic aspects of the movements that are hard to put to words but that can be expressed with poetic language. They hint at the expressive quality of *sprezzatura*. In other words, the names are aesthetic descriptions of the movements and their dynamic qualities. There is a concept for this kind of expressions and thinking in Chinese philosophy, the "*xiang* thinking", which is related to perception and [is] rich in poetic expression (...).²⁰ *Xiang* is a complicated concept that basically means grasping things through perception and not through rational and logical ways of thinking or by deduction, judgement,

¹⁹ *Oxford Dictionary of English* defines *sprezzatura* simply as 'studied carelessness, especially as characteristic quality or style of art or literature' (from Italian, 'nonchalance') but it has its origins in Baldassare Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier* (*Il Cortegiano*, 1528), a courtesy book where the word is used to describe a certain quality of an ideal courtier. Although the word is also used in art history to describe the quality of a painting, a Google search will turn up dozens of photos of fashionable, chic men, contemporary embodiments of the outward display of *sprezzatura*.

²⁰ Wang, Shuren (2009), 'The Roots of Chinese Philosophy and Culture – An Introduction to "*Xiang*" and "*Xiang*" Thinking', *Frontiers of Philosophy in China*, Higher Education Press/Springer-Verlag GmbH, vol. 4, no. 1, p. 1.

and reasoning.²¹ Regardless of the finer points of *xiang*, what is important here is the concept in Chinese philosophy that the essence of things cannot always be grasped and defined through direct descriptions but indirectly through poetic expressions; that something may become lost if the definition relies too much on exactness, logic, and rationale; that a poetic description can be a more accurate description than a reasoned one. Hence 'The White Crane Spreads Its Wings' can be considered a more detailed and true description of a movement in which the practitioner averts the opponent's attack with her hands, and by spreading her arms opens the opponent's defences to place a kick at their knees or abdomen, while balancing her body on one leg. The image contained in the poetic name would be, I trust, apparent to most watching someone perform the movement masterfully. While the technical description explains the mechanics, if you will, of the movement, it does not communicate the *feel* of the movement, its the inner state. To me it seems like there are few if any words in the language of the body, but expressions and expressiveness that are not easily available for our thinking mind and its words. Therefore examining such experiences benefits significantly from a method that allows for the poetic, allusive, subjective, even ambiguous, paradoxical, and perplexing so that they can be examined and discussed without the use of concepts and exact expressions.

Looking back at what I have written, I realise that I perhaps could and should have used more aesthetic descriptions in my work. I feel that I did not use the method of descriptive aesthetics to its full potential. This aspect of descriptive aesthetics could be taken much further, I believe, but that would perhaps work best in a differently organised and executed work of study, perhaps one where the objects of enquiry would be more narrowly determined. An anthology of case studies, perhaps, would offer a better environment as it would allow for the development of more intricate, poetic disseminations of particular experiences. To me it seems that as a style of writing, as a form of expression, descriptive aesthetics benefits of a more short story like approach with more room for philosophical risk taking. But, of course, methods of inquiry can have varied levels of implementation, some more hardcore than others, without necessarily losing their value. It is a question of selecting a suitable mode.

While I do think there is room for improvement in the style or mode of writing, I did find descriptive aesthetics to be a more than suitable framework of thinking. First of all, it allowed me to study my individual experiences as valid sources of knowledge. What descriptive aesthetics brought into play was more freedom of expression, a permission and a method to dig into experiences for which there are no labels, expressions, or terminology – as was already said. This was achieved by including poetic and imaginative ways of expression as a method of study into the available methodology. Secondly, I felt that adopting

²¹ Ibid.

descriptive aesthetics as a frame of thinking enabled and allowed me to take hold of the bodily and embodied experiences so that their ephemerality, subjectivity, and elusiveness were not taken as an issue. As I searched for an aesthetic description of an experience, I was able to try out different solutions more freely without the need to cling to a particular tradition of enquiry. It allowed me to take an experience and to, in a way, freeze it in my mind so that I could try out different approaches, different angles and perspectives, in an environment where every expression that came to my mind potentially had something in it. It also meant that meanings and experiences that are not produced by single aspects of the situation but where several aspects overlap or come into contact with each other could be examined more fluently as I could approach each element from an angle that seemed to suit it the best. Thinking in this way resembled the poetic expressiveness of the Chinese way of naming mentioned before: describing an experience was not simply a matter of putting it into words but to sentences and narratives where some of the meanings existed in the combinations of words and sentences. Thirdly, I personally find descriptive aesthetics to be a kind of set of repeated deconstructions and reconstructions of an experience that make graspable some core realisation through *poiesis*, more or less in the Heideggerian sense of 'bringing forth'. It helped me come into the presence of the experiences and environments, and to study them from both within me and outside of me, in a kind of a double exposure of the instance of experience.

