THE PEOPLE’S MUSEUM FOR PRINCE:
INVERTING THE CURATORIAL LENS FROM ARTIST TO AUDIENCE.

BY

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ABSTRACT

The People’s Museum For Prince:
Inverting The Curatorial Lens From Artist To Audience.

This practice-based research explores an alternative model for an artist’s museum focusing on the impact of the artist on their audience. It takes form as a dissertation, and an exhibition which was held in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in May 2018 as the first iteration of the museum. This research asks how the mourning for an artist and the aftermath of their death can inform an alternative model for an artist’s museum that inverts the curatorial lens from artist to audience in order to honour the deep impact of the artist on the lives of many.

Taking Prince, who died in 2016, as a case study, it analyses curatorial, institutional and public practices relating to the musician and his audience, focusing on the public mourning for Prince and the rapid transformation of Paisley Park, Prince’s home and studio complex, into a new museum. The alternative artist’s museum model proposed is a curatorial response to the discrepancy between how Prince was mourned by the public and how he was officially memorialised by an institution. The research is situated within the frame of institutional critique, new institutionalism, and critical exhibition practices, and also within the context of recent contemporary museum exhibitions that take the musician as their subject.

The research finds that an artist’s audience provides an alternative source of expertise and rich content for a museum. This new museum model works to transform the essence of the public testimonials and the other creative expressions enacted in the wake of the artist’s death into the generative centre of the museum. By drawing on the diverse, subjective perspectives of the artist’s audience, and through collecting and presenting their stories, creative works and biographical objects, a multidimensional portrait of the artist can emerge. This new model for an artist’s museum that places the audience’s experience at the centre has application beyond Prince to any artist who was deeply beloved by many.
Declaration:

I declare this thesis comprises only my original work towards the degree of Doctor of Philosophy; due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used; and the thesis is fewer than the maximum word limit in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices as approved by the Research Higher Degrees Committee.

Emma Catherine Balázs
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List of Figures

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Figure 2c. Prince’s Gold Star at First Avenue, May 5, 2016. Photo by Jim Mone. AP. https://www.thecurrent.org/feature/2016/10/12/purple-pilgrimage-prince-fans-making-the-trek-to-minnesota.


Figure 7. Notes to Prince from around the world by Kristin Kokkila, August 2018. Photo by the author.

Figure 8. Paisley Park Fence in August 2016. Photo by the author.


Figure 10. Kristin Kokkila in Prince jersey waits to present at Chanhassen City Council Meeting, Oct 3, 2016. Photo provided by Kristin Kokkila.


Figure 13. Prince4Ever fence, Paisley Park carpark, April 2017. Photo by Gail George.

Figure 14. Fence display at My Name is Prince exhibition, Amsterdam, June 2018. Photo by Arun Saldanha.

Figure 15.a, b. Fence at Riley Creek, just beyond Paisley Park boundary, October 2016. Photos by the author, October 2016.

Figure 16a. Riley Creek Underpass on Prince’s birthday June 7, 2017. Photo by the author.

Figure 16b. Riley Creek Underpass, January 26, 2017. Photo by the author.


Figure 20. Joel Weinshanker, Opening Day at Paisley Park Museum, October 6, 2016. Photo by David Joles, Star Tribune. 

Figure 21. The author in Studio B, at Prince’s piano, Oct 6, 2016. Photo by Paisley Park Museum staff.

Figure 22. The author in Studio B, at Prince’s piano, Oct 9, 2017. Photo by Paisley Park Museum staff.

Figure 23. Visitors at Elvis’s grave in the meditation garden, Graceland. September 2016, photo by the author.

Figure 24. Prince’s urn. Photo by Foreverence. 

Figure 25. Paisley Park Atrium, October 2016. Photo by AP. 
https://www.theguardian.com/music/2016/oct/06/prince-paisley-park-estate-museum-minnesota


Figure 27. Prince’s Bedroom, April 2016. Photo by Carver County Sheriff’s office. 
http://prince.org/msg/7/453907?&pg=3

Figure 28. Purple Rain room, Paisley Park Museum, October 2016. Photo by NBC. 


Figure 30. Fan Art in David Bowie Is, New York, June 2018. Photo by Arun Saldanha.


Figure 40. Installation view, The People’s Museum for Prince. Photo by Daniel Pratt.

Figure 41. Installation view, The People’s Museum for Prince. Photo by Daniel Pratt.

Figure 42. Installation view, The People’s Museum for Prince. Photo by Daniel Pratt.
Figure 43. Visitor at Dana Lemoine’s installation in The People’s Museum for Prince. Photo by Steven Cohen. [link]

Figure 44. Troy Gua, *Le Petit Prince*. Installation view, The People’s Museum for Prince. Photo by Daniel Pratt.

Figure 45. Bon Mott, *Catsuit*, Installation view, The People’s Museum for Prince. Photo by Daniel Pratt.

Figure 46a. e’s Prince collection, Installation view, The People’s Museum for Prince. Photo by Daniel Pratt.

Figure 46b. K.L. Peterson, *Portrait of e*. Date unknown. Photo by the author.

Figure 47. Visitor at Rich Benson’s installation in the People’s Museum for Prince. Photo by Steven Cohen. [link]

Figure 48. Visitors at the *Houses of Prince*, May 2018. Photo by author.

Figure 49. Kristen Zschomler explains the *Houses of Prince* project to visitors, May 2018. Photo by Steven Cohen. [link]

Figure 50. Installation view, The People’s Museum for Prince. Photo by Daniel Pratt.

Figure 51. Table at the People’s Museum for Prince. Photo by Daniel Pratt.

Figure 52. Art-A-Whirl Promotional card, May 2018. Designed for the Solar Arts Building.

Figure 53. *Purple Preview* event with DJ Michael Holz, May 2018. Photo by Steven Cohen [link]

Figure 54. Community Roundtable, May 2018. Photo by Arun Saldanha.
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .................................................................................................................. 4  
List of Figures ............................................................................................................................ 5  
Introduction .................................................................................................................................. 14  
Who was Prince? / Research Question ..................................................................................... 15  
Research Methods and Process .................................................................................................. 19  
Terminology .................................................................................................................................. 22  
Project Structure ....................................................................................................................... 25  
Scope of this Dissertation .......................................................................................................... 26  

Chapter One: Mourning Prince: The Paisley Park Fence as Spontaneous Museum ............... 29  
   1. Mourning Prince .................................................................................................................. 30  
      Mourning online .................................................................................................................. 31  
      Public memorials for artists ............................................................................................... 33  
      “I’ll celebrate the day I die” ............................................................................................... 36  
   2. The Paisley Park Fence ....................................................................................................... 41  
      A spontaneous shrine ......................................................................................................... 44  
      Teach us how to mourn: the role of the media ................................................................. 48  
      Signs of “rectification” ....................................................................................................... 50  
      Paisley Park Museum and the Chanhassen City Council ................................................. 52  
      Effacement of the fence ...................................................................................................... 54  
      Paisley Park Museum and the appropriation of the fence ............................................... 60  
      The fence in London: a travelling memorial site within a commercial exhibition .......... 64  
      *Soul sanctuary*: the quiet, continuous life of the other Paisley Park fence .................. 70  
      Conclusion: the spontaneous museum and the messiness of mourning ......................... 75  

Chapter Two: The Artist’s Museum and the Museumification of Paisley Park Museum ........ 77  
   1. The Artist’s Museum .......................................................................................................... 77  
      Museums for musicians ....................................................................................................... 79  
   2. Paisley Park Museum .......................................................................................................... 83  
      The museumification of Paisley Park ................................................................................. 84
“Rule No. 1 at the Museum: Only do what Prince would do” .............................. 89
Approaching the museum .................................................................................. 91
The visitor experience: dreaming in the museum .............................................. 94
Graceland as memorial ....................................................................................... 97
Paisley Park as memorial ................................................................................... 100
Guided tours ........................................................................................................ 107
Staging the museum: Paisley Park as house museum ....................................... 110
Where is Prince? ................................................................................................. 115
Conclusion: “Paisley Park is in your heart” ....................................................... 117

Chapter Three: The Musician in the Art Museum – Contemporary Curatorial Practices .............................. 119
The musician in the museum ............................................................................. 119
Anatomy of a music exhibition in a museum .................................................... 123
The new standard for musician exhibitions: David Bowie Is .............................. 125
“Sound and Vision”: an intimate, solo encounter with the artist ....................... 126
The super-fan in the museum ............................................................................ 130
The immersive experience: Their Mortal Remains ........................................... 133
Curatorial indifference to the audience: Björk at MoMA .................................... 137
Exhibition as homage: Leonard Cohen: A Crack in Everything ....................... 141
Michael Jackson: arranging pictures On the Wall ............................................. 147
Conclusion .......................................................................................................... 149

Chapter Four: The People’s Museum For Prince .............................................. 151
1. Curatorial Contexts ......................................................................................... 151
The institution as critical form .......................................................................... 151
New institutionalism and the role of the curator .............................................. 152
Inside / outside the institutions of art ................................................................. 154
Institutional critique .......................................................................................... 156
Institution-as-project ........................................................................................ 157
2. The People’s Museum for Prince ................................................................. 166
The original vision for the museum ................................................................. 168
Curatorial process .............................................................................................. 169
Volunteers & Local Community ....................................................................... 173
Exhibition elements ......................................................................................... 175
Exhibition design and layout .............................................................................. 184
Venue and Art-A-Whirl event ........................................................................... 186
Purple Preview and Community Roundtable events ...................................... 187
Local media coverage and guest book .............................................................. 189
Conclusion ........................................................................................................ 191

Conclusion ........................................................................................................ 192
Applications of the research and scope for future development .................. 192
The gifts of the artist and the labour of gratitude ............................................ 193
Bibliography ...................................................................................................... 197
Creative Work for Examination ....................................................................... 201
Appendix ............................................................................................................ 202
How can you dance and dance, in front of millions of people, for years, and still seem like a secret only I know? (And isn’t it the case that to be a Prince fan is to feel that Prince was your secret alone?).

– Zadie Smith¹

Prince blows the doors off our limited notions of what makes up a human being. He’s a luminously sexy motherfucker who makes space for us to be larger and brighter and more complex than we ever thought we could be. Prince didn’t just demonstrate how to own the full scope of your feelings, no matter how the world feels about them. He showed that, by celebrating the rawest, most painful, most dangerous, sexiest, strangest, most freakish parts of your soul, you can touch the divine.

– Heather Havrilesky, nymag²

Prince’s time was ruled by love, in its full possibilities, sometimes in anger or sadness, most often in joy. He gave us that time, and no mortal ending can take it away.

– Ann Powers, NPR³

I’ve never felt a grief like this. I’ve lost family members, and I’ve watched the people closest to me grapple with the deepest, darkest depths of loss. But this was something different; it was massive, but also oddly intimate. How could I explain to anyone what it felt like to lose an icon that I also somehow viewed as a local treasure and respected as a human and a friend?

– Andrea Swensson, The Current⁴

Miss you. Love you Prince. Heartbroken. Will miss you forever. Just the greatest, the sweetest & a one of a kind & it’s too sad you are gone. Went to the beach at sunset to talk to you. Thanks for everything you gave to all of us.

– Esquibelle, YouTube⁵

Introduction

The concept for a People’s Museum for Prince emerged as a curatorial response to two years immersion in the aftermath of Prince’s death, as I observed the public mourning for Prince, and the emergence of his afterlife in the flurry of legacy-building activities in his wake. Whilst I focus on Prince, and on museums for musicians in this specific case, the model of the People’s Museum has application to any artist beloved by their audience.

This work interweaves my twin practices of curatorial practice and arts management. The project began with observing the public mourning for Prince, online and in his home town of Minneapolis, and recognizing it as an important demonstration of the deep impact of an artist on the lives of many. As a curator, I began to ask questions about how the contents of this mourning might be framed, not only to honour the artist, but as a way to express how profoundly artists matter in our lives. Could there be a way to translate the essence of the spontaneous memorials into a successful exhibition format? Could this uncollated, uncollected archive of testimonials exploding across the internet in the hours, days and months after Prince’s death, be in fact collected and re-presented so that others could witness the cumulative effect? What would be the effect and benefit of such a collation? I began to reflect on the importance of an artist’s audience as a usually untapped, unseen source of significant expertise and experience, and noted how rarely the spotlight is on the audience.

As I studied the public mourning over a period of two years, I also closely observed the chaotic emergence of what could be termed Prince’s ‘afterlife’, that is, the world of Prince-related activities in the wake of his death. I observed the formal, institutional responses to Prince’s death, and the beginnings of the formation of his legacy. As an arts manager, I was particularly attentive to the emerging discrepancy between how the public mourned Prince and how he was being officially commemorated. This was particularly evident in the process of transforming Paisley Park, Prince’s home and studio complex, into a museum. I found a stark contrast between the spontaneous public mourning – a diverse chorus of full-bodied, unrestrained, spiritual and profane testimonies of love, loss and transformation – and the lonely space of Paisley Park Museum filled with professional artifacts, with barely a personal object on view, and a highly regulated management of fee-paying visitors.
As both curator and arts manager, I was motivated to translate this study of the public mourning and emergence of Prince’s afterlife into an institutional form that could capture and reflect the great love people felt for Prince and the many ways he had shaped or even transformed their lives. Drawing inspiration from divergent critical art and curatorial practices, especially those engaged with critiquing the institutions of art and experimenting with new institutional forms, my response to the problems raised took form as a model for an alternative museum that honours the personal impact of an artist on his audience. The museum creates a space that bears witness to and explores how an artist can shape our lives and dwell within us. The artist’s audience is positioned at the generative centre of the museum.

As I developed the museum concept, I also studied the contemporary curatorial practices of the recent flood of museum-based music exhibitions, to assess how musicians are being represented within the museum setting more generally, and in particular how curators shape a visitor’s experience. Further, I was interested in how they address the artist’s audience.

The People’s Museum for Prince is thus a curatorial response to the public mourning of Prince, motivated by a lack of representation of the vital role of the audience in the emerging legacy-building institutions. It seeks to transform the essence of the testimonials and the other creative expressions enacted in the wake of his death into the centre of the museum experience. The museum starts with the premise that the audience is a vital source of expertise about the artist, and through the gathering of many voices, expressed from the highly subjective, multi-focal lens of the audience, a new, publicly drawn portrait of the artist can emerge.

Who was Prince? / Research Question

The current work is not intended to be a hagiography of the life of Prince Rogers Nelson (June 7, 1958 – April 21, 2016); rather it considers the question of how the mourning for an artist and the aftermath of their death can inform an alternative model for an artist’s museum that inverts the curatorial lens from artist to audience in order to honour the deep impact of the artist on the lives of many.
Nonetheless, a brief biography of Prince helps provide context for one of the best-known music artists of modern times. Prince Rogers Nelson was born to musical parents in Minneapolis in 1958. A guitar virtuoso, multi-instrumentalist, electrifying performer and prolific songwriter, Prince released over 900 songs, including 39 studio albums and more than ten others under different names. In addition, he wrote many songs for other artists. He starred in the film Purple Rain, and directed three feature films. He won eight Grammy awards, six American Music Awards, a Golden Globe Award and an Academy Award. He was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in 2004. Prince sold over one hundred million records and remains one of the best-selling artists of all time.6

Prince was the main creator of the Minneapolis Sound, which combines funk, synth-pop and new wave sounds. He secured a major studio contract at the age of nineteen, and in an early sign of his prodigious musical talent, he produced and played every instrument on his first album. In 1984, the album and film Purple Rain, based loosely on his biography, was released, which elevated him to international mega-stardom. He was one of the three biggest pop stars of the 1980s, together with Madonna and Michael Jackson. Instead of playing to public expectations, he continued to experiment with his music, and by the 1990s had settled to a more comfortable fame. As he said in the 1991 song “My Name is Prince”: “My name is Prince, I don't want to be king/Cause I've seen the top and it's just a dream.”

Famously prolific, he was known to write a song a day in many periods of his life, including on tours, making far more music than he could release. His storehouse of unreleased material known as the Vault, reportedly contains hundreds of unreleased songs and professional

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6 This biography is drawn largely from publicly-known facts about Prince, and can be referenced at Princevault, the most comprehensive source of Prince knowledge online, which is updated continually www.princevault.org, and Wikipedia. There are no authorized Prince biographies, though Prince is reported to have written the first fifty pages of his autobiography starting with his childhood in the last months of his life which will be published in the future. For Prince biographies, Matt Thorne’s Prince: The Man and His Music (Chicago: Bolden, 2016) is an outstanding work in a crowded field, as is Dave Hill’s Prince: A Pop Life (New York, Harmony, 1989). See also Alex Hahn and Laura Tiebert, The Rise of Prince 1958-1988 (Mad Cat Press, 2017), and the memoirs of Prince’s first wife Mayte Garcia, The Most Beautiful: My Life with Prince (New York:Hachette, 2017) and of Sheila E, his long time musical collaborator and former fiancé, The Beat of my Own Drum. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014). An earlier publication, Per Nilsen, Dance Music Sex Romance: Prince: the first decade. (Firefly, 1999. Revised edition SAF publishing, 2003.) remains a classic Prince reference text.
recordings of many live performances. A workaholic, and exceptionally proficient musician, he had equally high expectations of his musical colleagues. He was a strong supporter of female musicians, working with them in his bands and mentoring many young talents. Intense and introverted (except when performing), he was a sex symbol to many, and was associated romantically with scores of beautiful and famous women over the years.

The main themes in his music are sexuality and spirituality. “Love is God, God is Love” is a famous refrain from his 1988 song “Anna Stesia”, which he would have audiences chant at his concerts. He was known for his highly sexualised lyrics, performances and outfits in the early 1980s, and explored and pushed boundaries of gender and sexuality in his lyrics. Following the trauma of his son’s death at one week old in 1996, and the subsequent breakdown of his first marriage, Prince became a Jehovah’s Witness. This prompted him to modify his more salacious lyrics and focus more on love than sex.

Prince was a strong advocate of artist’s rights, and protested the exploitative music industry norms, insisting artists should be paid fairly for and own their work. In one ongoing protest against the constrictions of his recording deal with Warners, he changed his name from Prince to an unpronounceable symbol, in a protest against Warner Brothers record company owning his name and his musical output. Later, in another protest against his recording contract, he appeared regularly in public with the word Slave emblazoned in black eyeliner on his cheek.

Through his life, he was a silent philanthropist, and a quiet supporter of African American issues, providing financial support for families and organizations in need. In later years he became more publicly political, such as when presenting an award at the Grammys in 2015, said only: “Like books and black lives, albums still matter” which was reported by many as the highlight of the night. The same year, he wrote the song “Baltimore” and held a spontaneous Rally 4 Peace concert in Baltimore in the wake of the riots following the death in police custody of African American teenager Freddie Gray. After Prince’s death, his extensive anonymous philanthropy was revealed, such as his donation of one million dollars to The Harlem Children’s Zone and support for Yes We Code, which offers skills training to help minorities gain entry to technology jobs. His donation to the historic Louisville Free Library, the first library run by and for the African American Community in the state, established in 1905, helped save the library from closure.
Prince lived in Minneapolis, Minnesota, all his life, other than brief stays in other cities. In 1987, he built and opened Paisley Park, a studio complex in the suburb of Chanhassen, which was equipped with three professional recording studios, a massive sound stage for filming and performances, a music club room, offices, kitchens, private living quarters, and guest accommodation. In its peak years, he also had a fully staffed wardrobe workshop, which made all his clothing. After separating from his second wife in 2005, he razed his house and moved into Paisley Park, living in the top floor apartment. In 2015 he performed his Piano & A Microphone Tour in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States, a one-man show where he performed for up to four hours per night to rapturous audiences and universally positive critical reviews, and often played a late night aftershow at a small club, as had been his tradition throughout his career. His last performance was in Atlanta, Georgia on April 14, 2016. He died from an accidental fentanyl overdose at Paisley Park on April 21, 2016. (See Figure 1A).
Research Methods and Process

As curator, I was interested in the challenge of how to translate the essence of tribute and testimony expressed through public mourning for an artist into a form that exists beyond the context of its spontaneous expression. I sought out modes of curatorial expression that would enable me to communicate effectively the diverse ways in which a single artist can impact on, and dwell deep in, the lives of many. I sought a means to frame and make visible the audience’s experience of the artist’s presence in their lives. It was essential also to find a mode of expression that enabled the gathering of many different voices and expressions, and to represent this collectively. As an arts manager, I studied the many complex forces at work in the aftermath of Prince’s death, seeking to understand the disparity between how Prince was mourned and how he was formally memorialised. Then, I searched for creative and practical solutions to the problems raised.

My approach to the field research was direct and immediate: from the day of his death, I conducted close readings in real time of the unfolding, as-yet-uncollected archive of materials being published about Prince, online and offline, formally across all media platforms, and informally throughout social media. My intention was to cover all aspects of his life, death and afterlife, including his estate, and the extremely fraught legal and business matters pertaining to it, in order to establish an understanding of his world and his impact. I tracked Prince media coverage almost daily in the year following his death and, through this and deeper readings into his biography, I mapped out narratives of his life, death and the emergence of his afterlife. I searched key Prince discussion sites online regularly and looked deep into the YouTube comments under the masses of suddenly-surfacing Prince videos to find the more hidden, anonymous tributes. I listened to many Prince-related podcasts and interviews with Prince associates, and watched hundreds of hours of video of and about Prince to better understand why he mattered so deeply to so many people.