As for exploring the instances of engagement, the literary techniques supported by descriptive aesthetics came in handy. Seeing the experiences of engagement as stories meant that I was able not only to study the experience, as described above, but to study my expression. Any instance of storytelling and narrative building means that the narrator has to decide what elements and expressions are elemental and important to include into the narrative for it to be correct. 'Correct' is naturally a somewhat subjective state of things in literature and I suspect many a narrator (writer, filmmaker, storyteller, actor) would rather say that they try to reach a solution that makes the narrative come off 'just right'. Nevertheless, an experience is not necessarily a story in itself but engagement that takes place in a situation where several (active) contributors are present in the creation of the potential for the experience. Narrativising the experience is an effective way of exploring the role of those contributors. Especially because of the possibility of using different perspectives and even fictional experiencers through whom it is possible to speculate on and theorise the influence of circumstances for the nature of the experience. For example, I have no assurances that my reading of the states of mind of the mother and son who caught me sitting in the exhibition of the National Museum of Finland was correct or true. Nevertheless, narrativising allowed me the freedom to read into their expressions the feelings and thoughts that may not have been there, which then made it possible for me to relate the situation as I experienced it. It also

made it possible to give the reader a chance of experiencing the situation herself through her imagination and empathy which, I hope, would engage her aesthetically and ignite her imagination and thinking on the subject. Narrative is a part of meaning-making, as psychologist Jerome S. Burner states in *The Culture of Education*²². Narratives enable us to put information into perspective and things into context, which makes narrativisation the preferred method of many museums.

On the whole, I found descriptive aesthetics to be a good frame of mind for achieving and maintaining a mindful approach to body and experience. I was able to accommodate both the immediacy of experience and engagement and the distance that benefits awareness and analysis. It enabled, to an extent more readily, an oscillation between creative, analytical, and observing thinking as it does not necessitate a particular procedure of thinking and examination but alters when alteration finds²³. This flexibility means that in examining something as fleeting as (subjective) experiences and as ever-changing as situations, a change of perspective or approach is more fluent. This also meant that the text came out more freeform than what is perhaps often expected of dissertations.

5.4 Imagination, Museum Exhibitions and Engagement

One word that has repeatedly come up in the dissertation and did so already during the research that led to the writing of it is *imagination*. Most of the exhibitions I have used as examples have relied on and fed the visitor's imagination. The St. Louis City Museum appears to be imagination-driven and experience-oriented par excellence, and even though the picture from the Museum Gustavianum's *The Mediterranean Sea and the Gulf of the Nile* exhibition may seem rather object-oriented and an archetypical example of what we think museums used to be, it is more than its visual impression gives away. The Museum Gustavianum is not just a museum of Mediterranean and other objects, it is a museum of a museum. The point is not to look at the Mediterranean objects and study their forms and meanings but to walk in the halls and rooms of a university with over 500 years of history under its belt. The experience the museum strives to create is not just of, for example, the ancient Mediterranean life, but of the students and academics studying those artefacts two hundred years ago. Museum Gustavianum is a museum of layers that boggle the mind when you try to imagine the life the building has lived and the lives it has seen and

²² Burner, Jeromy (1997) *The Culture of Education*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge.

²³ Contrary to what Shakespeare wrote of love in sonnet 116.

touched. On the whole, it has begun to seem that experience-orientedness is characterised by an emphasis on imagination, though this does not mean that object-oriented exhibiting would not include imagination. The difference is, I would argue, that in object-oriented exhibiting the imagination is more a question of forming mental pictures, of picturing scenes as if the visitor was to build imaginary dioramas in her head, as reproductive imagination. In experience-oriented exhibiting, imagining is a more active, participating, or engaging act where the visitor is asked to invest more of herself into it, to be an active member of the group.²⁴

Eventually, every museum has a simple request for their visitors: 'Imagine. Engage and use your powers of imagination with you. Bring this to life. Create meaning and understanding.' It is not imagination as something that creates fairytale fantasies, although it is an ability to conjure up images and situations of which the visitor does not necessarily have prior experience, based on the information and objects present and seen through and combined with the visitor's personal experiences and life history. It is the power of imagination that brings the hunters' peat hut to life and animates Medieval Stockholm. Imagination tricked and confused my senses as I stepped aboard the Fram. Intelligence alone, although it is part of the ability to imagine, would not have managed that to that extent without the imaginative willingness to let go and take part. Imagining a situation especially involves empathy, a grasp of the bigger picture, an idea of consequences and their causes, knowledge, information, ability, and willingness to explore and to try out. Imagining also requires concentration as one's attention must be turned towards whatever is being imagined; imagining *is* turning towards. My imagination may present me with an image or a story in the middle of the hustle and bustle of everyday life without warning, things may appear to pop into my head out of thin air, but these images are only results of a process on which I have paid attention earlier, sometimes even months before. A museum exhibition tries to achieve some of this during the visit, immediately, although part of the experience is always hidden somewhere in our minds to return on a later date.

There is, however, a drawback to this emphasis on the imagination. While 'experiences are volatile and unruly'²⁵, as Hein warns, the imagination is even more obviously beyond the control of the museum. Imagination is individual, although it has to contain a collective aspect or otherwise storytelling would have always been much more difficult, and so the way expectations, beliefs, mindsets, and previous experiences of individuals colour the result of their imaginations is difficult to predict. All of us, I am sure, have experienced a

²⁴ See Bonsdorff, Pauline von (2009) 'Mielikuvituksen voima – ruumiin ja runouden kuvat' ('The power of imagination – Pictures of the body and poetics') for various concepts of imagination.

²⁵ Hein, Hilde S. (2000) *The Museum in Transition*, p. 68 as quoted in the first chapter.

situation completely differently from our friends. Have we not been astonished to find out that someone else has seen the same situation in a way altogether different from us? Or have we not been totally misunderstood although we thought that what we meant was crystal clear, that we communicated our meaning clearly? Experiences are perceived through the coloured glasses of mental states and imaginations are painted with a selection of colours with some of the tints varying unexpectedly. Though a museum can do a lot with how they design and set up their exhibitions, there is always, even with object-oriented exhibitions, an element of uncertainty to how the visitors will experience and interpret it. It is impossible to build a foolproof exhibition in this sense just as it is impossible to please everyone. There is always a certain degree of risk involved in the process – like there is to any instance of communication and representation.

5.5 Paths, Body, Reciprocity, and Engagement in Museum Exhibitions

As to how the situation potentially leading to engagement is set up in exhibitions, I cannot offer a full manual but only some of the basics. After this journey into the other worlds of exhibitions, I am more assured than ever that exhibitions are environments of encounters. They are interactive guided maps of strange foreign shores beyond which the unexplored expanses await. Exhibitions are instances of coming into contact with something other and welcoming that other into your experiences and lifeworld. This is the potential of any kind of museum exhibitions.

Encounters are assisted by orientation. It helps to know which way we should turn, to know the cardinal directions of the situation. Coming into a meeting we know where we came from and, if we are fortunate, with what kind of goals and expectations, but we often have very little knowledge of the origin and background of the other party. In this sense, visiting an exhibition really is an expedition into an undiscovered land. Just as the ground and gravity help us to define our world (remember ‘Stand up!’), sense and knowledge of other directions help us to define our standing in a space and in a situation. We cannot come together as an engaged group – with other humans, beings or things in general – unless we can find a place in the group after which the conversation can begin.

There is, of course, a certain directness to spaces with clear orientation. I, for one, dislike exhibitions that dictate which route I should take, in which order I am to walk through it. It feels a bit arrogant to presume where I am to linger, and when and where to have which thoughts and realisations. Then again,

some subjects benefit from linear routes, some may even be incomprehensible if not 'read' in a correct order. What would be the point of exhibiting methods of brewing beer if the process in question was not explained stage by stage? But is it necessary that every visitor takes the same route predetermined by the museum through an exhibition on Renaissance masters? Could an overall picture of the period's art not be formed piece by piece like a puzzle? Certainly creating an exhibition that would support both route and puzzle strategies would require more time and effort. It is a balancing act: too much emphasis on the directions and the space becomes restrictive and commanding. Too little, and it loses cohesion and orientation both as a space and as a presentation of ideas, as things become loose and begin to drift meaninglessly. There needs to be something for our bodies to grasp, something on which we can anchor ourselves.