I conducted extensive fieldwork in Minneapolis, Prince’s home town, across the 22-month period August 2016 – May 2018, researching, visiting and photographing all key sites in Prince’s life, attending many and varied forms of tribute events, and making regular visits to
Paisley Park. During this time and through these activities, I was immersed in Prince’s afterlife, and had the opportunity to meet hundreds, and observe thousands, of Prince fans and others impacted by his life and work. I attended the opening day of Paisley Park Museum on October 6, 2016, and visited on five other occasions, including the special event “Celebration 2017” held in April 2017, to explore the different tour formats and programming, and to observe how the museum evolved over its first year of business. Paisley Park was transformed into a museum by Graceland Holdings, which operates Graceland, Elvis Presley’s house museum and entertainment complex. As such, I took a research trip to Memphis in September 2017 to better understand this phenomenally successful museum for a musician, which welcomes almost 600,000 visitors per year and since opening in 1982 has

7 In this period, I visited and photographed over forty Prince-related properties, including all those he owned, such as the sites of his former houses, his warehouse, commercial and residential properties, as well as other places he lived or used to frequent. I visited famous sites associated with Prince such as the Electric Fetus record store, which he supported and visited as recently as a few days before he died and was the subject of his final tweet; the Capri Theatre in North Minneapolis, where he gave his first performance in 1979; the Schmitt Music Mural, where he posed for now iconic photos taken by Robert Whitman in 1977; and also lesser known places, such Lake Ann and the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum, which he used to visit regularly, even though he is not usually associated with nature. I also visited locations where Purple Rain was filmed, including the Purple Rain house (as it is now known) in South Minneapolis, and the small town of Henderson, where the iconic “Take Me with U” autumnal motorbike ride and (part of) the Lake Minnetonka scenes were filmed. I regularly attended the Park Avenue church where Prince used to play basketball after school and was a member of the youth group. This church has multiple Prince connections: he celebrated his first marriage here in 1996, attended the funeral of his (possibly adopted) half-brother Duane here in 2011, and in August 2016, this was the location for his family’s small, private, memorial service for Prince.

8 During this period, I attended several Prince dance parties at First Avenue, the iconic nightclub associated with Prince and key location for his film Purple Rain, and also attended more than twenty concerts by Prince-related musicians at venues across town, including the Dakota Jazz Club and Bunkers, venues which Prince attended often and played at several times. I viewed Robert Whitman exhibition of photos of Prince from 1977 at the Mpls Photo Center in August 2017. Whitman has subsequently published a limited edition art book, *Prince Pre Fame* (London: NJG, 2017). I attended several Prince book launches, including two separate events for Jim Walsh’s *The Gold Experience: Following Prince in the ’90s* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), at the Amsterdam Bar, St Paul and the Chanhassen Public Library, and Andrea Swensson’s gala book-launch-as-concert event at the Fitzgerald Theatre for *Got to be Something Here: The Rise of the Minneapolis Sound* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

9 A separate business entity PP Management was set up as a subsidiary of Graceland Holdings to operate Paisley Park museum.
“handled in excess of 20 million visitors”. I wanted to understand the model that Paisley Park Museum was being shaped upon, to help make sense of the choices being made by the museum’s management.

I was on the organizing committee for the *Prince From Minneapolis* Symposium held at the University of Minnesota in April 2018 and met many academics and others involved in the world of Prince through this process. I attended the opening of the symposium-linked *Prince from Minneapolis* exhibition at the Weisman Museum, which featured photography of Prince from his early career, and a small collection of artworks. I attended a lecture by, and took a tour of Prince’s childhood homes with, historian and Prince researcher Kristen Zschomler in April 2017 and September 2017 respectively.


11 Prince from Minneapolis (symposium), http://www.princefrommpls.org. To date, this is the third major international academic conference on Prince. The first, Black Star Rising & The Purple Reign, held at Yale University in January 2017, took a twin focus on David Bowie and Prince: https://schwarzman.yale.edu/events/blackstar-rising-purple-reign-celebrating-legacies-david-bowie-and-prince. The second, Purple Reign, was held at the University of Salford in May 2017. https://blogs.salford.ac.uk/prince-conference/. Prince studies is a nascent academic field and these conferences displayed a wide, disparate range of interests and approaches. Overall, the presenters were established academics across many different disciplines, who also happen to be Prince fans. Conference participants included geographers, musicologists, cultural theorists, anthropologists, psychologists, theologians, and historians. Publications from all three conferences are forthcoming.

Museum of American Soul Music and Sun Studios, both in Memphis, and Motown Museum in Detroit.

I elected not to conduct formal interviews for this research project, as my purpose was to observe and interpret the massive public response to Prince’s death as a way to understand how and why he mattered so deeply to people. It was important to the project to study what was publicly expressed and to observe behaviour without interference.

Terminology

The use of the term “The People’s Museum” refers to the spirit of democracy that lies at the heart of this project which looks to the artist’s audience as an important source of expertise and source material for the museum itself. Inspired by the concept of Howard Zinn’s “A People’s History of the United States”, the term “The People’s Museum” captures the idea of the artist’s public as the generative force of the museum, and as a multi-voiced author of the artist’s story, defying the usual museum conventions of a more neutral, objective voice of curatorial authority.

In this dissertation, my use of the term ‘artist’ includes musicians. I use the term ‘artist’s museum’ instead of ‘musician’s museum’, for the artist’s museum has a long, established history with which I seek to align this project. By using the term ‘artist’s museum’, I invoke the tradition of artist’s homes that have been converted to museums, in which the artist’s domestic and work spaces are prepared and staged for a visiting public. This type of


14 According to scholar Linda Young, the first artist’s house museum in this tradition was Sir John Soane’s house in London, which he established in 1833 and is still operating. Instead of being merely the space for displaying his significant art collection, Soane was deliberate in presenting it as a domestic space for living, and when he made his gift of the museum to the nation, he specified it must maintain the same layout and furnishings. It is still in operation today, as Sir John Soane’s Museum, https://www.soane.org. As Linda Young notes, “a house may contain a museum but also constitute it.” Linda Young “Is There a Museum in the House?: Historic Houses as a Species of Museum,” Museum Management and Curatorship, 22:1 (2007), https://doi.org/10.1080/09647770701264952, 59. This double function adds to the aura of the artist’s museum,
museum evokes a sense of drawing closer to the artist by visiting their domestic and professional sphere. Whilst in this current project I have no access to the artist’s home or belongings as materials for a museum, I am interested in the emotional power of the artist’s museum. My research tests whether it’s possible to create an alternative museum for an artist that carries its own emotional resonance, when, in place of the artist’s authentic possessions and living space, we are presented instead with the lived experience and artifacts of the many who loved or whose lives were touched by him.

I use the term ‘artist’s audience’ instead of fan wherever possible, except when writing specifically about fans. An artist’s audience is a much greater field than those who define themselves as fans. For example, in the case of Prince, many more people than his self-described fans were impacted by his life and work, as was shown in the way he was mourned. The term ‘fan’ is problematic, yet unavoidable, in terms of this research. Originally an abbreviation of ‘fanatic’, it still carries a negative charge. Whilst Fan Studies as an academic discipline has made significant advances in validating the status of a fan in the past twenty years, it is nevertheless a limiting classification. Media studies scholar Henry Jenkins, who has made significant contributions to the elevation the status of fans within the academic sphere, proposes a definition:

Fans might be broadly defined as individuals who maintain a passionate connection to popular media, assert their identity through their engagement with and mastery over its contents, and experience social affiliation around shared tastes and preferences.15

This definition is too limited to describe the scope of my work for, whilst many people I encountered in my research could well fit this description, there are many people whose lives are deeply impacted by an artist who do not confirm their identity through the artist nor have any social affiliations through their love of the artist. Yet they are an audience, the artist’s audience, for they have listened to the artist’s music over time, whether casually or with as the visitor can experience a frisson of heightened attentiveness, knowing this is the very place the artist lived, as well as enjoying the artistic and domestic artifacts presented as an engaging presentation of museum objects in themselves.

deeper interest, and perhaps have been aware also of news of the artist himself across a number of years. Further, it is a curious phenomenon that upon the artist’s death, many people who enjoy the artist’s music or have followed the artist with interest over the years, yet have never needed to define themselves as a fan or belonging of a community of people who appreciate this particular artist, suddenly find themselves needed to testify about the artist’s transformative impact on their life. In the wake of Prince’s death, this was a commonly expressed sentiment, with many people posting online about their bewilderment at being so upset, and not realising until that moment how deeply Prince had been a part of their life. Many people joined Prince communities online at this time, to be in the company of like-minded people and to reflect and mourn together, when people in their immediate circles might question why they were mourning someone they never met and were even never known to be a fan of. I use the term ‘audience’ to include all these people, not only the more ardent or obsessive self-defined fans. One specific example from a participant in The People’s Museum for Prince helps to illustrate the idea of an artist’s audience being more than his fans. On the day of Prince’s death, Theo Langasen of Minneapolis wrote a moving testimony about how Prince has shaped his outlook as a young African American man and has been a strong influence on his life. Yet it is his mother Rebecca, not Theo, who identifies as a Prince fan:

She raised me on Prince, because Prince spoke to her the way few could. 
So as I weep writing this, I weep tears of the sincerest gratitude. 
Thank you Prince, for teaching me how to speak the language of my mother’s soul.

16 Minneapolis-based ethnomusicologist Suzanne Wint is conducting an ethnographic study of the public mourning for Prince and noted the phenomenon of what she terms the ‘posthumous Prince fan’. She remarked on the significant number of people she has encountered in Minneapolis who were not Prince fans before his death, but upon his passing suddenly found themselves mourning deeply. Many of these people felt compelled to catch up on his music and the details of his life they had missed, and to cross the country, or even the world, to make a pilgrimage to Minneapolis to make sense of his impact on their lives. Personal email correspondence with Suzanne Wint, December 1, 2018.

Project Structure

This research comprises a dissertation and an exhibition, *The People’s Museum for Prince*, which is the first iteration of a new model for an artist’s museum. The exhibition is presented for examination by documentation. The documentation is provided in the form of images throughout chapter four and in the appendix, which comprises pdfs from the project website. The dissertation is structured in four chapters and provides a context and rationale for the creative project.

The first chapter begins with a brief biography of Prince Rogers Nelson, then studies the public mourning for Prince and understands the expressions of mourning to be a type of spontaneous uncurated, unconstituted public museum. The mourning took place online and in various locations around the world, with its epicentre at Paisley Park. The public mourning revealed how deeply an artist can impact on the lives of others, and also made evident a tension between spontaneous memorial practices and more formal acts of commemoration (such as the museumification of an artist’s house). This chapter takes form as a case study of the Paisley Park fence as the central site of mourning, tracing its brief but vital life cycle, and the commodifying forces that caused its premature shut-down.

The second chapter considers the artist’s museum as a memorial institution, taking Paisley Park Museum as a case study. It traces the transformation of Paisley Park from Prince’s home and studio into a museum, and its public reception within the context of Graceland, which managed its museumification. This chapter focuses on the formal curatorial and management decisions made in response to the challenges of creating a memorial museum so soon after an artist’s death, and the resulting impact on the visitor experience.

The third chapter examines contemporary curatorial practices within the newly popular genre of art museum exhibitions on musicians. It considers the representation of the musician in the museum and the key factors that shape the visitor’s experience, through a study of recent museum exhibitions on David Bowie, Pink Floyd, Leonard Cohen, Björk, and Michael Jackson.

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18 The People’s Museum for Prince, [www.peoplesmuseumforprince.org](http://www.peoplesmuseumforprince.org).
The final chapter introduces The People’s Museum for Prince as an alternative model for a museum that places the artist’s audience at the centre, as source of knowledge and expertise. It begins with an introduction to the curatorial contexts for this project, then studies the first manifestation of the museum as a test of the new model.

Scope of this Dissertation

While the diverse topics of artist’s museums, curatorial practice, public mourning and museums for musicians could encompass a vast range of approaches, I have limited the focus of this dissertation to subjects that are directly relevant to my creative practice in this research project. That is, I have focused on topics related to creating a new model for an artist’s museum. My work as curator and arts manager is inherently practice-based and responsive to its context. Throughout the dissertation I pay attention to both curatorial and institutional concerns relating to the exhibitions and museums I study, for they are always intertwined, and both are essential components in the realization of any project.

Whilst I take Prince as my case study, and as such I have consulted extensive sources on Prince for background context, the research focus is on the curatorial aspects of creating a new museum, rather than on topics associated directly with Prince, such as his music, biography, or the popular themes of sexuality, religion, gender, race and place. Because of the curatorial focus of this work, there is limited overlap between my work and that of other people writing on Prince at this time.\textsuperscript{19} However, as a curator of the People’s Museum for

\textsuperscript{19} Whilst many books have been published on Prince, including over 40 books since his death, with numerous memoirs from his associates, there are few critical and scholarly works available. Prince Studies is still emergent; there is currently a lot of activity, with the three recent Prince conferences preparing publications and several academic writers working on new books. In 2017, \textit{The Journal of African American Studies} dedicated an entire issue to Prince, edited by Judson L. Jeffries and Shannon M. Cochran (Volume 21, Issue 3, September 2017). \textit{Got To Be Something Here: the Rise of the Minneapolis Sound} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018) by Minneapolis music writer Andrea Swensson is a valuable contribution to understanding Prince’s musical background. Beginning in 1958, the year of Prince’s birth, it traces the musical roots of the Minneapolis Sound, of which Prince was the key figure, and provides a rich social and historical context for his work. Jim Walsh has edited a collection of his writings on Prince, first published in local newspapers in the 1990s, which is a period in Prince’s career that is little studied: \textit{The Gold Experience: Following Prince in the ’90s}
Prince, the work of many Prince researchers is of interest in terms of future collaborations. The work being done by ethnomusicologist Suzanne Wint on the public mourning for Prince is relevant as an allied practice, as is that of historian Kristen Zschomler, who is working on Prince’s childhood houses and undertaking a significant project to register key Prince properties on the National Register of Historic Places.

Whilst there is important work being done in fan studies, especially in advancing understanding of how fandom and fan communities work, I have not found the field to be pertinent to this current research. My focus is on the curatorial question of making a new museum, rather than on studying and analysing the behaviours and practices of an artist’s fans or audience. Although I am working with fans and the artist’s audience and their stories, objects and creative expressions, I am working with them as contributors and collaborators in the project of making a new type of museum. In another sense, one could say I am using the artist’s audience’s lived experiences as the very material of the museum itself.

There are many important subjects that deserve focus which lie outside the scope of my current project, such as the role of race in the public mourning for Prince and his subsequent

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Touré has written one of the few cultural critiques of Prince, in the provocative *I Would Die 4 U: Why Prince Became an Icon* (New York: Free Press, 2013), which focuses on the major Prince themes of god, sexuality and race and argues Prince embodies the zeitgeist of Generation X. Sarah Niblock and Stan Hawkins’ *Prince: The Making of a Pop Phenomenon* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2011) also offers a cultural critique of Prince as icon.

20 Suzanne Wint is working on an ethnography of public mourning for Prince, and has presented her work at several conferences and published a couple of papers, including: “‘Tears Go Here’: Commemorating the Minneapolis Prince and the International Prince” which will be included in the Salford University Purple Reign publication. Kristen Zschomler’s work on Prince is not yet published, however some of her work is available online through her collaboration with Kirsten Delegard and Michael Lansing on “Purple Places: A Digital History Tour of Prince’s Minneapolis,” Augsburg University, http://digitours.augsburg.edu/tours/show/3. accessed December 8, 2018. The project offers an interactive self-guided tour of Prince’s properties in Minnesota. Zschomler presents her Prince research at conferences and in guided tours of Prince’s properties. She freely shares with any interested parties her formal, meticulously researched 72-page application-“National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property form”- to the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2018, for multiple Prince properties to be registered formally as historic places, as part of a longer term preservation effort. Also see note 109.
memorialization. My focus is limited to the curatorial and management aspects of the museum and the concepts of an audience-centred practice, which stem from my observations of the public mourning for Prince that took place online and on location in Minneapolis. I have endeavoured in my research to be thoughtful in my aims to realise a diverse, culturally inclusive project. This work acknowledges the complexities of being a white Australian woman working on a museum dedicated to an African American male artist who lived and worked in a largely white, racially segregated city within the complex and difficult race relations of the USA in the period 1958–2016.
Chapter One: Mourning Prince: The Paisley Park Fence as Spontaneous Museum

When my daughter turned to me as we sat in the mall parking lot and said, “Mom, I think Prince died”, I made her google it because I didn’t believe her. I felt like a bomb had gone off in the car. We went into the mall and I was walking around in disbelief, watching people and wondering what the hell was going on, is this real? Prince is dead. I can’t believe it.

– changirl

Mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one’s country, liberty, an ideal, and so on.

– Sigmund Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia”

For death takes from us not only some particular life within the world, some moment that belongs to us, but, each time, without limit, someone through whom the world, and first of all our own world, will have opened up in a both finite and infinite – mortally infinite – way.


This chapter begins with an introduction to the public mourning for Prince, then focuses on the fence at Paisley Park as the central site of the initially spontaneous, then ritualised, public mourning for Prince. It follows the efforts to control, clear and eventually commodify the site by Graceland Holdings, acting as agents for the Prince estate. It looks at the key role of the Chanhassen City Council in this process, which acted at various times and in various ways, in support of both fans and of the estate, and sometimes blocked both in the interests of its own citizens. It traces the brief but important life cycle of the fence at Paisley Park as a contested site in order to demonstrate the growing discrepancy between the needs of mourning fans to pay tribute, and those of the Prince estate to monetise his assets. In addition, the Chanhassen City Council was a vital player in the unfolding events, balancing local residents’ concerns

that the enterprises emerging in the wake of Prince’s death would forever change Chanhassen with the prospects of a tourist boom that could significantly benefit the local economy. The time period for the fence’s life as spontaneous museum was the six months from Prince’s death on April 21, 2016 to October 6, 2016, the intended date of opening of the new Paisley Park Museum.

A symbol of the public’s spontaneous worldwide mourning for Prince, which took place largely online, the fence can be seen as the first, entirely uncurated, manifestation of a people’s museum for Prince. As a demonstrative gathering point for a disparate audience actively testifying about the power of one artist impacting many lives, and as a place that became sacred because of this ritual function, it provided direct motivation for The People’s Museum for Prince. The fact of its erasure, then commodification, by other competing forces, provided further motivation to seek out a new institutional form to hold a space for these and other memorial activities initiated by the public.

1. Mourning Prince

Today, the world lost a creative icon. Few artists have influenced the sound and trajectory of popular music more distinctly, or touched quite so many people with their talent. He was a virtuoso instrumentalist, a brilliant bandleader, and an electrifying performer.

– President Barack Obama, Twitter, April 21, 2016

Upon Prince’s death in April 2016, there was an outpouring of public testimonies, online and offline, about how he shaped and transformed many individual lives. His death took over major news channels for an entire day and it was cover-page news across the world. The scale and range of responses revealed the depth of his influence. The intensely personal nature of many of the testaments was a striking manifestation of the impact of an artist in our society. Beyond these testimonies, digital and physical, there were actions: spontaneous tribute dance parties across the world, city bridges and buildings lit up purple that night and in following days, and many more formal, organized events in the days and year to follow with Minneapolis, Prince’s home town, the epicentre of the tribute-celebrations. Purple Rain, Prince’s iconic film from 1984, was screened in 72 cinemas across the US within two days of his death and soon expanded to 212 screens within days.
People begin flocking to Minneapolis immediately after Prince’s death. Paisley Park, his home and studio, became the central site of mourning for many months. The Paisley Park fence became a spontaneous shrine, covered with tributes from visitors from across the world. A visit to Paisley Park and other key Prince sites in Minneapolis was quickly established as one of the most powerful modes for paying tribute to Prince, transforming Minneapolis into a site of pilgrimage for many visitors.

**Mourning online**

In the other’s grief I hear and see my own, for mortality makes brothers and sisters of us all.24

As in the wake of the death of every significant artist today, a primary, vital space for mourning Prince was online. In the first hours and days, there was a flood of short, heartfelt testimonies in the shock of the news of his death, the gathering of which created a powerful sense of what anthropologist Victor Turner calls *communitas*, connecting millions of people around the world. “I can’t fuckin’ breathe right now,” wrote Questlove, musician and celebrity Prince superfan, as the news broke across the internet.25

Within hours of Prince’s death, another form of paying tribute emerged powerfully: the sharing of images, video and audio links of favourite Prince performances. This was extraordinary, as Prince had been vigilant about copyright and kept the internet almost free of his image and his work.26 One article in the music criticism magazine *Pitchfork* bemoaned


25 His comment invoked Eric Garner’s cry for help as he was choked to death by police in New York in 2014. “I can’t breathe” has been taken up as a rallying cry of the Black Lives Matter movement which campaigns against systematic racism and violence against the African American Community of which Prince was a supporter. Thus in just six words, Questlove expressed his own personal pain and gestured to the magnitude of the loss of Prince to the African American community.