Paths, while being routes and significations of access, create thickness within the space they traverse, as paths are born where scores of feet have padded the ground. Our lives in our homes are mapped out in invisible paths that lead from the kitchen to the living room and from our bedroom to our shower. Our everyday life itself takes place along familiar paths and routes along the streets of our neighbourhood leading to our work, hobbies, friends, and the stores we frequent. When we see a path in a park, for example, we know it leads somewhere and that it has value since others have seen it worthwhile to take it. If I, while strolling in a botanic garden, see a path trampled in the lawn, leading away from the gravel path and disappearing between the rhododendrons, I know that there must be something hidden, yet worth seeing. Why else would so many other strollers have left the gravel? There is a pull to paths, a call for our feet to follow.

In an exhibition, paths and suggested paths – they do not need to be obvious – create thickness by their nature. Winding paths through an unfamiliar ground create comfort and familiarity: other have been here and others have known their way. I might not know the terrain but I have knowledge of paths, I am familiar with them. A path will, for it must, take me somewhere. It will reveal me new sights and prospects, it will bring me into new situations. A path is also a reassurance: I cannot think how many times I have been comforted in a forest by a path appearing in front of me just as I have begun to feel that I might have lost my way. Stumbling upon a path on such a moment gives directions, although I still might not know exactly where I am. A path means and assures that there is something over there from where it comes and to where it leads. It is a sign of habitation; a single wanderer leaves no path but foot prints. Furthermore, paths indicate a community, and by taking up a path, by stepping on it, we become a part of that community, even if we never meet another member of it, or if we stay on that path only for a while or for a part of it. Paths are indi-

cations, signs, and gestures. Layers of action, time, and intentions of embodied beings create them. Or it could be said that paths are accumulations of time and activity. They are signs and results of habitation and territories as they are formed where life takes place.

In exhibitions, axes create purpose and paths let and lead the mind to wander. A path takes hold of the walker's feet, taking care of her body and directing or guiding her gently through the space, into the place, and along the landscape. Our bodies can follow a path independently, without the guidance of our conscious thought – providing that the path is smooth and free of hindrances such as stones; it is mentally surprisingly taxing to walk a path that is littered with stones and rocks large enough to trip up the walker. Charles Darwin had a 'thinking path' in Sandwalk Wood where he walked daily and was so lost in his thoughts that he created a system which included kicking aside a small stone each time he completed a circuit of the Wood. This kept him from walking for too long and saved him the trouble of interrupting his thinking in order to keep track of the laps.²⁶

Paths also give a space or a place cadence. The widening and narrowing of the path, its descent and ascent, turns and twists, affect not only the pace of the stroller's feet but her thoughts and feelings and the feel and character of the space itself. Paths are simultaneously a guiding, directing force and a communicating, reciprocal presence. Axes alone command attention and dictate directions but paths negotiate the space, they present options, they allow, and they give room. They also deny, direct, and convince. All this makes axes and paths the most basic level of the exhibition design – especially because they, along with walls and doors and other passages, set the rhythm and hence the fundamental feel of the space. Connections and engagement can be made or interrupted with the lay of the paths and axes. The placement of other elements of an exhibition can be created around and along the predesigned paths, but creating fluently flowing paths and guiding axes around a predesigned display is much harder.

²⁶ A popular anecdote of Darwin's 'thinking path', that can be found in several sources online, e.g., Wikipedia: Down House, Darwin's home, or at the English Heritage's webpage <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/daysout/properties/home-of-charles-darwin-down-house/garden/sandwalk>.

5.6 Touch, Layers, and Presence

The way paths are created makes me think about handling and touching in exhibitions. As said, paths come into being after countless feet repeatedly touch the same, certain areas of ground. Paths are created by the repeated 'handling' of the landscape by the walking feet. While it certainly is good if there are objects available for visitors to handle – especially in exhibitions of history, technology, science, natural history, and so on – I am not so sure if an exhibition will certainly be made more involving and engaging by allowing handling. Handling something is an exploration, an examination and as such it has the tendency of becoming more the matter of the observing mind, unless it is introduced in an environment of appreciation and thoughtfulness of sensations. Handling hands make the object known to the mind and the body, they reveal how things are materially, what are their properties, how do they relate to our bodies. But does handling objects necessarily engage the visitor? Is handling objects intrinsically an engaging activity? I do not think so. While handling things is something to be desired, the simple act of handling is not the most engaging thing a visitor can do. Handling is to some extent handling an action that holds within it hierarchies as the object of handling has been submitted to be handled; it is not necessarily an action of equal partners. There is more to touching than just handling.