26 Famously, he had previously sued fans and he employed people to keep the internet clear of his work. His vigilance bordered on paranoia, but he insisted throughout his career that artists must be paid for their work. His commitment to this idea led him to change his name to a symbol at one point, in an attempt to escape a constrictive studio contract, and to free himself to create anew. He also pulled all his music from streaming services on the grounds they exploited artists with their low payments, finally signing on exclusively with streaming service TIDAL which is led by Jay-Z and artist-owned, and offers a fairer deal for all their artists.
this fact in its very title: “Mourning Prince Online in the Absence of Media”. Written the day after Prince’s death, it begins in a tone of grateful desperation:

I would like to formally thank whoever manages the NFL’s YouTube channel for helping me – and millions of other frustrated viewers – mourn Prince. In the wake of his shocking death yesterday, one of the rare videos of Prince is the NFL’s high-quality footage (with accompanying commentary) of the 2007 Super Bowl Halftime Show – aka the greatest Super Bowl Halftime Show there ever was, and ever will be. Similar regards go out to Radiohead, for fighting to keep Prince’s exquisite and rageful cover of “Creep” at Coachella 2008 on YouTube. I fear the internet may have gone mad without these few clips that have escaped Prince’s tireless copyright war.27

Suddenly his music and image began to flood the internet, with the uploading/sharing/release of over thirty years of performing concerts all around the world, most of it unseen other than by serious fans or anyone who attended the performance. It was a powerful resurrection: as he was mourned, he came into full view, and people began to realise just how much was lost in his death. Suddenly amongst his other accomplishments, he was being acclaimed as one of the greatest guitarists of all time as people circulated and published articles studying his best performances. The New York Times published an oral history of Prince’s legendary Hall of Fame guitar performance to honour George Harrison. In the performance, Prince stands off to the far side of the stage in the dark, and throughout the first part of the song he is not even in shot. Right at the end of the song he delivers an extraordinary guitar solo, in the middle of which he leans back into the audience and keeps playing. At the end, he throws his guitar in the air, and it never falls back down. The author notes, “Prince, who essentially stood in the dark for most of the performance, burned the stage to the ground at the song’s end.”28 An apocryphal story circulated generously in the wake of Prince’s death was this exchange with Eric Clapton in the 1980s:

– How does it feel to be the world’s best guitarist?

The sharing of his work was painful and revelatory, a labour of mourning, a way to offer up gifts to the community of mourners and share the gifts of Prince, hitherto kept out of mass circulation. Lewis Hyde, in his work on the concept of gift, writes that “The spirit of a gift is kept alive by its constant donation.” In the wake of Prince’s death, it seemed people were reluctant to stop this flow, for the mass posting and sharing with new revelations daily, continued for many months. Alongside this unexpected resurrection, in the weeks and months to follow, deeper, reflective essays on the artist and his impact rippled through social media and online platforms, while entire concerts kept magically appearing and circulating like sacred acts of remembrance. These combined practices may have contributed to the long, raw period of mourning online that stretched out for many months, compared to the more usual flare of celebrity mourning which ripples for a few days then dissipates.

Public memorials for artists

Major musical icons are often mourned with grand ceremonial gestures. Michael Jackson’s private family funeral was directly followed by a public memorial at Staples Center stadium, Los Angeles, twelve days after he died. “Michael Jackson’s body, in a golden coffin, took centre stage as an estimated one billion people watched the biggest celebrity send-off of all time last night.”

1.6 million people applied in a lottery for 11,000 tickets to attend. Tickets were free. The funeral was broadcast on TV and in cinemas around the world, and watched by an estimated 31 million people in the US. Leading musicians performed, and several eulogies were delivered. The gestures were large, emotional, unrestrained:

An avowed fan and artist heavily influenced by Jackson, Usher provided an emotional take on “Gone Too Soon,” passionately singing the 1993 Jackson single with gritty abandon as he laid his hand on the singer’s casket and walked mournfully across the sea of flowers at the foot of the stage while a montage of vintage pictures of a smiling Jackson played behind him. Breaking down in tears at the end, the singer removed his sunglasses, was embraced by the entire Jackson family and made his way to family matriarch Katherine, kneeling down on one knee to kiss her.\(^{33}\)

Detroit recently went into a full week of grand, ceremonious mourning rituals for Aretha Franklin, the most important female soul singer of the 1960s and a major proponent of civil rights, who died on August 16, 2018.

From August 28–29, the body of civil rights champion, fashion icon, daughter of Detroit, and undisputed Queen of Soul Aretha Franklin will rest in the rotunda of the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History. The viewing is open to the public, and museum doors will open promptly at 9 am.\(^{34}\)

Aretha Franklin’s body lay in repose in Detroit’s Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History for two days and then again, the next day, in the New Bethel Baptist church. All were welcome. Aretha had magnificent outfit changes each day and it was much remarked how beautiful her high-heel shoes looked and how her legs were neatly crossed at the ankle. A public memorial concert, *A People’s Tribute to the Queen*, followed, in Chene Park Amphitheatre in downtown Detroit. That week, the mayor of Detroit announced the park was to be renamed the Aretha Franklin Park. A private funeral followed the day after and was broadcast via livestream free to all, with many prominent African American musicians giving tribute performances. The city of Detroit turned its focus to welcome all for a solemn full week of mourning and celebrating Aretha, even down to small, vital details


such as promising not to enforce parking meters in the area on the days of the public viewings. A fan organized a spectacular tribute – calling on owners of pink cadillacs to form a motorcade tribute, evoking Franklin’s famous song “Freeway of Love”. One hundred participants joined in, driving from across the country to meet in Detroit.

And then there was Prince. There was no public ceremony or memorial following his death, only many spontaneous dance parties, in Minneapolis and across the world. There was no formal eulogy, no communion of mourners, though the parties might be viewed as such. Unlike Jackson and Franklin, Prince had no close, immediate family members to step up in the void of his death. He had no spouse, no children, no living parents, and he had not been close to his siblings who would soon be named his heirs.

Prince died on Thursday and his body was cremated on Friday, little more than 24 hours after he was found dead in the elevator at his Paisley Park home and studio. A funeral planned for Saturday was downgraded to a memorial gathering at Paisley Park, amidst the chaos following his death. On that day, as the two previous days, fans gathered outside Paisley Park to leave tributes and pay respects. In an impromptu gesture, Prince’s family and friends came out to the fence to greet fans following the ceremony. They offered pizza, gave out purple giftboxes, shared hugs, and accepted condolences.

Local fan Heidi Vader was at Paisley Park on the day Prince died and then visited daily to tend to the spontaneous shrine growing at the fence. She said, “I was really in a pretty deep funk for those many months, as were so many of us … There wasn’t any kind of service for the public to mourn his passing.”

Six months later, a high-priced, shambolic tribute concert was finally realized, held at the Xcel Stadium in St Paul, after many date changes, line-up changes and mis-steps. Morris Hayes, Prince’s former band leader, was called in last minute as music director and heroically pulled it together. Two years later, it is still the focus of several major legal disputes within the complex estate proceedings.

“I’ll celebrate the day I die”

– Prince, interviewed by Mel B, at Paisley Park, 1998

The mourning in the aftermath of Prince’s death took the form of invoking his presence directly, celebrating his gifts and embracing his spirit of living in the moment. This was an apposite response that echoed the spirit of songs like “1999”, where the lyrics encourage everyone to dance their life away in the face of the apocalypse. The need to mourn Prince through celebration was quickly linked back to Prince himself:

Prince’s final and perhaps his most vital, beguiling stunt, the one that will resonate the furthest, is how he transformed the way we grieve in public. This is territory previously unknown. We are celebrating at the funeral. Then we lost Prince ... once the gut punch was over, the party began in full swing.

The mourning process for Prince was not enacted through one central symbolic, ceremonial occasion, with formal eulogizing and the gathering of a community of mourners and the comfort this communion often brings. Instead, it was dispersed across time and space, in hundreds of events across the world, and millions of views of the sudden sharing of literally thousands of previously unseen Prince performances online. It was as if Prince himself had exploded into the universe and was suddenly everywhere at once: present in the dance parties, the film screenings, the millions listening to and watching him, at home, in the bar, on the phone, blasting in the car, on headphones. He was everywhere online in thousands of small and large testimonials, as the with purple heart and the purple umbrella-in-the-rain emojis (not invented, but repurposed, for Prince), poured out across Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. 💔☔ Even the bells of Minneapolis City Hall played Prince songs the Sunday after he died.

The mourning was also concentrated geographically in two key Prince-related sites in Minneapolis: First Avenue nightclub and Paisley Park. Located in downtown Minneapolis, First Avenue is a legendary music venue, which become famous outside of Minneapolis in large part due to its central role in Prince’s phenomenally successful film *Purple Rain*. Prince has a long history and close connection with the club. He performed there thirteen times from 1981 to 2007, and regularly frequented the club in the 1980s, sometimes bringing freshly pressed records direct to the DJ to test out how the audience responded. He continued to go there to see live bands right across his career. Thus, when he died, it was First Avenue that became the central place of gathering in the city on the day and night of Prince’s death, and for weeks after. The venue’s exterior walls are covered with 531 silver stars, each naming past performers at the club. Prince’s star became a spontaneous shrine – flowers, candles and gifts quickly amassed. A ritual was soon established: people approached to make an offering, and then reached out to touch his star (See Figure 2a). First Avenue was also the site of a spontaneous street party that the venue and local radio station The Current, a strong supporter of Prince’s music in his final decade, hastily organized on the day of his death, gaining emergency permits and gathering musicians to perform within hours. An estimated 10,000 people attended the street party, which closed downtown and lasted into early morning (See Figure 2b.). First Avenue general manager Nate Kranz noted, “The icing on the cake was people who came in at 5 a.m. Friday to dance for a while before going to work”. Tribute dance parties continued for two more nights. Minneapolis Mayor Betsy Hodges commented,

Prince loved Minneapolis, and Minneapolis will always love Prince. The scene outside of First Avenue was as electric as Prince’s music, which seemed to flow out

38 For a comprehensive history of First Avenue, see Chris Riemenschneider’s excellent *First Avenue: Minnesota’s Mainroom* (St Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press 2017). For a visual history featuring iconic photographs of the music scene in Minneapolis, see Daniel Corrigan and Danny Sigelman, *Heyday: 35 Years of Music in Minneapolis* (St Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press 2017). Photographer Daniel Corrigan has been associated with First Avenue from 1981 to the present, and took some classic performance images of Prince which are included in this book.


of every open car window downtown. Minneapolis cried and laughed and sang together, and we will continue to do so for a long time.  

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41 Kim Palmer, “Reaction: Twin Cities is ground zero as tributes to Prince grow.” *Star Tribune* (Minneapolis),
Andrea Swensson, a Minneapolis-based music writer who writes extensively on Prince, was deeply attuned to the atmosphere of acute public mourning all around her. She wrote about being at First Avenue on the night of his death:

> When Prince died, I felt it from the ground floor: in the welled-up eyes of my friends and colleagues who had just lost their hometown hero; outside of Paisley Park as we all crumpled; and in the bending, swaying mass of thousands of people who couldn’t seem to get close enough to First Avenue after the sun went down that night. It was like all we wanted was to climb up inside that building, to touch his star, to reach out and feel him as he drifted away.42

Weeks later, Prince’s star at First Avenue turned gold overnight. Several months later, artist Peyton Russell, who once did some work for Prince, finally admitted to doing it, an hours-long operation starting at 3 a.m. with a couple of helpers, using not just gold-coloured paint, but 24-carat gold leaf requiring careful preparation. The management liked it, and it has stayed gold ever since, a single gold star on a black wall in a sea of silver stars. (See Figure 2c.).

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Along with almost all other weekly publications in late April, The New Yorker made their cover page a Prince tribute. Multiple staff writers offered tributes, including Sarah Larson, who noted, on the loss of David Bowie and Prince within three months of each other: “I’m getting better at mourning brilliant musicians whom I love: it involves listening to their music, very loud, and dancing. Let’s go crazy.”

Yet a thousand dance parties – celebratory, cathartic, communal – can only perform some aspects of the work of mourning. Grief, sadness, personal reflection must take place elsewhere. This place was Paisley Park.

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2. The Paisley Park Fence

Space that has been seized upon by the imagination cannot remain indifferent space subject to the measures and estimates of the surveyor.

– Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*\(^{44}\)

The black chain link fence that surrounded Prince’s home was a mecca and an altar. Within two days it was already dense, thick with families’ shiny purple balloons, potted violets laid at its base, signs made of purple construction paper carrying messages of love and grief, all with a subtext of shock. And so much Bisquick. Inside, a memorial was rumored to be taking place. Outside, it was quiet. People paced and observed, took portraits, laughed, shared their sightings – at the airport, downtown, at the Fetus – and cried.

– Andrew Flanagan, *NPR*\(^{45}\)

Figure 3. Mourners at Paisley Park, April 21, 2016 Photo by Nate Ryan.


As early as an hour after Prince’s body was discovered on April 21, 2016, Paisley Park became a site of mourning. People began arriving, by car, by bike, and very soon after, by plane. They lingered, standing around or sitting on the grass across the road. Many people came alone, crying. (see Figure 3). The media started arriving, setting up tents and chairs and cameras on tripods. An artist set up his easel and started painting oil portraits of Prince, placing them as offerings on the fence when he was done. Later in the day, there was rain. Then a rainbow appeared over Paisley Park (See Figure 4).

Figure 4. Rainbow over Paisley Park, April 21, 2016. Photo by Carlos Gonzales.

Magnetized by the news of his death, thousands of people came to visit in the following days and months. “People are just drawn here,” said Julie Swenson, whom the Washington Post interviewed on site, “We’re all dumbfounded, bewildered, mystified.” The north-west stretches of the fence were publicly accessible from the street and soon became heavy with objects left by mourners: flowers, balloons and handwritten notes in the first days, then


42
letters, photos, album covers, a guitar, handmade artworks, photos, candles, soft toys, purple underwear, Prince’s favourite cereal, pancake mix, and purple locks. (see Figure 5)

![Figure 5. Paisley Park spontaneous memorial. Photo by Scott Olson](image)

The cars were piled on top of each other and bleeding onto the curb of the highway as they inched west and north towards the Lake Ann Park parking lot, each blasting their favourite [word missing] from the windows; families walked down the trail and under the tunnel beneath the highway they’d just come from, holding the strings of the purple balloons floating just behind them; families walking back to their cars had no balloons and little expression.47

Paisley Park is located in Chanhassen, a prosperous suburb of 22,000 people, forty kilometres south-west of downtown Minneapolis. When Prince built Paisley Park in 1987, there was little development in the area. Even now its main neighbours are General Mills, the City’s Public Works building, and a few childcare centres. On the day of his death, the Sheriff’s office responded to arriving crowds and blocked off Audubon Road (see Figure 6). A few days later, with crowds still high, they balanced local traffic and memorial needs:

Fans of Prince began flocking to Paisley Park after the announcement of his death and are using the site as a memorial. Deputies placed barricades along the east curb line of

47 Flanagan, “In the Wake”. 
Audubon Road late Sunday evening to provide a safe viewing area for the memorial. Northbound vehicle traffic is only allowed to turn east onto Highway 5 as the barricades between the east and westbound lanes on Highway 5 will remain in place for the next few days.”^48

Due to the constant, heavy attendance of media and visitors, it was ten days before the city reopened the road to regular traffic.

Figure 6. Fans visit Paisley Park, April 22, 2016. Photo by Scott Olson.

A spontaneous shrine

Every sacred space implies a hierophany, an irruption of the sacred that results in detaching a territory from the surrounding cosmic milieu and making it qualitatively different.

Around the perimeter of Paisley Park (the building itself and grounds remained closed for six months following his death), visitors could come and go as they pleased, night and day, and take quiet time to read the other tributes, place their own, walk around and witness the scale of the messages and gifts left, engage with other people from the Prince community, all the while being able to view through the openings in the chain-link fence the building and grounds Prince lived, worked and died. Folklorist Jack Santino writes extensively on spontaneous public memorials, which he designates as shrines,

… because these are more than memorials. They are places of communion between the dead and the living ... They are sites of pilgrimage ... They commemorate and memorialize, but they do far more than that. They invite participation even from strangers. They are “open” to the public.  

Santino emphasises the spiritual and social function of spontaneous shrines, evoking the spirit of *communitas* that these public memorials can generate:

The shrines insert and insist upon the presence of absent people. They display death in the heart of social life. These are not graves awaiting occasional visitors and sanctioned decoration. Instead of a family visiting a grave, the “grave” comes to the “family” – that is, the public. All of us. We are all family, mutually connected and interdependent. 

Similarly at Paisley Park, Local fans, mostly women, tended the site, clearing dead flowers, deflated balloons, cleaning up trash. Some also did some editing, taking down lingerie or other items they considered disrespectful. Local residents posted notes, tributes, gifts, banners
on behalf who could not make it there in person. Fans around the world would email messages or mail items to locals who would post them on the fence and take a photo for them. Long-time Paisley Park attendee Heidi Vader was at Paisley Park on the day Prince died and then visited daily to tend to the spontaneous shrine growing at the fence. She posted tributes for others regularly, including an intricately decorated banner created by fans in Japan. A young fan, Kristin Kokkila, stated she posted over 400 messages on the fence on behalf of those who could not visit (See Figure 7). She would receive these via her Facebook page “Purple Elegance”, print them out, place in protective plastic sleeves, and make designs on the fence with them.

Figure 7. Notes to Prince from around the world by Kristin Kokkila, August 2018. Photo by author.

Speaking at a Chanhassen City Council Special Meeting in October 2016, local resident Anna Bader explained how she understood the significance memorial practices that these local fans performed for strangers:

I have people from all over the world who have asked me to put things at the fence and I go and I do it and I film it for them and it’s very moving for them. It helps them

52 Heidi Vader offered “Love Symbol Relay Flag,” the Japanese banner, to The People’s Museum for Prince for display in its first exhibition in Minneapolis, 2018.
grieve. ... I mean people really feel a very spiritual connection to Paisley Park and to Prince and to have something like an artwork that they created for Prince left there, even if it’s for one day, is very special to them.\textsuperscript{53}

Santino suggests the practice of participating in the creation of spontaneous shrines is emotionally powerful because it helps link the mourner with the deceased, as well as displaying this relationship to the public:

Spontaneous shrines both construct the relationship between the deceased and those who leave notes and memorabilia, and present that relationship to visitors. ... The gifts have personal meaning, and this is indicative of—that is, they index—the nature of the relationship, real or (as with Princess Diana and other celebrities) imagined. Imagined, but no less felt.\textsuperscript{54}

People continued to visit the site for weeks and months after Prince’s death, paying their respects by bringing gifts, reading the notes of others, quietly being present at Prince’s house, the site of his death. Inherent in any act of pilgrimage or in this case, a simple visit to Paisley Park to witness the spontaneous shrine, is a belief, no matter how faint, or vestigial, that specific places on earth carry some imprint of the lives that have passed over them. Art historian Harriet F. Senie notes:

There is pervasive evidence that we believe the ground we walk on holds the content of its history – offers us direct access to what has occurred there. Mourners at spontaneous memorials often act as if the bodies were buried there.\textsuperscript{55}

Yet it was not only upon Prince’s death that Paisley Park became a quasi-sacred site. For over thirty years Paisley Park has exerted a kind of spiritual magnetism on fans.\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{54} Santino, “Performative Commemoratives,” 13.
\textsuperscript{56} Anthropologist James J. Preston defines spiritual magnetism as “the power of a pilgrimage shrine to attract devotees. It is not an intrinsic “holy” quality of mysterious origins that radiates objectively from a place of
Park – imagined as a utopian wonderland, “the place in your heart”, according to the song named after it – is a prominent part of Prince mythology and dwells deep in fans’ imagination. Playing concerts all over the world, Prince would often invite the audience to come and visit him there. Thus for fans, to visit Paisley Park in real life would certainly promise an approach towards a closer connection to Prince. “Coming here is my destiny,” said Tsu Yoshi, 58, visiting from Tokyo several months after Prince’s death, who was “at the end of a 6,000-mile pilgrimage that he has dreamt of his entire adult life.”

In the absence of a public funeral, or any other formal public memorials for Prince, the visit to Paisley Park became the first and primary public ritual for mourning and paying respects to Prince.

Teach us how to mourn: the role of the media

From the day of Prince’s death, when all media attention focused upon him, the spontaneous shrine at the Paisley Park fence came to symbolise the public mourning for Prince. The intense media coverage soon transformed the site into an attraction and necessary site of pilgrimage. In this sense, the media broadcast to the public instructions on how to mourn Prince and invited everyone to join this ritual. In a similar way, writing on the mourning for Princess Diana, sociologist Tony Walter notes the role of the media in amplifying what was a spontaneous event, the mass laying of flower tributes outside Kensington Palace:

People identified with Diana in all kinds of ways and acted upon their sense of loss by creating public rituals, which were really their own. It was a performance that was appropriated, encouraged, and sustained by the mass media, but that cannot take away from the tangible, real-time, flower-smelling reality of the performance.