The main concern regarding visitors and touch in many museums are the stolen caresses by the hands of the visitors that wear patinated bronzes down to gold and smooth out the surfaces of stones; many an object could be destroyed by the gentlest caring touches of the admiring fingertips of visitors. A caress is an expressed desire for connection, for presence, for ecstasy. Fingertips following the curve of a statue or the edge of a table are an admiring act of reaching for a presence. A single, quick touch of fingers can transform an object more real and more present than a hand that takes hold.

Hands caress those parts of the environment and the things in it that in some way reach towards us. Many bronze statues are touched where their shape reaches out: the foot that extends over the edge of the plinth, the hand and the fingers that gesture towards us, the head or the cheek turned to the side. Of course this kind of touch would not do in most museums, but the gesture of reaching would. We can touch and caress the objects and forms on display through our eyes as we recognise their gesture towards us, like Pallasmaa has repeatedly suggested. This is how the reconstructed interiors of the Heinola Town Museum work. The imperfections of the displays – the forgotten books and the doors left ajar – are indications and signs of touch that our minds and bodies recognise, creating a desire to complete the intentions behind the ges-

tures. These objects and unfinished intentions reach for us across the space, and we sense and imagine in them the caress of gazes; we see where the caressing looks have worn the patina of time. These imagined, sensed touches add to the thickness of a place, even if they do not leave a visible mark on the objects. We can follow their course and feel their weight in our environment. Like in a stone garden, some paths may be invisible to the naked eye and still obvious to us.

The embodied being of the visitor can be welcomed and engaged through such gestures as it reciprocates with them in engagement. If we sense the world and its things turning towards us in openness, we are inclined to respond in kind. No actual physical contact is necessary for addressing the visitor bodily, a welcoming gesture is enough – if the visitor is ready and willing. After all, an exhibition is built and ready to welcome its visitors, but in the end its success is very much dependent on the visitors' attitudes and moods. As in any instance of communication, much can be done to ensure the success of the communication, but its success more often than not comes down to the individuals participating in it.

5.7 A Change of Pace and Final Thoughts

I began this dissertation by pondering the change of museums. Have they changed? Has there really been a change of orientation from objects to experiences? The more I have thought about it and the more I have examined my experiences, the more unsure I have become. Have things really changed? Now I am inclined to argue that they have not. Experience has always been a fundamental part of museums. At one point in their history, some museums became scientific collections, or more truthfully, some scientific collections, such as the collections of the Royal Society in Great Britain, became museums. Perhaps what many have experienced as a change has in reality been the process of finding a new balance for museum exhibitions' aesthetics and the language of exhibiting as the scientific collections and the way of ordering and displaying them has been combined with the more flamboyant traditions of princely palaces and collections.

Have not objects always been the source of knowledge and experiences in museums? Has that ever changed? Thinking exhibitions as environments through rhythmanalysis, I would suggest that what might have changed is the rhythm of the exhibition environments. The older and more traditionally structured exhibitions are more controlled and physically structured than many contemporary ones – as far as I can tell from my experiences of exhibitions that have remained close to their original form. The old extravaganza of the princely collections and national displays of power were exuberant in their style, espe-

cially in comparison to many scientific collections, but they were in many ways no less ordered. They had clear, even ritualistic routes leading the visitor through them, a trend that lasted well into the 20th century, as Carol Duncan shows in *Civilizing Rituals*. Today, however, many museum exhibitions are more freeform or they at least have more of a stroll garden feel to them. They still show things to their visitors, they still try to pass on messages and affect their visitors' thinking, but they do it in a more relaxed, more flowing fashion, intentionally leaving more room for individual feelings, experiences and choices. The St. Louis City Museum is an extreme example of this, while the Museum of Medieval Stockholm is a more moderate one. In the latter, it is difficult to find a ritual route in any traditional sense. If rituals have an ending, a completion, then when is a visit to these museums completed, if we take completion to mean a point in time when a visitor has seen and experienced the whole exhibition? This, I think, is the core of the change many have experienced but have had difficulty to express: visiting a museum exhibition has become an open-ended experience. Museums have also become more layered in the sense that they – partly because they need the revenue – are (intended to be) experienced over the course of several visits, with each visit contributing to the next one so that some of the meanings we create are born over a period of time. Although museums have responded to the trend of general aestheticization in our culture and embraced experience-orientation in a new, more lively fashion, they have also started to vouch for cumulative or slow processes of repeated experiences. While museum experiences in general have in a way become more instant, they have also gained more depth – although this does not necessarily mean depth in a purely intellectual sense. It might be more prudent to talk about wider reach or more width or breadth.

Art museums ended up getting a far smaller part in this dissertation than I first anticipated, but this should not be taken to mean that much of what I have written would not apply to them. However, there are considerable differences between most art exhibitions and museum exhibitions of other kinds, the main difference being that art exhibitions are created around objects of art which in general do not have the same evidence-nature as other museum objects. This alone can be taken to mean that the intentions behind exhibiting art are also different from other exhibitions. In a natural history exhibition, for example, every specimen shares the same purpose of representing its species, habitat, ecosystem, and so on. Even in an art history exhibition, where the artworks on display are specimens demonstrating that history, their life will still continue as individual works of art. They are not dead specimens in this respect. The story of art is different from the story of evolution or national history.

A possible next step from here would be to consider the layers of exhibitions above the ground and around the axes and paths, to look into the displays

and examine the instances of engagement on a range that the whole of an exhibition. New actions would then come into play: peeking into, leaning over, and becoming surrounded by the display. Sounds and soundscapes would also be interesting. For example, the *Tampere 1918* exhibition has remarkable soundscapes that have a considerable effect on the experience. Standing in front of the firing squad when you hear the commands and the following firing is quite different from hearing the birds sing at the end of the exhibit after the turmoil is over. But research on sounds would have required more expertise than I had time to accumulate for this occasion and it had to be excluded from this study. I also had the intention of including more detailed studies of lighting but that also provided so much material that it also turned out to be worthy of a research of its own.

What, however, in exhibitions would interest me most is the spatial representation of time. A good example is the flow of history and lives in the *Cradle to Grave*. I have had experiences of a kind of 'time travel' for example in the Orkney's famous Skara Brae, where a clever path leads a visitor 5000 years back through history and ancient landscape opening around the barren site. There the layers of history seemed to be stacked above the landscape all visible and accessible simultaneously. But that too has to be left for another exposition.

Thinking about art museums guided my thoughts to inhabitation. In art galleries, most visitors, in my experience, seek to place themselves right in front of the painting they are viewing as if to look at the picture right in the eyes. How about sidelong glances? How about strolling along the gallery? I have been to art museum exhibitions that have borne some features and sensations of a stroll garden but many, if not most, art museum exhibitions of paintings and such seem to follow a rather regimented route around the room along the walls with pitstops in front of each painting. Or at least the visitors tend to act this way. How to loiter in the gallery, how to wander, how to inhabit it? At first it does seem that art galleries and museums are still white cubes of sorts. They do not come off as habitats at first glance, as places of embodied dwelling where we would encounter works of art bodily – with the exception of installations and other such works of art. The various exhibitions I have studied in this dissertation as examples of engaging environments seem on the contrary to be rich, layered, even voluptuous environments, something many art galleries and museums do not seem to be. And yet we can become engaged in them too, even deeply so. It seems that engagement does not so necessarily require an environment that is sensorially rich. Perhaps there is no absolute need to offer stimulations for all our various senses? An aesthetically stimulating environment – as an environment that stimulates our senses, our sensibilities, our imagination, our thoughts, our ethics, our rationale, us as embodied, conscious beings – is not necessarily an environment of sensual abundance as we often tend to perceive it in our everyday life. Of course there is nothing wrong or bad

in exhibitions and museums like the Museum of Medieval Stockholm or The St. Louis City Museum as such – they are a much appreciated variation on the theme that lies under their appearances: the theme of coming together and being in the presence. Ryōan-ji's stone garden achieves that same connection, the same level of engagement with only a few carefully chosen elements and without losing any of its aesthetically engaging power. This is, I think, something to keep in mind when designing museum exhibitions especially in the world of today, filled with a taste for entertainment and superfluous aestheticising: an engaging environment, an environment that encourages dwelling is not a question of the amount of things that are materially there. It is a question of creating a dynamic group, of coming into and bringing into a contact. It is a question of turning towards and being open for each other. It is a question of understanding being in the world as bodily activity.