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Writing on the public response to the death of famous Hungarian singer Jimmy Zámbó, István Povedák noted that the media helped to institutionalize the mourning acts, noting which were broadcast constantly, and began to shape public mourning:

The media in this case can be regarded as a mediator through which the processes among the fans are given publicity and therefore strengthen the similar feelings of others. In fact, the media events after the death of Jimmy Zámbó serve as an illustration of how the events broadcast by the mass media became ‘folklorized.’

The continuous media coverage of the spontaneous shrine at Paisley Park helped to heighten the significance of this site, broadcasting to a large public that this was now a site made sacred in the wake of his death, perhaps sanctified not only by the fact of his death here, but equally by these very acts of shrine-making and mass ritual visits. The media coverage helped to further mythologize Paisley Park and confirm it as a valid destination for secular pilgrimage.

Media scholar Jennifer Bickerdike, who studies fandom as what she considers to be a form of secular religion, writes on visiting grunge rockstar Kurt Cobain’s house and the park next to it in Seattle. She notes that small park itself is unremarkable, yet its status has been magnified and transformed though social media attention:

Every fan blog about Nirvana or Cobain now mentions the park, yet in real life, the minute piece of land feels forgotten and unused, contrasting with the online tributes paid to the one-point-eight acres. Fans first started leaving memorial messages and commemorative tokens to Cobain soon after his death. It is rumoured that he used to come and sit on the benches. The proximity of the park to Cobain’s former home (and place of death) combined with a lack of a traditional grave have elevated the small, green area from a simple outdoor space to a sacred place.


The media’s participation in the mythologization of Paisley Park certainly contributed to the months-long practice of people making visits from all over the US and the world. For almost six months, the fence at Paisley Park functioned as a shrine. However, with the impending transformation of Paisley Park into a museum, changes were underway.

**Signs of “rectification”**

The fence tributes were taken down twice. In May 2016, just a month after Prince’s death, volunteers worked under the supervision of local historical societies who had been contacted by Bremer Trust, Prince’s estate representative, to carefully take down and preserve the items left. Wendy Petersen Biorn, executive director of the Carver County Historical Society said at the time, “In order to protect these artifacts, and this element of Prince’s legacy in Minnesota, it is important to begin the preservation process now.”61 Fans were generally understanding and felt this was a respectful act.

Clearing the fence caused no interruption to its function as shrine. Immediately after being stripped bare, new tributes were left, and the fence was quickly filled again with exuberant gifts, notes of gratitude and mourning, and a constant supply of lovingly crafted fan-made artwork (see Figures 8a-b). Local journalist Sharyn Jackson reported on the scene at the fence in July 2016:

The visitors walked slowly along the fence surrounding the artist’s home and recording studio and examined the impromptu museum of tributes left by previous mourners: large canvas paintings, unlit prayer candles, bouquets of flowers now dried and yellowed, deflated star-shaped balloons, matted lavender teddy bears, a single purple roller skate, empty candy wrappers tied around the metal links like Mylar confetti.62


The personal memorial visits to the fence continued steadily in the months following Prince’s death, with mourners still coming from all over the country and the world, to pay their respects.

The crowds may have thinned and the offerings left along the fence may have withered, but people continue to come here to grieve. “It’s very quiet,” said Robin
Gunter, who was visiting from North Carolina with her daughter Denise. “It does seem kind of like church.”

Writing on the memorialization of American sites of violence and tragedy, geographer Kenneth E. Foote introduces four designations for the status of these sites: sanctification, designation, rectification, and obliteration. For the first months following Prince’s death, the Paisley Park fence was certainly understood by the public as sanctified, even if it did not result in a formal monument or designation.

Sanctification occurs when events are seen to hold some lasting positive meaning that people wish to remember – a lesson in heroism or perhaps a sacrifice for community. A memorial or monument is the result.

However, the fence was about to undergo a process of desacralization, or “rectification”, which Foote describes as “removing the signs of violence and tragedy and returning a site to use, implying no lasting positive or negative meaning.” In this case, the signs were not of violence or tragedy, but expressions of love and grief, yet they were removed in an attempt to restore the fence to its ordinary state, as a regular perimeter fence.

**Paisley Park Museum and the Chanhassen City Council**

Outside the Prince universe, anxiety had been building in the local community of Chanhassen about the present memorial activities and the plans for Paisley Park to become a museum. The sudden deluge of visitors to Chanhassen following Prince’s death was a shock to locals. Prince was regarded as a quiet, private, respectful neighbour. A local resident commented on an article detailing the bumpy process of getting the museum approved:

“The purpose of the museum at Paisley Park is to preserve the legacy of an international celebrity”. It’s ironic, I live just a few miles from Paisley and have driven by it almost daily for decades. When in life and sharing his creativity with the

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63 Sharyn Jackson, “Prince fans still making their pilgrimage to Paisley Park.”


world he was an unpretentious member of this community. Moving through Chanhassen almost without a person noticing. In death this whole thing has become a tangle that is completely contrary to the private life he lived.66

Paisley Park was far out of range of any residential areas by design, so Prince was free to make his music and receive guests. He had a no-alcohol rule at Paisley Park, which allowed him to skip having to apply for a permit for a public event anytime he wanted to throw a spontaneous party and no doubt this minimized problems of public disorder in the neighbourhood. After he died, the future of Paisley Park was unclear, for he left no will and no one was, at least officially, privy to his plans.

The constant stream of people coming to pay their respects presented a problem for locals, unsettled by the sudden influx of visitors and their non-compliant behaviours. Complaints of traffic delays caused by people slowing down to view Paisley Park and the fence tributes, and pedestrians crossing busy roads outside of the lights in an area there were always very little to no foot traffic (and a footpath on only one side of the road) were registered at the City Council meetings. By the time it was announced, in August 2016, that Graceland Holdings would transform Paisley Park into museum, there were many strong expressions of concern.

In September 2016, Graceland Holdings LLC, owner of the newly formed company PP Management LLC, which was set up to run Paisley Park Museum, was preparing to launch the new museum to the paying public. In the *Paisley Park Museum Business Plan*, Graceland affirms its community commitment and expertise:

> Graceland Holdings is highly committed to this project and making it success for the Estate of Prince Rogers Nelson as well as the local and broader Twin Cities community. Toward that end Graceland is providing the initial funds for capital improvement and initial operating costs of the museum.67


The business plan also states they expect 1500 to 2000 guests per day, which certainly caused the city to look carefully at their traffic and parking plan. Within the very short time they had to prepare and launch the museum and, anticipating their rezoning application to the City Council, Graceland Holdings took some bold actions to minimize fears that Paisley Park as Museum would disrupt Chanhassen.

**Effacement of the fence**

Graceland Holdings issued a press release announcing their intention to clear the fence of tributes, and immediately stripped everything from it. They also posted large banners on the Paisley Park lawn in clear view of all visitors to curtail the tribute practice, stating: “Help us be a good neighbor. Please don’t hang or place anything on or near the fence.” (see Figure 9). It was reported that the contents of the fence were carefully archived, though this was contested by people who witnessed the process.

Fan Kristin Kokkila presented at the Special Chanhassen City Council meeting soon after, on October 3, 2016. She tearfully showed tribute items that she had collected from the mud around the fence after Paisley Park had stripped it, questioning the supposedly careful archiving process. (see Figure 10). Referring the salvaged items, she says:

> I mean there are things from people from around the world in here. From Australia to Berlin to San Francisco to Texas. Everywhere. I’ve tried to find the owners for them to either give them back. I don’t know what to do with them if they’re not, you know I mean this one it clearly has clips on it. That just doesn’t fall off the fence in the wind so I just, I don’t know what happened. I mean they put their hearts into this”

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Meanwhile, at the same city council meeting, convened to discuss Paisley Park’s application to rezone so it could open as a museum, the museum and the city were working together to find common ground. Council staff member Kate Aanenson commented: “We know that now that they’ve requested things not be put on the fence there’s less walk-up traffic and that’s
what we’re just monitoring. Both parties are. We both want to make it a good neighbor.”

This sentiment, that the presence of mourners, with their material and performative expressions, make bad neighbours, or perhaps even could contribute to making a bad neighborhood, has also been noted in the case of other spontaneous shrines. Writing on public memorials, Erika Doss observes:

Some have criticized temporary memorials and spontaneous shrines for being ‘too much’ for the public sphere, with their overwrought displays seemingly straining the boundaries between good taste and vulgarity.”

Later, when the museum opened, Graceland Managing Partner Joel Weinshanker would make a plea to the local community to give the Prince fans a chance. Yet, at this crucial moment of negotiation, the presence of mourning fans was clearly an obstacle to be overcome. Weinshanker, doing his best to impress the councillors and address their concerns of the pedestrian traffic around Paisley Park, had earlier publicly proposed that the fence be replaced by a solid wall if fans continued to post tributes (See Figure 11.) The wall would, of course, block the view of the building. It was hoped this would prevent people slowing down their cars as they passed, and ideally would eliminate all pedestrian traffic.

This heavy-handed announcement caused an uproar amongst the fan community and was seen as something Prince would never do. Weinshanker explained at the council meeting that by removing the tribute items and keeping the fence clear, fans would have no need to visit the fence itself, as they would instead pay to visit the museum and other sites.

If you’re coming from hundreds and hundreds of miles away, or thousands of miles away which people are, we have very affordable tickets so someone coming from Chicago and traveling 6 or 7 hours to get here, going to the concert, doing other things, those are the people that are coming in, they don’t need to walk around.

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Thus, the museum made clear it considered there would no longer be a need for a tribute fence. Foote writes on effacement and different modes of signification for memorial sites:

> Whereas sanctification leads to the permanent marking of a site and its consecration to a cause, martyr, or hero, effacement demands that all evidence of an event be removed and that consecration never take place.\(^{72}\)

By the following city council meeting on October 10, 2016, when it was in doubt if the council would in fact issue a permit to the museum, signs of strain were showing. The council minutes reveal that amongst a long list of items being negotiated, the City and the museum management had become desperate to come up with a plan to prevent pedestrians accessing the fence:

> It is staff’s recommendation and the operator of the Museum to discourage pedestrian walking along the east side of Audubon Road in front of Paisley Park. In order to deter pedestrian and traffic conflicts along the east side Audubon Road staff is recommending that low vegetative landscaping (junipers, roses and barberry) be placed between the curb and the fence line.\(^{73}\)

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\(^{72}\) Foote, *Shadowed Ground*, 25.

This suggestion later became an ordinance from the City, which stipulated the landscaping must be done to maintain their rezoning status. So far, these weaponised plants have not yet appeared, so their power to ward off fans is untested. Instead, piles of woodchips poured unevenly from time to time make walking unpleasant.

Effectively, this second stripping of the fence, together with the threat to construct an opaque wall should anything further be posted, closed down the freely accessible, reflective, communal site of pilgrimage and its creative and personal expressions. At the Special City Council meeting on October 3, a couple of local fans protested this action. Resident Kim Huston noted:

> It is unfair, it is an unfair expectation to state that people cannot come if they aren’t attending the tours and that only paying customers have the right to leave gifts or even see the building. We need to come up with an agreement for a place to leave gifts. Lastly I would just like to say that April 21st was less than 6 months ago. Fans from all over the world are still grieving having not been able to properly pay their respects so we created our own with fans bringing gifts and using their artistic abilities to share with Prince the way they feel and you know leaving gifts for him.74

The city councillors heard this and other protests voiced that night, and suggested to Graceland representatives that something should be done to allow mourners space for their memorial. From the actions that followed, the new museum management clearly took a different view. It was confident visitors would be content to redirect their mourning activities at the fence to a different form: perhaps online as offered on the ‘virtual fence’ subpage on the Official Paisley Park Facebook page, but mainly by paying the admission fee to visit the mythic interiors of Paisley Park itself. As Amanda Petrusich in the New Yorker comments, this is actually not uncommon in America:

> Most of Prince’s fans didn’t know him personally, yet his work was essential to their lives. When he died, where could they mourn? An ungenerous reading might be that Americans are so ill equipped to manage death that we are forced to mediate it through tourism. We soothe our pain by buying a plane ticket, booking a hotel room,

74 “Special Meeting, Chanhassen City Council.” Verbatim Minutes, Chanhassen City Council, October 3, 2016.
buying a key chain: expressing gratitude via a series of payments. It works, to an extent.75

Paisley Park, newly in the hands of Graceland’s management, was being formed into a museum along the lines of Elvis’ famous attraction that combines functions of shrine and tourist destination. Yet, as local resident Kim Huston pointed out at the City meeting, which was attended by lead representatives for the Prince estate and Graceland Holdings:

   It is also important to note that Graceland was built 5 years after Elvis passed away and those fans had several years and a lot more time to mourn the way they wanted to and not be told that they can’t leave gifts in any certain area. Prince built Paisley Park with the intent of having visitors and not having walls to keep us out.76

Yet, as Weinshanker reveals in his comments and decisions, welcoming still-mourning Prince fans to the new museum was clearly not perceived as a problem. After all, Graceland places ongoing mourning for Elvis as a central attraction, even activity, for visitors and has a well-acknowledged mastery for combining the sacred and the profane. Erika Doss, writing on pilgrims at Graceland, notes:

   Simultaneously a shrine and a shopping mall, Graceland’s thirteen-acre complex resembles other pilgrimage sites where devotional practices, material culture, and commercialism are commonly mixed, from Lourdes to the Basilica of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico City.77

Paradoxically, though it actively shut down the tribute fence at Paisley Park, in Memphis Graceland maintains and encourages an active, participatory practice of welcoming the public to sign their personal tributes on the fence of Graceland Mansion, and even has marker pens distributed along the length of the wall. This is free and openly accessible to the public.

The new management of Paisley Park Museum was under both intense time and financial pressures to have the essential rezoning permit approved, which was so late applied for. As such, it is possible that removing the tribute fence was a gesture of goodwill on behalf of the museum management to appease the concerns of Chanhassen City Council as well as residents concerned about the impact of a Graceland-scale attraction opening in their neighbourhood. Weinshanker was keenly aware of local antagonism towards Prince fans, which he revealed in defensive remarks in a speech on the museum’s opening day: “There’s misconception about who Prince fans are. Once the public sees how peaceful and loving his fans are anyone who has any concerns, those concerns will go away.” It is easy to understand the removal of the tribute fence as a peace offering to locals and the city, promising a reduction in pedestrian presence (museum visitors would drive in or be bussed in from a local transit centre), and a reduction of what might be viewed in a wealthy suburb as visual noise around the site. Once efforts to fully efface the fence’s function as shrine were well in place, the memorialization and commodification of the tribute fence itself could begin.

**Paisley Park Museum and the appropriation of the fence**

Paisley Park Museum didn’t waste the opportunity to capitalize on public mourning for Prince and the affective power of the tribute fence. Having destroyed the original, the museum cannibalised its power, drawing on the folklore of the fence, and transmuting it into a replica of itself, that was then reproduced within the boundaries of the museum’s commercial sphere.

The museum’s first act of replacing the fence was to announce a virtual fence, a subsite of their Facebook page. The press release stated:

> What fans had initiated on their own after Prince’s passing this past April by bringing their artwork and tributes to the actual fence at Paisley Park is now being transformed into “The Fence,” a next generation, permanent, virtual fence, enabling all fans worldwide to participate and experience the creativity, originality and heartfelt

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devotion embodied in these works of art inspired by the life, legacy and music of Prince.\textsuperscript{79}

In this revised and limited understanding of the tribute fence, the original tribute fence was seen as only about artworks. By inference, the placement of actual objects on the real fence is framed here as a ‘past generation’ activity. The fence was now taking new shape as “The Fence”, an online gallery for “extraordinary art”, thus a very different concept to a spontaneous shrine that was a space for mourning and all kinds of contributions. This was met with lukewarm enthusiasm by fans as not only was it narrow in its focus, but it was hidden away as a subpage, thus largely out of the public eye, where only a very specific subset of dedicated Prince fans would seek it out. More promising was the museum’s statement that works from the fence would be displayed as part of the exhibits in Paisley Park itself:

In addition, a dedicated exhibit space at Paisley Park will feature a physical fence where some of the creative tributes left by fans will be displayed. Fans also have the option to send their artwork to the attention of the Paisley Park Archives for possible inclusion in the exhibit at a future date. Artwork in the exhibit space will be rotated over time to show the wide variety of unique and creative tributes.\textsuperscript{80}

When the museum opened, a tight selection of highly presentable items from the fence tributes formed a neatly arranged display on a side wall of the gift shop of the Paisley Park Museum (see Figure 12).


\textsuperscript{80} “Prince’s Paisley Park Launches New Social Media.” \textit{Business Wire}, October 5, 2016.
As promised, curators rotate the display from time to time, drawing from their large collection. Blogger Scott Woods visited the museum on the second day it opened and commented on the exhibit:

> Before you leave the interior of Paisley Park there is a section of preserved fence memorials … It is laid against a wall where the curators have kept some of the graft fans have left outside. I recognize some of the pieces. They picked good ones, but it’s far from representative. The fence was an enormous and beautiful thing that we all knew couldn’t last. At least someone recognized the value in displaying a sliver of it, since some of it just ended up in the mud.81

This faux fence as constructed by Paisley Park Museum had further iterations. In April 2017, on the first anniversary of Prince’s death, Paisley Park Museum held its first major four-day event, “Celebration 2017”, with a program of panel sessions and Prince-related live music. For this occasion, a freestanding section of chain link fence backed with purple cloth was

erected in the museum’s parking lot, a few metres from the building entrance. (see Figure 13). Named “Prince4Ever” tribute fence, it was a surreal, temporary installation. Some items from the original fence tribute were displayed, with plenty of space to allow for new contributions. People were encouraged to post tributes there, thus providing an opportunity for fans arriving from across the world to self-consciously re-enact or perform what was once a spontaneous ritual. In the first year, the museum also invited people without tickets to enter the Paisley Park grounds on two specific days in April.

Figure 13. Prince4Ever fence, Paisley Park carpark, April 2017. Photo by Gail George.

The main activity at the Prince4Ever fence was placing items and posing for photos. The atmosphere was markedly different from the original fence. Here there was a sense of tourists undertaking a famed ritual, which by now was part of the folklore around mourning Prince. Guards stood nearby and the entire set up was awkward, self-conscious. The items placed were now the opposite of spontaneous: polished artworks, professionally made signs, and group tributes, made with care and attention, and sometimes great expense. There was now a performative, competitive quality to the works. This replication of the fence, now isolated from its original context, stood in the carpark as largely a temporary holding frame before the
works would be taken inside Paisley Park, and preserved, and if deemed worthy, possibly shown again on the inside tribute wall. By the second anniversary of Prince’s death, the faux fence was put up again outside, for the month of April 2018, but access was now for Paisley Park ticket holders only.  

The fence in London: a travelling memorial site within a commercial exhibition

In October 2017, Paisley Park Museum presented its first travelling exhibition, My Name Is Prince, in the O2 Arena in London, which later moved to Amsterdam. The O2 arena is important in Prince history as he played an unprecedented 21-night residency there in 2007, performing to around 35,000 people in total over two months. A critic appraised the residency:

> Every night was completely different, with no setlist, no autocue, and no standardised costume changes. He conducted his band like an orchestra, and used code words to tell them how and what to play next. You couldn’t quite believe he would pull it off, but he did, in spectacular style.

Unlike Prince’s performances, the exhibition, held almost exactly ten years later, was unevenly received by fans or critics. Disappointed visitors posted online reviews across social media to complain. In London, visitor standards were set at a new high for exhibitions on musicians, due to the V&A’s recent ground-breaking exhibitions David Bowie Is and Their Mortal Remains (Pink Floyd), which opened first in London before travelling internationally. The Prince exhibition suffered by comparison. Neil McCormack, who had reviewed the Pink Floyd exhibition earlier that year, expressed the sentiments of many:

> This is an exhibition that ignores Prince’s religious conversion to Jehovah’s Witness, turns a blind eye to his love and sex life, blurs over his complicated family history and all but erases every musician he ever played with. All that is left to display are the artefacts of his brand. The V&A’s David Bowie Is and The Pink Floyd Exhibition: Their Mortal Remains exhibitions have showed what kind of creative synergy and

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82 To enter Paisley Park in April 2018, there were limited standard tours available, starting at $US46, including service fees. For the main April event, the four-day “Celebration”, ticket prices started at $549 plus fees.

enlightenment might be realised in an ambitiously and lovingly curated rock and roll exhibition. That is the kind of exhibition Prince deserves.\textsuperscript{84}

Fans were similarly disappointed by the presentation of the objects, and the lack of any interpretive materials and context:

It is definitely worth a visit, but it is also a little heart-breaking in some ways to see it done quite so badly. Hoping we’ll see these artifacts presented better in a future exhibition at Paisley or wherever. And for the love of Jehovah, can PP find someone decent to run the merchandise side of things?\textsuperscript{85}

Another visitor commented:

I didn’t expect it to be great or if the high standard like the Bowie exhibition at the V&A, but this really was much worse than I imagined. Such lack of insight into any Prince history. There was nothing giving the stories behind any of the objects (except the cloud bass). No interviews or talking heads, no costume designers talking, guitar techs, band mates or literally anyone who had ever worked with Prince giving any further information. At £27.50, and the 2 giftshops trying to fleece you on cheap unimaginative merchandise, and the badly pixelated videos, poorly cheaply printed signage, signage that was incorrect. Sure it’s nice to see his costumes and his guitars but they’re so badly displayed with zero context.\textsuperscript{86}

Yet, despite these disappointments, there was another, far more successful aspect to the experience. A representation of the tribute fence was part of the display. The exhibit showed items from the original fence, and allowed exhibition visitors to add their own tributes, which happened largely via spontaneous Post-It note tributes(see Figure 14).


\textsuperscript{86} Tbokris, “My name is Prince at the O2 exhibition – part 3,” \textit{prince.org}, January 5, 2018. prince.org/msg/2/450850.
Whilst far away from its original setting, because these exhibitions served the European fans who could not make it to Paisley Park, many visitors commented that they appreciated the fence: “The peoples [sic] tribute to Prince at the end was very touching and was lovely to read how Prince touched so many lives.”

Curator Angie Marchese, who is also Director of Archives at Graceland, emphasized the exhibition’s ritualistic function at the opening: “Visiting Paisley Park is a way of saying goodbye, finding closure,” she said in an interview for NME, “And this is a way of doing that for people who can’t make it there.” What is remarkable is that, despite its obvious artifice, so many visitors approached the fence as a memorial site rather than part of the exhibit. The

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self-consciousness of the visitors in this moment, when the exhibition shifts from commercial exhibition to memorial, moving focus from Prince to the visitor’s own connection to him, is clear in many comments.

I debated on taking something to add to the fence … deciding not to right up until the day before (as i didn’t want to get over emotional) at the last minute ipoored [sic] it out into an overly long note the day before I went – which I am glad I did now … The guy gave me so much joy over so many years (and many more to come I hope) so I thought it was the least I could do! I didn’t read any notes on the fence … but I sat quietly taking it in for a moment before adding my note to an already impressive collection!89

The intensely private, almost secret connection with Prince some visitors felt was expressed at the fence in this visitor’s action:

I found a spare piece of paper in my bag and composed a suitably personal eulogy; I found it very difficult to gather my thoughts, so it took a while! I just rolled it up and popped it in one of the holes in the ‘fence’. Some of the messages had fallen down, but I’m trusting the staff to gather them all up and store them appropriately. I found this one of the most intimate and touching aspects of the exhibition, and was glad of it.90

The presence of the fence was greeted by many fans as a genuine space of remembrance, in which to communicate with and pay their respects to Prince, despite the awkwardness of the setting:

I knew they had a memorial fence there so I put down my feelings on paper what he and his music had meant to me since being a teenage girl in 1986 and as stupid as it sounds leaving my memorial gave me a sense of peace. They may very well get thrown in the bin but I told him what I wanted to, this really does sound stupid and I


really am a well balanced person, honest! I’ll always be sad regarding the tragedy that was Prince’s passing but attending the exhibition helped and now I can enjoy the music again without getting upset and we all know he was always about the music.91

In her study of spontaneous memorial sites, Harriet F. Senie considers the practices surrounding the Vietnam Veteran’s Memorial in Washington DC, which has its own travelling walls that move throughout the US so people can leave their tributes. Senie notes that they replicate the sacred space of the original.

The ritual of leaving tributes occurs also at the five half-size replicas of the memorial known as the “traveling walls” that circulate around the country, functioning as its icon although they are smaller, flimsier, and never quite touch the ground. The space around the memorial (and its facsimiles) is treated as sacred, dedicated to remembrances of the Vietnam War. Visitors file by in silence.92

Despite the entirely constructed, non-spontaneous fact of its placement in a commercial context within the London exhibition, this representation of the Paisley Park fence was able to perform as a sacred space. In fact, it was the visitors that insisted upon it, by participating, not only reading what was displayed. Thus the space within the exhibit became a proxy site, an icon for Paisley Park, so visitors could pay their respects to this artist through offering notes and artwork, reading and admiring others, taking time to reflect.

Mircea Eliade’s classic work on sacred and profane space offers a way to understand how space becomes sacred, especially in his concept of the hierophany. The point is that the sacred is revealed in the perception of the beholder:

Man becomes aware of the sacred because it itself, shows itself, as something wholly different from the profane. To designate the act of manifestation of the sacred, we have proposed the term hierophany. It is a fitting term, because it does not imply

91 InThisBedIDream. “My Name is Prince – Official Exhibition – Amsterdam – March 8 – June 8, 2018.”
92 Senie, “Mourning in Protest,” 43.
further; it expresses no more than is implicit in its etymological content, i.e., that something sacred shows itself to us.\textsuperscript{93}

Eliade’s idea of the sacred helps to make sense of the visitor behaviour that shifted around the replica of the fence and immediately distinguished itself as a different space from the rest of the exhibition. For visitors to the exhibition who chose to approach and perceive the fence as sacred, it became so, and allowed them to perform rituals of remembrance appropriate to the individual. It is clearly troubling to see how easily this hierophanic dimension can be commodified, and how an industry can prey on the emotional vulnerabilities and strong passions of the fans towards their object. On the other hand, it appears as if the fans somehow transcended the context of the commercial exhibition, insisting that the very presence of Prince’s belongings gathered together in this space, the very invocation of a tribute exhibition to Prince, no matter how badly executed, called for them to bring their full authentic passion to the moment. The need to grieve overrules the less than ideal setting. In this sense, Paisley Park Museum acts as a practical conduit between the visitors and Prince, delivering this awkward yet real moment.

The Prince4Ever tribute fence travelled as part of the My Name is Prince exhibition to Amsterdam after London.\textsuperscript{94} Another iteration of the fence also appeared at an official Paisley Park concert “Prince: Live on the Big Screen” (a live band accompanied Prince on voice and video recordings) held at Target Stadium in downtown Minneapolis in April 2018. Perhaps the travelling Prince4Ever fence will continue as a feature of many significant official Paisley Park Museum events, as the management recognizes the emotional power of providing these contrived, yet real, memorial spaces. As long as the fans continue to participate and recognize these temporary fences as icons or at least echoes of the original site of mourning, there will be the potential for instances of sacred space for fans to experience their “imagined, but no less felt” connection with Prince.\textsuperscript{95} Whether in a car park, a downtown concert venue or an exhibition space next to the gift shop, perhaps the opportunity will extend for as long as Prince fans continue to need a space to mourn.\textsuperscript{96}


\textsuperscript{95} Santino, Spontaneous Shrines, 13.

\textsuperscript{96} Santino, Spontaneous Shrines, 12.
perhaps, judging by Graceland, where mourners still gather at Elvis’ grave more than forty years after his death, may be forever.

**Soul sanctuary: the quiet, continuous life of the other Paisley Park fence**

Whilst the original tribute fence has been effaced, outside of the main public view there is a section of the fence that has quietly and continuously maintained its function as shrine and sacred space since Prince’s death. It is story in which the City of Chanhassen plays a vital role.

Writing on the city’s role in enabling and controlling the spontaneous memorials that appeared everywhere throughout New York City following the 9/11 terrorist attack, Steve Zeitlin notes that other than two public squares that were cleared, “city agencies and landlords allowed New Yorkers to express their sorrow. They allowed the city to become a memorial garden on their property.”

In October 2016, when the tributes had just been stripped from the fence, in the highly charged special meeting of the Chanhassen City Council held to discuss Paisley Park’s rezoning so it could open as a museum, Councilman McDonald acknowledged the fans who had given impassioned testaments that night. He addressed his comments directly to Graceland Holdings and the Prince estate representatives:

> Then we bring up the issue as these ladies did about the fence. I had never thought about this and I thank you for bringing it up but I think you do need to have something for those fans that want to come up and mourn Prince’s passing. They have done that now by putting up the signs. The artwork. Whatever. It’s individualized. That needs to be addressed. I see nothing in the plan to address that. Granted it’s not part of anything the City would do but if you want to be a good neighbor and Prince would have done this you would include it in your plan. How are you going to accommodate all these people?

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At the north-east corner of Paisley Park, the land slopes down towards a creek. The chain-link fence continues on beyond the boundary of Paisley Park and crosses into public property. There the land dips down towards the Riley Creek, with a feeling of being almost underneath Paisley Park, and half submerged beneath the busy highway that runs just overhead. Here, on public property, is an ongoing tribute fence. (See Figures 15a-b). It is out of the way, yet still connected by the land and the fence to Paisley Park. Anything posted is left untouched. It has never been officially proclaimed as a site, for obvious reasons, especially with all the publicly debated concerns for traffic and pedestrians, yet the mayor has posted notes on Facebook, and the City of Chanhassen has quietly supported fans’ needs to grieve and leave tributes by allowing this space. As before, it is tended by local fans.

Figure 15a. Fence tributes beside Riley Creek underpass. October 2016. Photos by the author.
In addition to the section of fence allowing tributes, the City has also allowed the adjacent spontaneous shrine of the Riley Creek Underpass, also public property, to continue. Known amongst fans as Graffiti Bridge, after one of Prince’s films, it crosses under the highway just next to the tribute fence, just beyond the Paisley Park. Since Prince’s death, this has been host to full-hearted, unfettered expressions of grief and love which are sprayed, chalked, inked, painted, collaged throughout its concrete arch. It is a quiet, sometimes sorrowful, cold place, a concrete tunnel underneath a busy highway, a perfect site for a moment of introspection and communion. Here, fans have left personal notes and images written and drawn directly on the walls and ground, and candles are often burning, even when the ground is frozen and covered with ice sheets (see Figures 16a-b). People often leave behind markers for others to use.
The city has only intervened once, in a positive, protective action: it fixed some damage to the tribute fence and removed some offensive graffiti in the underpass that were clear acts of vandalism. The mayor of Chanhassen, a champion of the museum, a warm friend to Prince fans, and a generous supporter of Prince-linked initiatives, posted proudly,
The fence has been lifted. The memories remain in place, I believe. The graffiti in front of the fence has been covered over. Thanks to the City of Chanhassen, Minnesota Government for repairing this damage. There remains a substantial amount of tributes in the three tunnels. The city has no plans to cover or erase those tributes. Hoping you all “Come back to Chanhassen” to enjoy our community and our welcoming hospitality.99

To this day, the tribute fence and the Riley Creek underpass have taken over as introspective, sacred sites where people can spend time, read and post tributes, meet other visitors, before, after or instead of a visit to Paisley Park Museum (See Figure 17). The only challenge is to know about it, which many visitors to Paisley Park, even keen fans, do not, for it is not officially designated. As pedestrian access around Paisley Park itself is discouraged and the museum staff do not officially speak about this site with visitors, unless you are in Prince fan groups on social media, have Prince-informed friends, or go searching on Prince message boards, it would be easy to visit Minnesota and miss this hidden site completely.

Figure 17. Riley Creek underpass and tribute fence, April 21, 2017. Photo by Steven Cohen.

Conclusion: the spontaneous museum and the messiness of mourning

Paisley Park’s spontaneous shrine at the perimeter fence was a grassroots response to Prince’s death by the public, who sought out a space to express their sorrow over his passing, to feel their own personal connection to Prince, and to express their gratitude for the ways in which he contributed to their lives. The outpouring of intimate personal letters and notes, the lovingly handmade gifts and art, the obscure objects with a hidden personal meaning, as well as the generic expressions of love and respect – flowers and balloons and purple locks – all came together as a massive exhibition of the impact of an artist on his audience. Whilst not a museum, for it lacked any institutional frame to designate it as such, it was yet in some sense, a first manifestation of a people’s museum for Prince. It even had self-appointed curators in the local fans who showed up regularly to tend the fence, to add and arrange new contributions from fans around the world, tidy up the area, and remove anything deemed offensive. Certainly the fence was more spontaneous shrine than proto-museum, but the gathering of these diverse, creative, heartfelt expressions offered a vision, and demonstrated an emotional power, that suggested there was value in creating an institutional frame to honour an artist via his audience.

The story of the evolution and demise of this spontaneous museum reveals a widening discrepancy between the way Prince was mourned by the public and more formal memorialization activities emerging in the wake of Prince’s death. It also reveals the messiness of mourning when conducted in a context of an affluent, largely white Minnesotan suburb some of whose citizens were upset at the mourners’ presence, and the traffic and pedestrian disturbances they brought, as well as the visual disturbance and potential loose debris from the fence tributes itself. Here, mourning itself became seen as a safety concern, requiring ordinances and weaponised plants to fend off the Prince fans. The solution advanced was to remove the public memorial, and require the mourners to become customers of the new museum. Whilst there is no need to artificially extend a public expression of mourning, the impact of removing a sacred, reflective space where people can mourn when it is still an active site has long-reaching effects.

The next chapter will consider how this unfinished work of mourning was carried into hastily established Paisley Park Museum, by both the museum’s management and its visitors,
creating a series of dissonant experiences that clashed with the memorial functions of the museum.
Chapter Two: The Artist’s Museum and the Museumification of Paisley Park Museum

This chapter begins by introducing the concept of the ‘artist’s museum’, then examines the creation of Paisley Park Museum, and the way it shaped the visitor experience. Created as a museum by the same company that manages Graceland, Paisley Park Museum is seen within the context of Elvis Presley’s Graceland. After tracing the museum’s complicated development from initial announcement to opening day in October 2016, this study focuses on how the museum shapes the visitor’s experience, and how it offers and resists various modes of visitor engagement with the museum’s subject. Three key factors that shape the visitor experience at Paisley Park Museum will be considered: the museum’s response to the challenge of being both museum and memorial site; the guided tour; and the staging of the museum.

The aim of this study is to elucidate how Prince was officially memorialized through a museum, in his own home and studio complex, on behalf of his estate, and to identify the gap between the museum’s formal, impersonal modes of commemoration and the more intimate, multi-dimensional ways his audience memorialised him.

1. The Artist’s Museum

Most, but not all, museums dedicated to a single artist, are located in the house or studio where that artist lived and worked. The Rodin Museum, located in Paris and Meudon, in the former studio–workshop and home of sculptor Auguste Rodin, is a famous example. Rodin donated all his works to the French state on the condition it would turn the studio into a museum dedicated to his work after his death. The painter Gustav Moreau’s museum, also in Paris, was both his house and studio, and features domestic restagings of the different rooms of his residence, filled with personal objects, photographs and his paintings, and presents his top floor studio still as a studio space, filled with the largest canvases from a collection of 6000 works. Planned by Moreau in his final years, the museum opened five years after his death.
In the United States, single-artist museums in the United States generally fall under the rubric of historic house museums. The Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh is a notable exception, with no biographical link to the museum’s building. The National Trust for Historical Preservation estimates there are over 15,000 historic house museums in the United States. The popularity of American historic house museums started with George Washington’s house, Mount Vernon, which in the 1850s was saved from demolition by the Mount Vernon Women’s Auxiliary and remains to this day the most visited historic estate in the United States, welcoming around one million visitors each year.100,101

Linda Young defines house museums as a particular species of museum. A house museum is “a dwelling, museumized and presented as a dwelling.”102 Within her typology of house museums, the ‘hero house’ – “someone important lived or passed through here” – best describes the artist’s museum.103 Young describes the prevalence of hero house museums in the United States as part of a nation’s drive to establish a legible history:

The need to establish a pantheon of American heroes via museumization suggests why heroes’ houses seem an earlier phenomenon in the US than in the UK, where kings and queens sufficiently fulfilled the role of representing the nation.104

Young notes that commemoration is a powerful motivation for the museumization of hero houses: “Houses become museums as monuments to heroes”, while the need to rescue a significant building from developers and destruction can also often be a motivating force to urge people to action.105


103 Linda Young, “Is There a Museum in The House?,” 63.

104 Linda Young, “Is There a Museum in The House?,” 73.

105 Linda Young, “Is There a Museum in The House?,” 59.
Museums for musicians

Single-artist museums for musicians are not as common as museums for artists or other notable citizens. However, there are some exceptional models such as Graceland in Memphis, which opened as a museum in 1982, and attracts over 650,000 visitors per year, and the Bob Marley Museum in Jamaica, established in 1987 in Marley’s home and studio by his wife six years after his death and one of Jamaica’s top tourist attractions. The Louis Armstrong House Museum, both a museum and an archive for researchers, in Queens, New York, was opened in 2003. Armstrong’s widow Lucille Wilson donated the house to the City of New York after his death for the purpose of it being turned into a museum. It is operated by Queens College. Yet music museums are not plentiful and, where they exist, they are most often dedicated to musical genres or record labels rather than individual artists, such as the Motown Museum in Detroit, Stax Museum of American Soul Music or Sun Studios, both in Memphis.106

In the past decade there has been strong interest in creating museums for famous African American musicians as monuments to these artists, and to ensure their commemoration as heroes within the nation’s history. Nina Simone’s childhood house in Tryon, North Carolina, John and Alice Coltrane’s home in Dix Hills, New York, and Aretha Franklin’s childhood home in Memphis, are three possible future museums each in different stages of progression, and highlight the challenges to establishing a museum for a musician.

In 2017, Nina Simone’s house was scheduled for sale and likely demolition. (see Figure 18) Four African American artists based in New York pooled funds and bought it, declaring their much-celebrated hope of creating a museum. A year later, the National Trust For Historic Preservation designated it a National Treasure, which opens up funds and professional support to guide preservation efforts. The trust also awarded funds through the African American Cultural Action Trust, which seeks to help redress the lack of representation of African American properties on its register. The National Trust reports that under two percent of national parks, monuments and sites honour women, and less than six percent honour African Americans.107 With this designation, the National Trust will also act on “plans to preserve the home in collaboration with the community of Tryon as well as the North

106 I visited these three museums in 2017 as part of my research into music museums.
Carolina African American Heritage Commission and the World Monuments Fund. The organizations will work together to conduct studies and develop a strategy for finding a new use for the house.\textsuperscript{108}

Similarly, John and Alice Coltrane’s house in Dix Hills, New York, was saved from demolition in 2006 when locals and worldwide fans mobilized. The City of Huntington was able to purchase the house from a developer and established a non-profit foundation for the house. It was listed on the eleven most endangered properties by the National Trust in 2011. In 2018, it followed on the same trajectory as the Simone house, receiving a grant from the African American Cultural Action Trust, which enables a project manager to provide preservation leadership. Later the same year it was also declared a National Treasure by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The National Trust will work with the Coltrane foundation to provide support and guidance to realise the vision of restoring the house, establishing a music program and a public park on its grounds.\textsuperscript{109}


\textsuperscript{109} In a similar preservation effort, though without the intent to create a museum, historian Kristen Zschomler is working to have four Prince-associated properties listed by the National Register of Historic Places, as first steps towards protecting these material aspects of Prince’s legacy. It is important to note her work is self-initiated; Zschomler is Prince fan who is using her professional expertise to undertake a voluntary preservation effort. Zschomler identified 44 properties associated with Prince in Minnesota, 41 of which date from pre-1987.
Upon Aretha Franklin’s death in 2018, locals in Memphis visited her childhood home and treated it as a shrine. Since then, community groups have strengthened their resolve to restore it and establish it as a museum dedicated to the artist. The plan is also to honour Franklin’s father, who was a famous pastor and activist in the civil rights movement. It is a small cottage, and the organizers see it on comparable scale as Elvis’ humble childhood home in Tupelo, Mississippi, which is visited by many fans as a counterpoint to the massive scale of Graceland. As with the other artist’s houses mentioned here, Franklin’s Memphis home was to be demolished in 2016, but a community group managed to save it, offering their plans to restore it. So far they are faced with one major problem: the blessing of the Franklin family. In the wake of the artist’s death this may be difficult to secure.110

On a far grander scale, exceeding even Graceland, Michael Jackson’s estate Neverland has been awaiting sale since 2015 and is an illustrious case of a failed museum opportunity (See Figure 19). Owned by the Jackson estate and a private equity firm, it was a Disneyland-like fantasy space, with fairground rides, ornate gardens and a palatial main house. Neverland might have been at least equal to Elvis’ Graceland estate as an attraction, given Jackson’s extraordinary popularity worldwide and his appeal to a younger generation than Elvis fans. Yet the child molestation court case in 2005 overshadowed Jackson’s late career, and he quit Neverland, his home and the site of the alleged incidents, soon after. In 2009, just months before his death, he was deeply in debt and contracted an auction company to clear out Neverland and sell all the contents. The inventory and preparations took three months, and

Half of these properties have been destroyed or extensively remodelled, and Zschomler has worked diligently to identify which of the remaining properties should be prioritised in preservation efforts, based on the length of Prince’s association, or the significance of what took place there in terms of Prince’s life and career. Zschomler acknowledges the long-term historical significance of Paisley Park, but crucially also draws attention to “the modest properties associated with Prince’s upbringing in Minneapolis’s Northside neighborhood [which] tie him to the area’s African American history and the musical heritage of the Twin Cities.” After extensive research and careful analysis, Zschomler concludes that Prince’s story is best told not through one single property, but as a journey through a series of properties, so that “his story and connection from the Northside to Paisley Park can be told.” Kristen Zschomler, “Application for “National Register of Historic Places,” Unpublished application to United States Department of the Interior National Park Service, 2018., PDF provided to author.

the 2000 items were presented by the auctioneer in a museum-like exhibition in Los Angeles before the sale. Tickets cost twenty dollars. Jackson changed his mind last minute and successfully stopped the sale but not before the world had seen the contents of his house on display. It is unclear whether the items are still held by his estate, or whether massive efforts to repurchase house items and memorabilia, or collaborations with major Jackson private collections, such as Lady Gaga’s, would need to be undertaken if a museum were to be attempted at this stage. Because of these logistical constraints, it seems unlikely a Jackson museum would ever be a restaging of the original Neverland. In 2014, Lady Gaga indicated plans to create a museum for Jackson based on her own significant collection of over 55 artifacts, possibly based in Gary, Indiana, Jackson’s home town. However she would need estate approval for this, which is unlikely to be forthcoming. In 2017, the manager for Jackson’s intellectual property registered the Neverland name for entertainment uses, which includes a possible museum; almost ten years after Jackson’s death, the status of a Jackson museum is still pending.