At the end of the day, there is still much to be said and discovered in museum exhibitions as environments of bodily, embodied, aesthetic experiences. While exhibitions can be studied from a museological point of view, they are also an excellent environment for studying the human experience, philosophy, cognition, theories of mind, and knowledge. They contain in them both the individual and the society, the social and the personal, the teaching and the educating and the discovery. They are environments that are both controlled and giving, commanding or even authoritative, and both allowing and encouraging individual thought. They are, in a way, a laboratory of human experience.

ILLUSTRATIONS

All pictures taken by the author if not mentioned otherwise.

1	INTRODUCTION	
1.1a	A device to demonstrate the formation of mountains. Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh.....	31
1.1b	Two ways of grinding grain. Kilmartin Museum, Scotland.....	31
1.1c	How to polish a stone tool. Kilmartin Museum, Scotland.....	32
2	MUSEUM AS PHENOMENON	
2.1	The reconstructed Queen's Bedchamber in Sterling Castle, Sterling, Scotland.....	64
2.2	A maid brushing the carpet in the Queen's Inner Hall, Palace of Princes, Sterling Castle, Sterling, Scotland.....	68
2.3	A maid brushing the carpet with visitors observing the room in the Queen's Inner Hall, Palace of Princes, Sterling Castle, Sterling, Scotland.....	69
2.4	A plate depicting the main hall of the Army Medical Museum from <i>Ten Years in Washington – Life and Scenes in the National Capital as a Woman Sees Them</i> by Mary Clemmes Ames (1874). To this contexts from http://boothiebarn.wordpress.com/ 2012/06/09/the-collapse-of-fords-theatre/	84
2.5	Diorama-like exhibit depicting Finnish furniture from the 1600s in Ostrobothnia Museum, Vaasa, Finland.....	86
2.6	The first tier of the Biologiska Museet, Stockholm, Sweden.....	87
2.7	Tracks of animals and birds in a diorama depicting African semi-arid savanna at the Natural History Museum, Helsinki, Finland.....	87
2.8	View of the 'In Flight – Birds at Vapriikki' exhibition at Vapriikki Museum Centre, Tampere, Finland.....	88
3	PRODUCING PRESENCE – LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR A PATH BETWEEN WORLDS	
3.1	The permanent exhibition of Finnish prehistory in the National Museum of Finland, Helsinki.....	129
3.2	The CSI-like computer interface in Sterling Castle, Scotland.....	132
3.3	A view into one of the reconstructed houses in the Medieval Museum of Stockholm, Stockholm, Sweden.....	137
3.4	A detail of the bricks embossed with cycling anecdotes on a residential building in Arabianranta, Helsinki, Finland.....	145

3.5	A light well in the Scotland gallery of the National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh, Scotland.....	149
3.6	Detail of a vitrine in the Scotland gallery, the National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh.....	150
3.7	An exhibit of Roman horse tack, the National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh.....	150
3.8	A section of the first view into the Museum of Medieval Stockholm, Stockholm, Sweden.....	160
3.9	The town wall and a reconstruction of a building site in the Museum of Medieval Stockholm, Stockholm.....	162
3.10	The view towards the town and harbour. The Museum of Medieval Stockholm, Stockholm, Sweden.....	163
3.11	A street view in the reconstructed town in the Museum of Medieval Stockholm, Stockholm, Sweden.....	164
3.12	The view from the aft of the ship towards the main entrance in the Vasa Museum, Stockholm, Sweden.....	167
3.13	The Mediterranean Sea and the Gulf of the Nile -exhibition in the Museum Gustavianum in Uppsala, Sweden.....	170
3.14	The view of the Ra II in the Kon-Tiki Museum, Oslo, Norway.....	171
3.13	The aft view of the Ra II in the Kon-Tiki Museum, Oslo, Norway..	172
3.16	A general view from the entrance into the <i>Tampere 1918</i> -exhibition in the Museum Centre Vapriikki, Tampere, Finland....	177
3.17	The floor of the first part of the <i>Tampere 1918</i> -exhibition in the Museum Centre Vapriikki, Tampere, Finland.....	178
3.18	The floor of the middle part of the <i>Tampere 1918</i> -exhibition in the Museum Centre Vapriikki, Tampere, Finland.....	179
3.19	The floor of the final part of the <i>Tampere 1918</i> -exhibition in the Museum Centre Vapriikki, Tampere, Finland.....	180
4	COMING INTO THE PRESENCE OF THINGS	
4.1	The Marine Biodiversity- exhibit, The Natural History Museum, Helsinki, Finland.....	187
4.2	The Marine Biodiversity -exhibit or The Wall, detail, The Natural History Museum, Helsinki.....	188
4.3	The jar containing two juvenile, approximately 10 cm long sea turtles, detail. The Natural History Museum, Helsinki.....	189
4.4	The former entrance tunnel of the Museum of Medieval Stockholm, Stockholm, Sweden.....	204
4.5	The first, introductory exhibition space of the former version of the Museum of Medieval Stockholm, Stockholm, Sweden.....	205
4.6	The illusionary cloister in the Museum of Medieval Stockholm....	206