Figure 19. Neverland Ranch, September 2018, Photo by Carolyn Kaster, AP.

It is a long, expensive and complicated process to establish a museum for an artist and perhaps especially for an African American musician. Given this context, Paisley Park’s rapid museumification was truly an extraordinary feat.\textsuperscript{112} If not for Joel Weinshanker, Managing Partner of Graceland Holdings, reaching out to the family and estate shortly after Prince’s death with an offer, the building would likely now be sitting dormant, locked up, while the complex, expensive estate proceedings and resulting disputes between Prince’s siblings and his estate’s entertainment advisors and lawyers continue to unfold. Whatever the short- and long-term consequences of the decision to reopen Paisley Park as a museum run by Graceland less than six months after Prince’s death, it is notable that most house museums have a gap of at least five years between the artist’s death and the museum’s opening.

2. Paisley Park Museum

Paisley Park is an extraordinarily rich site for a museum, being the place where Prince spent most of the days of his life on earth. It was the epicentre for his creative output for almost thirty years, housing a studio complex and performance spaces. It was also his home for the last ten years of his life and the site of his death. Even if it were not transformed into a museum, it would forever be a site of pilgrimage for those wishing to pay their respects to Prince. It is in a sense a sacred site, made so by the intense association with Prince’s life, work, and death.

Miho Takayama, a fan who moved to Minneapolis from Japan in the 1990s to live close to Prince, fuses the identity of the site with Prince himself: “There was this aura around every single inch of Paisley Park ... this different ... air. It was him, that building.”\textsuperscript{113}

Before Paisley Park was a building, it was an idea. “Paisley Park” was the title of a famous Prince song, which appeared on the album \textit{Around the World in A Day}, a psychedelic album which was a complete change in style from \textit{Purple Rain} which immediately preceded it. The song describes a utopia whose location is “in your heart”. Released in 1985, a couple of years

before the Paisley Park building existed, the song sowed deep seeds of imagination in those who heard it.\footnote{114} For more than three decades, Prince’s audience has been dreaming of this heavenly psychedelic dreamscape imagined and then realized in a physical form by Prince. As one fan wrote after his death, “I did think of Prince over the years, in his amazing Paisley Park that I had made up in my mind, as I had never seen a picture of it.”\footnote{115} Prince did not allow photographs inside, and only sporadically allowed people to visit areas beyond the performance areas.\footnote{116} As such, Paisley Park existed largely in the mind of members of his audience, in images evoked by daydreaming about the song and imagining Prince working and living there across the years.

To introduce the possibility, as people were still adjusting to the reality of Prince’s death, that paying customers would now be able cross this threshold, from imaginary to real location, to enter into Prince’s very private domain, was highly loaded, and carried a sense of both wonder and dread. Speaking for many, Demaris Lewis, one of Prince’s friends, expressed it simply when accosted by a TMZ reporter and asked about the museum about to open: “Too soon.”\footnote{117}

The museumification of Paisley Park

The transformation of Paisley Park into a museum was managed by Graceland Holdings. Graceland’s Managing Partner Joel Weinshanker had contacted the estate shortly after Prince’s death in April 2016, and the museum was announced in August 2016, with a projected opening two months later, in October 2018.

\footnote{114} The same year Prince created the record label Paisley Park Records, partly funded by and distributed by Warner Bros, which allowed him to release his own and affiliated artist output.


\footnote{116} Until April 2018, the only images available were a set of commercial images taken to promote Paisley Park Studio when it was open to clients, a few images from public “Celebration” events at the start of the century, and various blurry snapshots of stolen moments from staff and visitors.

The estate was not in a position to invest in the required repairs and building alterations necessary to bring the building up to museum-ready status, nor was there expertise or resources to oversee the inventory, archival and preservation work needed to appraise and manage the contents of Prince’s building. Graceland offered to make these necessary investments and to manage the entire museumification process.

In preparation for opening, new carpet was laid, the death site was blocked and masked, the heating and air-conditioning system replaced, the roof fixed, and other necessary building modifications to open the building to public access. Archivists began work cataloguing Prince’s extensive wardrobe and musical items. These were listed by Angie Marchese, Director of Archives, of Graceland and Paisley Park Museum as 126 guitars, 8000 wardrobe items and 2000 pairs of shoes.118

An important business decision was made early on: Graceland offered Prince’s heirs – his sister and five half-siblings – generous fees to act as consultants to the museum.119 Family cooperation was essential, given the chaos of the estate, and the compressed timeline proposed for the museum project. The family’s support was also necessary within the public sphere, given the sensitivity expressed within the Prince community about rushed timing. As one visitor would later write about the awkwardness of visiting the newly opened museum in the wake of Prince’s recent passing: “His death is so fresh that fans still leave condolences at the edge of the compound. The day I visited there was a purple penguin, purple hat, purple flowers and a purple balloon.”120

119 Heirs were offered $100,000 for the first year, with $25,000 annual payments for subsequent years (now blocked by liens from some of the family’s lawyers seeking payments for legal fees accrued over past two years.) As of November 2018 the heirs have not received any payments from the estate. “Order Denying Motion,” Minnesota Judicial Branch, Oct 25, 2018, http://www.mncourts.gov/mncourtsgov/media/High-Profile-Cases/10-PR-16-46/Order-Denying-Motion_1.pdf.
The two-month timeline created organizational challenges which quickly turned into problems. The main issue visible on a public level was Graceland’s marketing of tickets well in advance of necessary council permits being obtained. The rezoning application was made to City of Chanhassen on August 19, 2016; ticket sales began on August 25, 2016, right after the museum was announced. This led to a host of problems, concentrated around the fact the Chanhassen City Council meeting to vote on the application was scheduled for October 3, 2016, three days before the scheduled opening of the museum. Many out-of-town visitors had taken vacation time off work, purchased admission tickets, flights and hotels, and had already arrived in Minneapolis, only to find out that the council voted to table the decision, citing lack of planning for traffic and a list of other concerns. At the same time, the Chanhassen City Council was under unreasonable pressure to approve a rezoning permit, which would potentially have a major impact on the community. The council was faced with approving a major new public-facing institution in a very short time frame, to open in the midst of their quiet, affluent suburb – an approval which caused some expressions of significant concern for many residents as evidenced by city council minutes and local press.

After initially rejecting the rezoning application, two days later the council issued a temporary permit to allow the museum to open for three days, including its projected opening day, October 6, 2016.121 This was to be seen as a test, and to allow more time for the list of issues to be resolved to be addressed. This limited opening pushed the museum into a scramble of reorganization, cancelling tickets for some days, and trying to rebook as many people as possible on the remaining three open days, thus setting up a severely overcrowded opening season. A few days later, the council issued another temporary permit, allowing the museum to open for a further twelve days. The agitation created by this fractured situation was unsettling for locals, fans, council members and the Prince community, and it drained much goodwill and social capital from the delicate relationships between the local community, Prince fans and the new arrivals, Graceland Holdings. During the period of uncertainty, upset fans deluged the council with messages ranging from polite requests to

abusive rants, which further put locals on edge as was seen in the council meeting minutes and local press.\footnote{122}

This inauspicious beginning also took place in the months following Prince’s death, when many people were still grieving, and emotions ran raw, in council meetings, on fan community sites, across social media and in the local and international press. Those people fortunate to attend witnessed the chaotic birth of a museum that was a complicated and contested site – performing simultaneously as a site of mourning, a death site with an active death investigation still underway, and a tourist attraction shaped along the lines of Graceland. Weinshanker acknowledged its dual function from the start, stating his purpose was to bring it up to a standard where Prince fans could be welcomed “to mourn and celebrate Prince.”\footnote{123} By the end of October, the city granted the final permits need for Paisley Park to open on a permanent basis. Chanhassen Mayor Denny Laufenburger declared October 28, 2016 “Paisley Park Day”, proclaiming, “No matter where his concert tours took him or how high his fame carried him, Prince was steadfastly devoted to Chanhassen and Minnesota, the city he called home and the state that inspired him.”\footnote{124}

It is impossible to know what would have happened to Paisley Park without Graceland’s proactive intervention and willingness to take on the financial and logistic burdens of time-pressured museumification. Prince’s estate faced an urgent need to monetize in order to pay the upcoming tax bill, which was estimated to be significant, even more than fifty per cent of the total value of the estate, when combining state and federal taxes. At the time, there was much written about Prince not leaving a will, and his overall lack of estate planning, namely his failure to shift funds into tax-shielded foundations or trusts. Complications with the valuation of the Michael Jackson estate continue to drag on in court, nine years after his


\footnote{123 Chris Riemenschneider, “Remembering Prince: One Year Later,” Star Tribune (Minneapolis), April 17, 2017, ProQuest.}

death, and indicate that it may be a long time before a final IRS valuation of Prince’s estate is finalised.\textsuperscript{125} With an urgent need to raise funds to pay interim tax bills, the special administrator for the estate made early plans to sell off most of Prince’s substantial real-estate holdings. A list of eighteen of his properties recommended for sale in July 2016 initially included Paisley Park, which caused so much media coverage and social media angst that the estate was forced to issue a statement to announce it was not for sale.\textsuperscript{126}

Given the financially vulnerabilities of Prince’s estate, it appears partnering with Graceland was a way for the estate to maintain ownership of Paisley Park, and potentially generate an income stream. Graceland’s total investment in Paisley Park Museum to make necessary capital improvements and prepare for museum operations is unknown, so it is hard to know how soon revenue would be flowing back to the estate. It is also difficult to assess whether the museum is operating within a financially sustainable model. Ticket prices are set high, which has been widely reported as a deterrent to locals who might be curious, but not ardent fans. and also to those hoping to make repeat visits. This positions the museum as a special destination for serious Prince fans rather than a more general tourist attraction. It was reported that 12,000 people visited in the first few weeks, despite the limited opening days, and in April 2017, Weinshanker said that over 40,000 people had visited in the first five months of operation, and he expects several hundred thousand visitors in the first full year of operation.\textsuperscript{127,128} New figures have not been released.

\textsuperscript{127} Chris Riemenschneider, “Remembering Prince: One Year Later.”
“Rule No. 1 at the Museum: Only do what Prince would do”

– Chris Riemenschneider, Star Tribune

From the first announcement of the museum, it was made clear that Prince had documented his plans for a museum, and preparations were already underway well before he died. This was an important message to communicate, given the speed of the museum process. Many Prince associates have confirmed hearing this directly from Prince, dating back to the 1990s and as recently as 2014. As far back as 2000, fans were given an opportunity to take a tour when they visited for the special event “Celebration”. Tours were fifteen dollars and available at the gate. A review from that time reveals many of the museum exhibits and elements were already in place or at least present almost twenty years ago, including awards, a visual timeline, and various memorabilia items.

It also appears more formal preparations were underway in the last years of Prince’s life. In an interview for Rolling Stone conducted in 2014, but published after his death, Prince mentioned the museum idea when he took a reporter through Paisley Park, noting, “There’s room for Purple Rain or the Super Bowl here,” referring to his legendary performance at the National Football League’s annual championship game in 2007. In the same year, a Facebook posting by Apollonia Kotero, Prince’s co-star from Purple Rain, reports on her visit to Paisley Park, and mentions Prince showed her the Purple Rain room and shared his vision. At the opening day press conference on October 6, standing outside the front entrance to the new museum, Joel Weinshanker declared everything was Prince (see Figure 20):

129 Chris Riemenschneider, “Remembering Prince: One Year Later.”
130 Kelli D. Esters, “Paisley Park rolls out purple carpet 4 all U fans 2 tour,” Star Tribune (Minneapolis), June 8, 2000, 1B.
What people are going to see in there is all about Prince and what Prince wanted. Each and every exhibition if it wasn’t there already was actually laid out in great detail by Prince. Rooms that you will see that we put together really were taken from emails, texts and messages that Prince had given to people who worked there. The same people who Prince trust to put these things together while he was alive, are the same people who are working really diligently to do this.133

Figure 20. Joel Weinshanker giving Press Conference, Opening Day at Paisley Park Museum, October 6, 2016 Photo by David Joles.

He was referring to two of Prince’s employees, Kirk Johnson and Trevor Guy, who worked closely with Prince on the building, merchandise, web design and other aspects of the business, and who both continued working for Paisley Park Museum. In this way, Paisley Park Museum extracted a posthumous blessing from Prince, attempting to reassure fans who wanted to respect Prince and might be hesitant to visit so soon after his death.

Approaching the museum

To the public, to journalists and to researchers, Paisley Park Museum is an opaque, all but faceless organization. Joel Weisnshanker and Angie Marchese, Director of Archives at Graceland and Paisley Park, are the only two publicly visible representatives and have conducted rare media interviews. There are no staff listed on the website, there is no phone number, and only one generic email to contact with any queries. It is unclear how many of the staff work onsite or from Graceland itself. Email enquiries are answered within a few days, and are authorless, unsigned. Staff are hired at job fairs which have been held on a semi-regular basis as well as through direct application via postings on the website. The Star Tribune noted that the museum will pay above the Minnesota state minimum hourly rate of $7.75. Staff are recruited for “hospitality not musical expertise”, notes a local reporter, assessing the tours on opening day. Locals have commented that many serious fans with ample qualifications have been unsuccessful in their applications. Efforts to initiate discussions to collaborate with Paisley Park Museum proved fruitless for both the Prince from Minneapolis symposium convened by the University of Minnesota, and the People’s Museum for Prince. Other researchers and organizers of Prince-related initiatives have reported similar problems, with people resorting to giving tour guides their business card to pass on to the management, to no avail.

In the wake of Prince’s death and even today, many who feel upset with decisions about the management of Prince’s estate often direct their demands and frustration towards Paisley Park Museum, mistakenly thinking that, as Graceland is operating inside his home, it is now responsible for Prince’s legacy. Additionally, Prince’s legendary vault – known in the Prince community simply as “the Vault” – containing thousands of unreleased recordings remained in the basement of Paisley Park for the first year of the museum’s operation before being secretly transported overnight by a convoy of armed trucks to California in August and September 2017. Thus, it was understandable that people might assume Graceland was also

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responsible for Prince’s music. In reality, the only role Graceland has is the already heavy responsibility of operating Paisley Park as a museum. The museum has made clear through its actions and communications, that it is not within its purview to field or respond to fans’ opinions and suggestions regarding Prince’s estate or his legacy. Perhaps its deliberately opaque, non-customer facing strategy is a defence against the passionate activism of Prince’s fans.

The main options for touring Paisley Park are a general admission or VIP pass. VIP includes access to several more spaces, including the galaxy room, the video editing room, and Studio B, where visitors are allowed a special photo opportunity. Since photography is absolutely forbidden and all mobile phones are to be locked inside special bags this opportunity became a highlight for visiting fans. In the first weeks of opening, the photo opportunity was an offer to stand at and touch Prince’s purple piano, even the keys, which he played throughout his last tour right up until a week before his death, or pose with his guitar. (See Figure 21). After public outcry, when some fans made suggestive poses with his guitar in honour of Prince’s younger lascivious self, these instruments were roped off. The photo opportunity is now

136 In October, 2017, half of Prince’s siblings protested the removal of the Vault from Paisley Park, and attempted (unsuccessfully) to have Comerica Bank, the personal representative of the estate, removed. The three heirs declared they were not informed about this important decision, and demanded his work be returned home to Minnesota. However, the judge determined that the move was in the best interests of the estate, as it is now safely secured at Iron Mountain Entertainment Services in a private vault in Hollywood. The facility offers climate controlled storage and high security which are superior to the conditions at Paisley Park. In addition, Iron Mountain has full preservation and archiving services on site so the contents can be fully inventoried, inspected and preserved without leaving the premises. A full-time archivist, Michael Howe, is now working on-site on the Vault’s collection. In December 2017, the heirs protested again, declaring the severe wildfires in California were a threat to the Vault. The estate called upon the head of IRES to testify all was safe and secure. Maps of wildfires were issued as proof, and in the process, the location of the vault was shown. See Jem Aswad, “Prince Heirs Petition to Remove Comerica Bank as Estate’s Representative, Claiming Vault Was Moved Without Permission,” Variety, October 30, 2017, http://variety.com/2017/biz/news/prince-heirs-petition-to-remove-comerica-bank-vault-was-moved-without-permission-1202602468/. See also Dee Locket, “Meet the Guy Tasked With Archiving Prince’s Entire Vault,” nymag, September 21, 2018, http://www.vulture.com/2018/09/prince-vault-archivist-michael-howe-interview.html. For all public documents released on the estate proceedings, in chronological order, see “10-PR-16-46 In re the Estate of Prince Rogers Nelson, Deceased,” Minnesota Judicial Branch, http://www.mncourts.gov/InReTheEstateofPrinceRogersNelson.aspx.
safely located beside a giant image of Prince and photos are taken by staff who save it to individual purple USB drives for each visitor, which one can purchase at the front desk, as all phones are locked on entry. (See Figure 22). In later 2017, a new “Ultimate” tour was added, which allowed more time, and a few extras such as being able to hold one of Prince’s guitars. The museum’s range of ticket offerings is modelled closely on Graceland.

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Figure 21 The author in Studio B, at Prince’s piano, October 6, 2016. Photo by Paisley Park Museum staff.

Figure 22. The author in Studio B, October 2017. Photo by Paisley Park Museum staff.

137 Additional bonuses are offered, such as being able to record a song “with Prince” on Thursdays, or brunch on the weekends.
Other programming includes “Celebration”, an annual four-day event held on the anniversary of Prince’s death, which celebrates Prince with panel sessions, live bands, and concert video screenings. In 2017, ticket prices started at over $500, plus fees. The other programming offering is Paisley Park After Dark (PPAD), a weekend event that has struggled to find the right format. In the first six months, it was held weekly, and some nights featured a video screening of a Prince concert; other nights it was a dance party, hosted by in a DJ in the NPG Music Club. Recently there was a surprise live concert and a listening party for a new posthumous album. Thus, at present there are limited options for experiencing the museum, all of which require a guided tour.

Overall, the visitor approaching the museum faces a cold welcome, with no-one to direct queries to, no faces or names on the website and little information offered. Effectively, the only choice for a visitor is to select a tour option and purchase a ticket online, then see what will unfold upon arrival.

The visitor experience: dreaming in the museum

Visiting Paisley Park today is obviously a very different experience than it was during Prince’s lifetime. What was once a mysterious wonderland full of flickering candles and bursting with extremely loud music is now experienced by fans as a series of rooms to be moved through in a (more or less) orderly manner, conducted by enthusiastic but callow guides.

– Jay Gabler, *The Current*

In his work on the staging of the museum experience, geographer Sheldon Annis conceived of three different symbolic spaces or scripts at work for the visitor museum: dream space, cognitive space and pragmatic space. His thesis is that, within the museum space, personal meaning must be created, and he considers the museum an expressive medium that can be read like a text. The museum’s symbols are approachable in many different ways and combinations, creating a visit that is perhaps as unique as each visitor. Whilst the curator may

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138 PPAD has had some problems with attendance, and is now held fortnightly, sometimes less often. One possible issue is that the cost is $60 plus fees, and includes a tour. This price sets it up as a special event, rather than a dance party locals can drop in to join without having to pay for the tour each visit.

design a certain narrative for the exhibition, people follow their own paths, in thought and action, throughout the museum space. Annis’ concepts are particularly useful when attempting to understand the sometimes dissonant visitor experiences crafted by Paisley Park Museum.

According to Annis, ‘dream space is considered “a field of sub-rational image formation.”’\(^{140}\) In this realm, Annis suggests we experience images out of context, and we can control the speed and angle at which we encounter the different objects: “the eyes, the brain and the feet collaborate to give velocity and direction to the third dimension” of the two-dimensional painting. In the dream space there is “a flow of images and meanings that are ‘highly personal, sometimes lulling, sometimes surprising, and more or less conscious.”’\(^{141}\) This space accounts for our impulse to move towards and pause before one image that attracts us, and speed past those which don’t.

‘Pragmatic space’ is experienced as physical presence in the museum, and the visitors themselves are the main agents within this domain. This space refers to the personal and social experience of the visitor:

In pragmatic space, museum-going is usually a happy and social event. Being there in some particular social union is both purpose and product. It does not really matter whether the coins were Roman or Chinese.\(^{142}\)

‘Cognitive space’ corresponds to the field of rational, ordered thought and it is the curator who usually organizes this space within the museum, which is in evidence in the exhibition text and labels and in the grouping and arrangement of objects. Yet, although the visitor might attempt to meet the curator’s mind at this rational level when reading texts and moving through the exhibition in the intended order, invariably distractions and obstacles appear which interrupt this relational experience. In addition, the visitor’s own knowledge and preferences may open up other ways of knowing, viewing and understanding the exhibition’s objects and the overall experience of the museum.


Annis concludes that these different ways of reading and experiencing the museum’s exhibition might be the key to the enduring popularity of the museum experience: “The magic that makes museums so attractive may lie in the flexibility with which people create their own spaces.” As will be seen, Paisley Park Museum supports Annis’s premise, although in an inverted sense. Here, the distinct lack of flexibility to create one’s own space and experience impinges on the magic that might otherwise manifest in this charged site.

Carol Duncan’s classic work *Civilizing Rituals* also looks at the museum space, which she analyses as a ritualized environment. Duncan understands the museum as a complex, powerfully ideological institution, especially in its capacity to shape our experience by choosing what we see and what we do not, and how this is presented to the visitor. Duncan offers two important concepts relevant to this study: the performative scripts that the museum setting offers and the visitor enacts; and the museum space as a liminal space, set apart from the everyday world of regular space.

The museum constructs the ideal visitor; the actual visitor enters and performs the script set out for them, to some extent, depending on how prepared they are for this ritual and how attuned to its signals. The ideal visitor is:

perfectly predisposed socially, psychologically, and culturally to enact the museum ritual […] although] in reality people continually misread or scramble or resist the museum’s cues to some extent.  

Drawing on anthropologist Victor Turner’s concept of liminality, Duncan notes this receptive mode of experience is one that predominates when the visitor enters the museum space and performs the script of their visit. As developed by Turner, liminality is a state outside of normal awareness, that is “betwixt-and-between the normal, day-to-day cultural and social states and processes of getting and spending.” Set aside from regular space, the museum

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144 Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, 13.
space asks the visitor to be receptive and attentive. A liminal space such as a museum “could open a space in which individuals can step back from the practical concerns and social relations of everyday life and look at themselves and their world – or at some aspect of it – with different thoughts and feelings.”

Duncan’s work on the rituals of the museum is particularly useful when analysing Paisley Park Museum, because the museum itself defies many cultural assumptions about contemporary museum practice. In this case, I would suggest it is the museum rather than the visitor that appears to misread, scramble or resist cues, in a series of odd curatorial and institutional decisions. The museum creates visitor scripts and a museum space so different to the current norms of contemporary museum practice that it creates several levels of dissonance and confusion.

The reversal of regular museum rituals also produces a constriction of all three levels of symbolic space that Annis describes. The resulting disorientation raises questions about the role and stated purpose of the museum as a place to celebrate and mourn Prince. In the following discussion, three key factors that shape the visitor experience at Paisley Park Museum will be considered: the museum’s response to the challenge of being both museum and memorial site; the guided tour; and the staging of the museum and its exhibits.

**Graceland as memorial**

How should a museum accommodate the need for visitors to mourn and pay tribute to the artist? Graceland offers an outstanding model that has proven an enduring success. American Studies scholar Erika Doss writes on the deeper social and personal meaning inherent in making a pilgrimage to Graceland. She emphasises the long-standing American attraction for visiting death sites, which she sees as intrinsically American, and links part of Graceland’s spiritual magnetism to the presence of his grave:

> These experiences are constitutive: visiting sites of tragedy is not simply something Americans do but part of who Americans are. These feelings are ritualized, becoming shared and socially permissible through grieving, gift-giving, and intimate

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146 Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals*, 11.
participation at these sites. However morbid it might seem to make the pilgrimage to Elvis’s grave, even on a honeymoon, fans go to Graceland to emotionally indulge themselves, to become overwhelmed by their feelings of love, loss, and loneliness for Elvis. Elated inside his house, many fans openly weep beside his grave.  

At Graceland, Elvis’ grave is located in the meditation garden that he himself enjoyed. His grave is flanked by those of his parents, grandmother and a cenotaph to his stillborn twin brother Jesse. (See Figure 23). It is the intense yet peaceful, emotional heart of a visit to Graceland, the final stop after a journey through Elvis’ house and pavilions filled with artifacts that help recount and illuminate his life story. It is located in a tranquil garden setting with a fountain and reflective pool and has plenty of welcoming places for people to sit and rest and reflect. When visitors reach this point, the tour is over, there is no narration, and no need for the iPad guide visitors received at the beginning. There are one or two guards present, respectful but silent, allowing people their space. People clearly feel welcome, and sit around in quiet groups, sometimes chatting in low voices.

Overall, the meditation garden is treated by visitors as sacred space. This is further accentuated by the flow of people continually arriving into the space at the end of their tour. The space is open so people can easily see the gravesite and make a decision to approach or divert to a nearby path or bench. For those who wish, there is an easy ritual delineated. People approach the grave and pause a moment. Some appear to be in prayer, some offer a flower or other gift or reach down to touch the grave just before they leave. Then visitors step back and move away to sit nearby on the steps or benches that surround the grave area. Some wander about, to inspect some statues, or look back to the mansion, or across the grounds. This ritualistic flow of people can be considered hypnotic and contributes to the special aura of this liminal space.

The most surprising feature of Graceland, given its emphasis on commerce and high entrance fees, is that the gates of the Graceland mansion are opened from 8:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m., for people to visit Elvis’s grave. No ticket is required. Everyone, anyone is welcome to enter through the famous music-motif gates, and walk up the drive through the immaculate grounds, in full view of the historic mansion, and pass by into the meditation gardens and
dwell for this hour in Elvis’ space. This allows for people to visit outside of the tour, and to make repeat visits. The offering of free admission contributes to a sense that this has become sacred, public space.

In addition, Graceland stages an extremely popular annual candlelight vigil on each anniversary of Elvis’ death, to allow people the opportunity of a solemn ritual. An estimated 30,000 to 50,000 people attended in 2018, and on the twentieth anniversary of his death in 1997, over 700,000 people attended.148,149 People light candles and walk in silent procession up the sweeping driveway of Graceland to Elvis’ grave. It is the highlight of a major “Elvis Week” celebration and, until last year, entry was free.

Whilst many have found Graceland’s adjoining entertainment complex, located directly across the highway from the mansion, with its cavernous exhibition spaces, overpriced dining options, and a seemingly endless number of differently themed gift shops overwhelming, and very far from the experience the pilgrim may be seeking, the physical separation between the ferociously commercial entertainment complex and the peaceful mansion allows visitors to choose their own experience. Through offering a wide range of programs and modes of access, Graceland has mastered the need to cater to different types of visitors, from casual tourist dropping in to see this famous attraction and hoping to buy an Elvis t-shirt, through to super-fans making an annual or once-in-a-lifetime religious pilgrimage to visit Elvis’ grave. Graceland makes space for the sacred and the secular experience.

**Paisley Park as memorial**

From the moment that visitors step inside the Park, newly transformed from Prince’s living quarters and workspace to a public museum, the message is clear: Now ain’t the time for your tears.

– Andrea Swensson, *The Current*150


149 Doss, “Rock and Roll Pilgrims,” 123.

At Paisley Park Museum, the visitors’ need to mourn Prince and to be provided the space to do so in the fresh wake of his death, has been managed in stark contrast to Graceland. The liminal, spiritual equivalent of Elvis’ meditation garden was perhaps the Paisley Park Fence, which had been the spontaneous site of mourning and remembrance since Prince died. For the museum’s opening, now that the fence had been cleared, the management made a decision that was not publicly announced prior to the opening: to present Prince’s ashes at the start of the tour, in the space called the atrium (see Figure 24,25). It was not only the decision to present them, but also how it was done, that created distress. People’s strong responses to this curatorial decision overshadowed the overall visitor experience for many and was the centre of much debate and public attention. The impact of this single decision cannot be overstated. Andrea Swensson wrote of this encounter:

What I couldn’t possibly have predicted was that we would be confronted with not just the idea of Prince or evidence of his day-to-day behavior at Paisley Park, but with the remains of the late Prince Rogers Nelson himself, cocooned in a tiny purple coffin inside a miniature model of Paisley Park, which was itself encased in a glass box in the very center of a sunlit, two-story high atrium where the tour guide said he often went to collect his thoughts because he found it peaceful.151

151 Andrea Swensson, “On Returning to Paisley Park as a Tourist.”
Figure 24. Prince’s urn, ca. October 2016. Photo by Urn Design Company Foreverence.

Tour guides were instructed in their memorised script (with notecards as prompts) to have tissues on hand and leave a moment of silence for people to pay their respects. Swensson continues:

No one knew how to react to the information that was being delivered. A woman pressed her face onto the glass, leaving a cloud of fog. A man tried to crack a joke that fell flat. The staff told us to pay our respects, and let us know that Prince would want us to be joyful.152

Unfortunately, by confronting people directly and unexpectedly with the actual remains of Prince’s body at the start of the tour, the museum may have reawakened in visitors all the past six months’ grief and pain, at the very beginning of this special visit that many had keenly anticipated and spent a time and money planning for. As Robert Pogue Harrison writes on rituals of mourning, “Before the living can detach themselves from them the dead must be detached from their remains so that their images may find their place in the afterlife of the imagination.”153

152 Andrea Swensson, “On Returning to Paisley Park as a Tourist.”
For those beginning to adjust to the idea of Prince in the afterlife, this presentation of his physical remains arguably set the process back to one of fresh mourning, as at a funeral or gravesite. Naturally, in many tours, people started crying, yet at the same time everyone was self-conscious within the tour group. One fan commented later, “No. No. This feels deeply disrespectful.” Another remarked with more typically Minnesotan restraint, “I wasn’t expecting that, and at first it was a little upsetting.”154 It was impossible to understand why Graceland, which has created such an elegant and respectful way for people to pay tribute to Elvis, could make such a damaging decision.

Putting Prince’s remains directly before the (paying) fans was surely an attempt to offer some opportunity to mourn, to give thanks, to acknowledge the artist’s role in people’s lives. Yet not only did the museum fail to warn visitors of this ‘exhibit’, the staging and timing of this surprise left visitors no space to compose themselves and find any kind of adequate response.

Stripped of their own agency to take time, except for the beat of a pause in the script, there was nowhere to look, to turn, and nothing to do. In terms of Annis’ pragmatic and dream spaces, the museum had curtailed them into a tightly choreographed moment that was over before there was time to register a full or respectful response.

Even in the exhibition design, no space had been left between the visitor and the glass box that enclosed the display around which people were haphazardly gathered. In the first days of the museum opening, many thought the urn was an architectural model or artwork representing Paisley Park. On the opening day tour I was on, the group physically recoiled, as if receiving an electric shock, when told what they were standing before. No ceremonial approach was possible, even for those warned beforehand, as the positioning of the urn was in the main thoroughfare of the atrium and people almost stumbled into it right after beginning the tour.\textsuperscript{155}

Carol Duncan writes on the museum visitor as the agent in creating museum rituals:

\begin{quote}
In art museums, it is the visitors who enact the ritual. The museum’s sequenced spaces and arrangements of objects, its lighting and architectural details provide both the stage set and the script – although not all museums do this with equal effectiveness.\textsuperscript{156}
\end{quote}

Yet in this case, Paisley Park presented an extremely constrictive script at the very moment they surprised visitors with an emotional shock. The constriction was temporal, spatial and behavioural. The visitor was given the information by the guide, and offered brief pause in the tour guide’s narrative, “I will let you pay your respects now before we continue the tour,” yet had nowhere to move.

If museums can be acknowledged to have sets of ritualized behaviour and tend to induce a state of liminal space in visitors, then being confronted with death and the ashes of a person, may surely invoke even more ritualistic behaviour. Yet any rituals one might traditionally or

\textsuperscript{155} I visited the museum on opening day, October 6, 2017, and five more times in the following year and my direct observations in this chapter are drawn from these experiences and observing the responses of those around me, as well as published reports (as referenced).

\textsuperscript{156} Carol Duncan, \textit{Civilizing Rituals}, 12.
even spontaneously wish to enact in the presence of the remains of a loved artist, were impossible with this context.

As such, this became discombobulating for the visitor, who was one moment welcomed as a paying guest to a museum, and the next called upon to be a mourner, to perform on the spot some ritualistic response to death, and at the same time, potentially feel disrespectful for not being able to make an appropriate response.

Positioned at the start of the tour, when the visitors were bright and excited, the tour guide was given the unhappy task of having to open up this fissure of the museum space, and then snap it closed again as she rushed onto the next stop on the tour. This was a direct counterpoint to Graceland’s peaceful garden that allowed people to create their own space, make their own rituals, do whatever they needed to make peace with the idea of the artist’s remains and his memory, after having done the tour of the Presley mansion. Avoidance or engagement are equally accommodated. Graceland’s model allows that individuals have different memories of, and different relationships with, Elvis and also may be dealing with other deaths, and each needs the space to respond in their own way.

The presence of the ashes also directly invoked the question of Prince’s death site which many visitors seemed curious about but most had probably tried to put out of mind. Most people were unaware they were standing a couple of metres from the place where he died. Having seen the ashes, blogger Scott Woods notes:

More chilling – and not a feature of the tour guide’s spiel – was the oddly cut section of wall to the side by the front staircase. I kept looking at it, trying to figure out why such a design decision had been made, a seemingly random jagged series of cuts in the drywall. I considered that it might be a secret door (we would see a couple along the way) and shrugged it off as roughshod contractor work until I was able to review video of the area from previous on-site interviews after the fact. The reality is more
jarring: it’s where the designers have blocked off the elevator where Prince’s body was found.157

Woods echoes the cognitive dissonance of many visitors, who felt full force the collision of tourist attraction and death site.

I’m glad I didn’t know that ahead of time, since I probably would have just stood there staring at the wall while the tours kept passing me by. The “urn” wasn’t without its power, but it was devastating to think of how close I had been standing to where he had been found, where his spirit divorced the world, where the music and the soul of it ceased. ... If you believe in places of power, it’s hard to consider it anything but.158

Of course, Woods would not have been allowed to stand as tours passed him by, to have his moments of reflection in what for him had become sacred space.

Within a few months the urn was relocated to a high place in the same atrium, out of direct view, shielded behind clouded glass, and positioned directly above the kitchen. Weinshanker acknowledged:

Some mistakes were made and already have been corrected. Graceland Holdings moved the ceramic urn with Prince’s ashes (shaped like Paisley Park) from ground level to a second-story perch above the front atrium, after many fans expressed shock at its conspicuous placement. Just like at Graceland, Prince’s bedroom will forever be off limits to tour visitors, as will the elevator where Prince died, which has been boarded up.159

The relocation of the ashes is yet another unfortunate position: visitors are now invited to pay their respects for a moment as they gaze up at the object high above, but then the tour moves on to the kitchen, and visitors need to advance and stand directly underneath the ashes, in order to quickly adopt a fan’s curious gaze as they stand at the glass doors and appreciate the

158 Scott Woods, “Paisley Park Is In Your Heart.”
159 Chris Riemenschneider, “Remembering Prince: One Year Later.”
details of the kitchen where he used to eat. There is a definite sense that this placement may also be temporary, thus giving a sense there may be no final resting place for Prince’s ashes. Thus two years on, there has been no solution to this odd choreography of the tour. Writing for the *New Yorker* about her own tour experience in 2018, Amanda Petrusich notes it is still an awkward scene:

> [I]t’s expected that visitors, some of whom are still putting away their car keys, will enact gravesite rituals- genuflect, sob, pray, bow, or whatever it is a person does to convey homage. My fellow tour goers clutched one another. Anyone uncomfortable with public displays of bereavement might simply shift anxiously from one foot to another uncertain of where to focus her eyes.¹⁶⁰

No room has been set aside, nor even a space outside where the ashes could be moved, or a simple memorial setting established for reflection. The Paisley Park Fence, the spontaneous shrine for Prince, lives on now as a formal exhibit, not a memorial space, neatly displayed on a wall in the gift store right opposite the bathrooms.

**Guided tours**

After the presentation of the ashes, the mandatory guided tour was the next most powerful curatorial decision that deeply impacted the visitor experience. There was no other way to access Paisley Park. As noted, Graceland Holdings did not hire people on the basis of their Prince knowledge, and in the opening season, the tour guides read from note cards and many had no knowledge of Prince beyond what had been given to them in job training. This has improved over time, though the high staff turnover and casual hire arrangements restricts the accumulation of institutional knowledge amongst the guides. The decision to hire staff without subject knowledge had dramatic effect, as many of the visitors were long time, passionate fans who were finally visiting Paisley Park for the first time, and for many this was a once-in-a-lifetime experience. The knowledge within a tour group appeared wildly imbalanced: the paying visitors brought most of the information and stories, and yet the tour guide was required to talk almost constantly and was the conduit to Prince’s domain.

This imbalance between guide and many visitors created a definitive problem, especially when it came to welcoming fans who had spent up to thirty years listening to Prince’s music and following his career. Some guides became defensive and overwhelmed at visitors offering corrections or additional facts about the exhibits, the space and Prince’s history; others bravely welcomed input and defused the imbalance by befriending and deferring to informed visitors, assuring all that they were eager to expand their knowledge to improve the tours in future.

In Annis’ terms, all three levels of dream, pragmatic and cognitive space are entirely constricted in this tour model. Within a tightly timed guided tour is there is little time for reflection, for discussing and pointing out details with friends, or for personal space to enjoy the experience. The constant delivery of superficial, upbeat snippets of mostly already known information about the space, objects and Prince himself prevents any ability to enjoy the museum in a liminal state and allow the visitor’s own associations to arise. The cognitive level is also not satisfied, when the visitors know more than the guides, and even for casual tourists with little knowledge of Prince, the information given lacks context and understanding. One frustrated visitor reported on the visit to Studio A where Prince did many of his recordings:

“Prince sang sitting down,” our guide said almost as an aside. I stood blinking, waiting for her to explain that he didn’t need to stand. He used nuance far more than projection. He sang quietly, often speaking. His vocals were raised in the mix. But this woman didn’t know even the basics. If nothing else, explain to people touring a studio how a studio works.161

This particular guided tour model is also a wasted opportunity for the museum which desperately needs to gather information and expertise on its own subject and collection. Tour guides were continually waiting for people to stop talking, some impatient, and tour groups quickly learned that the way to take the tour was silently, or with brief conversation between stops which passed at quick-pace. As guides delivered their talking points, the quiet groups

passing through together carried a wealth of information and experiences relating to Prince, his music and his history.

Whilst it could be objected that perhaps tour guides are necessary for security purposes and to manage visitor traffic flow through the space, Graceland stands as a counter-example to show that is not the case. Graceland has similar space constrictions, being set in an actual house and has similar types of items of display. It welcomes many more visitors than Paisley Park. The key is that Graceland has created a range of options to cater the different types of visitors and their needs. At Graceland, only VIP tours include guides, whereas the general tours provide iPads for the tour of the mansion, and allow guests to navigate in their own time, at their own pace, taking whatever time they wish to share the experience with a companion and talk about details or linger over certain objects or scenes.

Moving to this model of self-guided tours, allowing people to move through the space in their own time, in their own inner or shared social space, or choosing to hire a tour guide if desired, would transform the experience of Paisley Park Museum. After investing in the production of an audio guide and hardware, it would also save significant costs. iPads could easily have dynamic content, with various Prince-related musicians and associates offering different tours or even differently themed guides, such as those focussing on the music or Prince’s fashion. This model also allows for people to fully engage in the technology if they choose, or to put the iPad aside and decide upon their own way of experiencing the museum. For many visitors who have long wished to experience Paisley Park, it may be enough just to be in the space at last, and experience it as a purely sensory, dream-space dimension, without props or guide. The iPad might also have an option of a pure Prince music channel so visitors can blast their way through a very private, journey, perhaps a more direct way to encounter the artist himself, much as visitors do in the V&A produced David Bowie Is and the Pink Floyd Their Mortal Remains exhibitions. In this way, visitors could be authors of their own museum experience, as Annis so compellingly proposes:
Adrift, the visitor finds a speed and direction appropriate to his own roles and expectations. He can seek out quiet/noisy, filled/empty, child/adult, or serious/frivolous spaces. He may freely ignore curatorial didacticism.\textsuperscript{162}

The guided tour as art form itself can be a vehicle for expansive creative possibilities, and it is possible to imagine compelling creative programs for Paisley Park, but in its current traditional form it is too restrictive for the contemporary museum visitor. As a format, the guided tour is currently under scrutiny in settings such as historic house museums where it has traditionally been the predominant mode of access. Linda Young notes the challenges of keeping pace with contemporary visitors who no longer seem interested in taking a tour:

Following the trend towards seeing museum visitors as active creators of their own visitor experiences, informed by personal history and agendas, they can be viewed as coming to mine the place for the raw materials of imaginative bricolage, and then to share the experience with their family and friends (Black 2005). These inspirations are to be found below stairs, as much as on the piano nobile, in closets as well as gardens, in frescoed ceilings, and at the same time in mass-produced wallpapers. The challenge is for house curators to let go of received truth as the only vector of understanding.\textsuperscript{163}

In a museum dedicated to a musician, each visitor’s own personal history with the musician’s work in their life will be unique, as will the meanings they derive from the experience. Freedom to dream and interpret and dwell in a more liminal, interior space, and the space for a shift between registers, is required for this experience to take place fully.