4.7	The redesigned entrance tunnel into the exhibitions of the Museum of Medieval Stockholm, Stockholm, Sweden.....	207
4.8	The current introductory room at the Museum of Medieval Stockholm, Stockholm, Sweden.....	210
4.9	The mock drawbridge leading into the main hall. The Museum of Medieval Stockholm, Stockholm, Sweden.....	211
4.10	Two cases of light as an inviting element in the National Museum of Finland, Helsinki, Finland.....	212
4.11	A mural extending into visitors' space. Wasa Museum, Stockholm, Sweden.....	213
4.12	A rough sketch of the entrance into the exhibition of Japanese woodblock prints in the Ateneum Art Museum, Helsinki, Finland.....	216
4.13	Charles Sandison's work <i>Sinuhe</i> in the Mika Waltari hundredth anniversary exhibition in the Ateneum Art Museum, Helsinki, Finland. Copyright Charles Sandison. www.sandison.fi/content/media/mediaimages.html	222
4.14	The gold miners' hut in the Arctic Museum Nanuq, Pietarsaari, Finland.....	227
4.15	A savannah habitat diorama with a bridge-like viewing platform in the Natural History Museum, Helsinki, Finland.....	231
4.16	<i>The Story of Bones</i> -exhibit in the National History Museum, Helsinki, Finland.....	233
4.17	A railing/barrier in the permanent exhibition in the National Museum of Finland, Helsinki.....	234
4.18	An exhibition of ecclesiastical history, The National Museum of Finland, Helsinki.....	236
4.19	The Mediterranean Sea and the Gulf of the Nile -exhibition in the Museum Gustavianum in Uppsala, Sweden.....	240
4.20	The rebuilt labyrinth at the Yuan Ming Yuan ('The Gardens of Perfect Brightness'), the Old Summer Palace, Beijing, China.....	242
4.21	The prehistory exhibition in The National Museum of Finland, Helsinki.....	243
4.22	View into the main hall of the current exhibition in The Museum of Medieval Stockholm, Stockholm, Sweden.....	248
4.23	An axis leading through the exhibition in the Kilmartin Museum, Argyle, Scotland.....	249
4.24	The second room of the Kilmartin Museum, Kilmartin, Argyle, Scotland.....	250
4.25	An illustration of the principles on how to make a square site appear wider. A drawing after Slawson (1991), p. 84.....	252
4.26	The last room of the Kilmartin Museum, Kilmartin, Argyle,	

Scotland.....	253
4.27 An experiment on alignment at writer's home.	
4.27a&b.....	256
4.27c&d.....	257
4.28 A section of the diorama of the Biologiska Museet, Stockholm, Sweden.....	260
4.29 The first version of the interior of an arctic hunting lodge in the Arctic Museum Nanuq, Pietarsaari, Finland.....	263
4.30 The second version of the interior of an arctic hunting lodge in the Arctic Museum Nanuq, Pietarsaari, Finland.....	265
4.31 The drawing room in the Heinola Town Museum, Heinola, Finland.....	268
4.32 The blue room in the Heinola Town Museum, Heinola, Finland.....	269
4.33 The tiled stove in the Heinola Town Museum, Heinola, Finland.....	270
4.34 The kitchen in the Heinola, Town Museum, Heinola, Finland.....	272

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