**Staging the museum: Paisley Park as house museum**

House museums offer a peculiarly direct encounter with the materiality of another’s life. Entering the interior spaces of the house, we immerse ourselves in the lived context of the commemorated life.

– Nuala Hancock, *Charleston and Monk’s House*\textsuperscript{164}

\textsuperscript{162} Annis, “The Museum,” 170.

\textsuperscript{163} Linda Young, “Is There a Museum in The House?,” 76.

Visiting the house of an artist invites the compelling fantasy of approaching closer to the artist themselves, and offers a tantalizing promise of better understanding the psyche of an artist through their dwelling and possessions. It is a normal expectation that the visitor will read the house and its contents biographically, seeking clues or keys to the artist, in the material remnants. Virginia Woolf visited Carlyle’s house and remarked “We know them from their houses,” and proceeded to analyse the house as a reflection of the author’s selfish personality.\footnote{165}

Diana Fuss, writing on four famous writers’ rooms, notes, that for literary scholars, “Every house is, in reality, an outer embodiment of the inner life of its occupant.”\footnote{166}

A visitor to a house museum might attune to what Edward Casey, writing on Bachelard, describes as its “psychic spatiality”.\footnote{167} Moving through the spaces where the artist spent so much time, the imagination is easily awakened, trying to perceive signs of the artist’s presence: “In its countless alveoli space contains compressed time.”\footnote{168}

Yet there is a curious tension created by a visit to Paisley Park: the knowledge that Prince lived and worked here, intensively, extensively, and yet seems to have left no trace of his physical presence. Nuala Hancock, who conducted an extensive study of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell’s houses, now museums, writes about the museum visitor’s quest:

Finding others retrospectively, then, among the remnants of their things is a highly charged affair. We reach them through the evocatory potency of things which connote their presence in their absence, which come to ‘stand’ for them. The chairs and tables, beds and drapes of the house museal room are drenched with content, replete with memory.\footnote{169}

Paisley Park Museum is presented as Prince’s home and studio, which is staged to achieve the effect of being barely touched since Prince left it. Although Prince did live here for the

last ten years of his life, his living quarters are not part of the exhibition display. The closest approach to a living space is his office, which has been carefully arranged to evoke the feeling that he has just left the room. The office was written about and talked about extensively as a highlight of many people’s tour experiences, as was the single room that contained a number of objects one could read as personal and biographical: books and CD’s to reveal his interests, work on the table, an arrangement of photos of his friends’ children, a carryon size suitcase with wheels in the corner. The installation is evocative.

The diner-style kitchenette is similarly staged as a scene, and the guides tell stories about Prince enjoying his meals in there [while?] watching his favourite sports on TV. People peer through the glass doors which stay firmly closed. In the rest of the space, there are a few signs of personal presence, a photo of his father in the studio, handwritten lyrics placed on a music stand, to give a sense of “this is what he was working on”, but the museum is largely devoid of the personal. Visiting Paisley Park Museum creates a picture that Prince, having razed his last house after his divorce in 2005, abandoned any further attempts at domestic life and moved into his office–studio complex, camping out upstairs between studio time for the last ten years of his life.

A visitor can look upon everything as a possible clue or connection to Prince, as all objects, all rooms are perceived in “a halo of authenticity”, as Caterina Albano writes on the biographical exhibition. On the function of the object, she writes,

> If biographical objects function primarily on a personal level, the turning of personal possessions into modern relics has broader social and cultural significance. Their metamorphosis suggests the evocative power of objects, whether imaginative or emotive, that enlists them as bearers of both the form and content of life narratives.\(^{170}\)

The museum presents many of Prince’s clothes, clearly recognizable from his videos and movies, but these are on mannequins that don’t seem to fit well. When asked, the staff said the curators had problems finding mannequins of Prince’s proportions, as if ordering custom mannequins was out of the question. The remarkable thing is the clothes look unworn, and

perhaps all on display were only worn once or twice. His high-heeled matching boots that accompany every outfit are similarly unmarked. It is difficult, even as an imaginative visitor, to feel as Virginia Woolf did when visiting the Brontës’ house: “Her shoes and thin Muslin dress have outlived her.”¹⁷¹ We can gaze at his outfits and his guitars, which may be recognisable, even iconic, for many visitors, but Prince appears to have left no mark at all. The curators have either consciously selected only pristine items, or Prince discarded any garments showing signs of wear.¹⁷²

There are some guitars and instruments, a motorbike, many posters and awards. Some videos are on display, though the music throughout most of the museum is dropped low like background music or sonic wallpaper. In the main cavernous soundstage space there are a couple of unique cars on display, and a series of stages with displays for different eras, lit bright in a dim room. The giant screen plays short clips of Prince in concert. The overall effect is entirely disembodied, as if Prince were only an idea, and has left no trace, though the scuff marks on a piano he used to play and dance on in the Purple Rain tour are keenly pointed out by every guide in the Purple Rain room, which has surprisingly few objects on display in so a large space. Whether the curators are holding back more personal items, or this was the way Prince lived in the material world, it is impossible to know.

The almost complete lack of the personal and overabundance of the professional frustrated many visitors’ efforts to find a deeper insight or connection to Prince:

> Down every hall we strolled, in every room we visited, Prince iconography presided on every conceivable surface. There was no indication that anybody but Prince ever spent time there. No family photos, no group photos in front of tour buses. Nothing to

¹⁷¹ Virginia Woolf quoted in Nuala Hancock, *Charleston and Monk’s House*, 120.

¹⁷² By contrast, the Minnesota Historical Society has in its modest but growing Prince collection a complete outfit from the Purple Rain tour. When curator Sondra Reierson guided me to the cold basement room and opened the drawer where the garments were carefully laid out, she proudly held up a white ruffled shirt for my inspection and immediately pointed out the marks: it is stained with perspiration.
show a life lived beyond a tightly controlled, highly stylized, and retouched existence. His image was everywhere. If his walls could talk, he’d be talking to himself.  

Revelations about Prince, and how he lived at Paisley Park came from another source, which formed a counterpoint to the museum. A complication of opening a museum during an active death investigation is the moment of inevitable collision of museologized space and death site. The privacy and secrecy that Prince ensured around Paisley Park and the mystique that the museum tried to maintain was blown apart by Carver Country who, upon the second year anniversary of Prince’s death, concluded their investigation and released all the files and images to the public. Links for downloading the massive files were posted on their official website. Every room in Paisley Park is documented, with plenty of detail shots showing his personal items, and his body.

In what could be seen as a countermove to the release of the death investigation photos, the estate and/or Paisley Park Museum worked with *Vogue* to do a series of positive features on Prince and the museum to be released online on the same day. They invited actress Yara Shahidi, whose father Afshin was a photographer of Prince, to visit Prince’s hitherto unseen private rooms. The journalist for *Vogue* magazine yearned for revelations: “One can’t help but study any/every item on view for clues to what informed the artist’s blistering talent and radical creative vision.” Much was made of his palatial bedroom, with its kitsch fluffy white round bed. (see Figure 26). As the actress toured the space, she declared the bed was “so Prince”.

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Yet the investigation files released the same day provided a different truth, with images and interviews confirming he actually slept elsewhere in a humble windowless room, unfurnished except for a bed, table and TV (see Figure 27). Clearly the opulent bedroom was for show, or company.

Where is Prince?

Attempting to read Prince’s biography, or even just his multidimensional personality, through Paisley Park Museum meets resistance at every turn, and results in characterising Prince as unknowable, and as if barely touching the physical world. His humour, spirituality and sexuality, vital aspects of his personality and sources of creativity, that many identify with and which attracted so many to him, are oddly absent. It is possible that Paisley Park may be
largely as he left it, that the staging by curators was minimal, and that he inhabited his physical spaces without much attention to its exterior materials, living only for his music. Yet critics and fans don’t know how to read the cold, unyielding, lonely aspects of this space, whether to blame the museum for this resistant, professional space, or to attribute it to Prince himself (see Figure 28).

Figure 28. Purple Rain room, Paisley Park Museum, October 2016. Photo by NBC.

Minneapolis-based music journalist Jon Bream, Prince’s first biographer who has been writing on Prince since the 1980s, writes on the museum, “You get the feeling that Graceland has been put together with TLC – and a sense of fun. You get the feeling that Paisley Park is presented more like Prince’s personal life than his music – it’s guarded, protective and airbrushed.” Bream is disappointed. He wants to know, “Where’s the humour?”, for Prince was a “funny guy”, and the museum lacks any playfulness.

Amanda Petrusich in the New Yorker writes of her disappointment at first that the museum resists offering deeper insight into Prince.


176 Jon Bream, “Paisley Park vs. Graceland.”
Paisley Park feels anonymous. His studios are beautiful, but unremarkable. There are many photos of him, and his symbol is omnipresent, but I was hoping for evidence of his outsized quirks and affectations – clues to some bigger truth. I found little that seemed especially personal. Paisley Park presents Prince only as a visionary – not as a father, a husband, a friend, or a son.177

Yet she concludes that perhaps that was exactly what Prince wanted, after all she refers to his famous quote that all he wants people to know about him is his music. Petrusich notes, “there’s something profound about how Paisley Park insists on maintaining Prince’s privacy.”178 This is a generous reading, as it is also possible that the museum’s resistance to offering the visitor a deeper, more informative, and more emotionally-engaged experience had more to do with a complete lack of thoughtful, audience-focused preparation.

**Conclusion: “Paisley Park is in your heart”**


Paisley Park Museum is an unusual museum that abides by an alternative logic. Largely shaped by the dual forces of Prince and Graceland Holdings, rather than contemporary museum practices, it resists being read as a house museum and at times appears as a series of exhibitions featuring a musician’s memorabilia. Some decisions that have shaped the museum have been clearly motivated by Prince himself, in terms of how he created and used Paisley Park, and in his plans for actual museum displays. Other major decisions have been made by Graceland, including curatorial choices of what to display and what to withhold, and the shaping of the visitor experience overall, including the use of guided tours and the lack of didactic, interpretative materials. Studying it as a space that thwarts visitor’s impulses to follow their own paths and create their own meanings seems to counter what many perceive as one of Prince’s key life messages to his audience: be yourself completely. Fellow black rockstar and good friend of Prince, Lenny Kravitz, summed up Prince’s message: “Do your

thing. Do everything. Don’t compromise. Fulfil your destiny.”

As one reviewer wrote on the museum experience, “the disconnect between what Prince gave his public and the sanitized museum of relics affected me – and not in a good way.”

What stories and insights, what new perspectives and interpretations would surface if the visitor was given space and time to share or simply to feel their own experiences of Prince? The narrow visitor scripts of Paisley Park inspire imagined counter-scripts where visitors are free to inhabit the dream space of Paisley Park, uniting it with their own imaginary world of Prince and his music. How can the artist who touched and transformed so many lives be more fully represented?

The constrictions of the current museum also motivate a vision of an alternative space that turns the focus to the artist’s audience itself, as a way to render a fuller portrait of the artist himself. A diverse, multi-voiced, multi-dimensional imagined community who may together be able to create a picture of how Prince himself influenced and impacted each life, in all the thousands of different and vital ways. People who personally knew Prince, colleagues and friends could contribute vital stories and insights alongside Prince’s audience with their own personal stories and perspectives. Resurrecting Prince via his audience seems necessary as a counteraction to address the discrepancy between how Prince is memorialised by his audience, and how he is presented in this formal, opaque museum. Paisley Park will always be a sacred space for anyone who loved Prince, but what would it mean to see the artist refracted through his audience?

Before answering these questions in Chapter Four, in the next chapter I broaden the focus to consider contemporary curatorial practices in the museum as they relate to the subject of the musician. In this way, I shift the focus from one specific musician’s museum back to the visual arts realm, to set a foundation and context for the development of the new museum model.

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181 Shannon Carrier, “Prince’s Identity Has Been Stripped From Paisley Park.”
Chapter Three: The Musician in the Art Museum – Contemporary Curatorial Practices

Before turning in Chapter Four to the development of the People’s Museum for Prince as a curatorial response to the public mourning of Prince, the creation of Paisley Park Museum and the gap between them, in this chapter I broaden the view to consider the state of current curatorial practices in the visual arts museum that take the contemporary musician as their subject.

In this chapter, I examine contemporary curatorial practices within the recent trend of musician exhibitions in the museum, specifically focussing on the curatorial decisions that shape the audience experience. The rationale for studying these major exhibitions is that they represent the current state of practice in the field, for they are realised with the full resources of established museums, as well as access to either the artist’s archives or a wealth of well-established contemporary artists who are commissioned to make work on the subject. They were also extraordinarily successful, both critically and in terms of visitor numbers, with one notable exception. As such, a study of these exhibitions can reveal the specific challenges facing the curators of musician exhibitions, and the curatorial strategies engaged to meet them, when preparing to welcome a public that comprises casual museum visitor with little or no knowledge of the artist through to fan and super-fan.

The musician in the museum

There is a wonderful irony in a career retrospective of a living artist that becomes so popular it outlives its subject. In 2010 – long before David Bowie Is travelled to ten other locations around the world, before it landed in Brooklyn earlier this month – London’s Victoria & Albert Museum was approached by the rock icon’s management to create an exhibit out of the singer’s archives. At the time, the idea that such a show would be taken seriously, much less prove to be a success, were hardly foregone conclusions. Music exhibitions of its type were practically non-existent outside of specialty institutions such as the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. The barrier between high and low cultures was, even such a short time in the past, still sturdy.

– Piotr Orlov The Record182

This century, visual arts museums have dramatically expanded their programming and their visitor numbers, responding to both ongoing developments in art practice and financial pressures. As the curatorial lens widens to embrace diverse disciplines such as performance art, film, fashion and architecture, exhibitions on musicians have become regular features in many major museums. Attracting a broader audience than the regular art museum visitor, these exhibitions have proved extremely popular, breaking attendance records and bringing in large profits for the museums, at a time when many institutions are in need of new revenue-raising initiatives. Yet, despite these factors which could easily lead to the exhibitions being dismissed by critics as easy revenue generators and a sign of the institutions selling out high art to popular culture, it is notable that overall they have been enthusiastically embraced by critics. Recent notable music exhibitions in major art museums have taken as their subject David Bowie, Leonard Cohen, Björk, Pink Floyd and Michael Jackson. These will be the main examples under discussion.

Kylie – The Exhibition, curated by the Melbourne Arts Centre, and enormously popular in London when presented at the V&A Museum in London in 2007, is considered by some curators as the exhibition that began the current trend of musician exhibitions in museums. However, it focussed on Kylie’s wardrobe and was generally dismissed by critics as little more than a fan attraction, with no scholarship (or catalogue) supporting its research and realization. V&A curator Victoria Broackes defended the exhibition:

There was lots of talk at the time of the Kylie exhibition about whether it was the ‘proper’ thing for the V&A to be doing – but I feel very strongly, looking at the late 20th century, that music is an essential part of culture, and our V&A collections reflect this, so it would be odd in every way to ignore it.183

Also in 2007, The Weisman Art Museum at the University of Minnesota held a Bob Dylan exhibition, curated by Colleen Sheehy, who researched and obtained many local exhibits to tell the story of Dylan’s early years in Minnesota, adding to a collection of artifacts from the Seattle Music Experience museum. A decade ago, a reporter felt obliged to comment and ask

the curator to defend the exhibition, as if featuring a legendary musician as subject of an exhibition was still in need of justification:

For Sheehy, there’s one thing people will have to acknowledge when they visit the Weisman. It’s that Bob Dylan of Hibbing, Minnesota is an artist of major significance, worthy of a museum exhibition. “He has been the subject of conversation, argument and controversy for 45 years.”

Until recently, musician exhibitions have been staged mainly in commercial contexts or within music-specific institutions. Prominent examples are the Hard Rock Café, with exhibits in its restaurants throughout the world featuring genuine music artifacts and memorabilia such as costumes and guitars; The Rock and Rock Hall of Fame in Cleveland, Ohio, which has a large roster of touring exhibitions; and Graceland, which opened a new 45 million dollar new entertainment centre in 2017, including massive exhibition spaces, located directly across the highway from Elvis’ historic Graceland mansion.

By 2013, the concept of the musician as museum subject was no longer unusual. It was the year David Bowie Is created by the V&A defines a new genre of contemporary musician exhibition. Critically acclaimed, seen by over two million people across the world, touring eleven cities in five years, bringing in over forty million dollars in ticket sales, it is an extraordinary success which exceeded all expectations. The show was extended in London and in its final days the museum opened for 72 hours straight to cater to demand. Similarly, in 2018, Brooklyn Museum extended the show at the end of its run and posted notes to manage people’s expectations: “Please be prepared to share the exhibition with a large number of Bowie fans and for longer than normal wait times.”

The entrance of the musician into the visual arts museum provides rich opportunities to experience representations of artists and their work through an art curator’s lens, realized with the full professional and financial resources of a major museum. The current interest of the visual arts museum signifies a major shift in status of the musician. The musician is suddenly brought into focus as an artist, and in the fullness of that designation, deemed worthy of this dedication of cultural resources, and given equal recognition as other kinds of artists in the museum. To be worthy of a museum show, as Victoria Broackes, the curator of *David Bowie Is*, notes, it can’t just be any musician:

Since Bowie, we’ve been inundated with offers to do other people and other shows, but many simply won’t work as a V&A exhibition. Music is important, of course, but because we don’t cover it purely from a musicological point of view – we’re not the Rock & Rock Hall of Fame – we look for subjects that impact our culture more widely: it’s not just about the band or the individual, but the world around.  

To keep up with contemporary practice in the expanded curriculum of the museum, curators have had to develop sophisticated responses to the challenge of non-traditional subjects and problems posed by non-material artwork. Throughout the history of modern and contemporary art, curators and institutions have been challenged by the dematerialization of art and its related transformations, such as the move towards social practices and the increasing proliferation of screen-based, performance and sound arts. Gallery spaces have had to become more flexible as the wall space is no longer the primary exhibition medium. Thus, it is particularly instructive to examine what happens when a visual arts museum applies its sophisticated, significant expertise and resources to the subject of a musician.

Beyond purely curatorial impulses to continue to expand the scope of the museum and explore the deeper cultural significance of musicians, it is important to note the ever-intensifying financial pressures on the museum today. These pushed a marketing sensibility deep into the logic of the museum’s operations. At a time when museums are universally under pressure to generate more revenue, and draw increasingly larger and more diverse

187 Jon Chapple, “A Museumful of Secrets.”

188 One stark example of this shift was evident in 2014 Whitney Biennial, when curators dedicated a whole floor of the museum, representing a third of the total exhibition space, to a clear space for performance art.
visitor numbers, the attraction of potential ticket sales and merchandising possibilities promised by a show on a popular musician appears irresistible.

What can be learnt by studying recent exhibitions on musicians in major museums? *David Bowie Is* requires careful consideration as its extraordinary access to the musician’s archive combined with the latest technology, created by highly skilled, experienced curators at the V&A, provides a new standard in what is possible for a musician exhibition. Another V&A show, Pink Floyd’s *Their Mortal Remains* presents different challenges and highlights by contrast the achievements of the Bowie exhibition. Other notable exhibitions considered include *Björk* at the Museum of Modern Art, which was almost universally panned and the manifestation of many problematic curatorial and management decisions. A very different curatorial approach to the musician in the museum, is to create a themed group show – that is, an exhibition of artworks that take the musician as their subject. For *Leonard Cohen: A Crack in Everything*, the Montreal Contemporary Art Centre commissioned forty prominent contemporary artists to make works on Cohen to celebrate and explore his legacy. The resulting multi-voiced, diverse and layered exhibition, which opened one year following Cohen’s death, has been extraordinarily popular and much acclaimed. Finally, the National Portrait Gallery (NPG)’s *On the Wall* exhibition of Michael Jackson is considered as a more modest realization of an “artists’ homage to a musician” concept.

This survey of recent, high-profile, contemporary exhibitions and their critical reception provides an overview of current exhibition practices relating to the musician in the museum, and a vital context for constructing an alternative model for a museum dedicated to a musician.

**Anatomy of a music exhibition in a museum**

There is a fundamental challenge in making an exhibition when the art itself is not visually present. The curator must look to and engage ‘the world around’ the art. Playing recorded music or concert video footage can’t constitute an entire exhibition that will draw in an audience, even if the most beautiful sound reproduction, or very rare, unreleased tracks. If the exhibition subject can’t be the artwork itself, the focus naturally falls on the artist to provide the conceptual centre of the exhibition. This results in a form that is often biographical. This
happens rarely in the visual arts exhibition, where the artist’s work is present as the central focus.

Without the art to show, curators employ a range of strategies to create a viable exhibition experience. This begins with the selection of an appropriate subject. Artists with theatrical personas and costumes, sophisticated visual performative elements inherent in their work tend to be the subjects.189 David Marsh, co-curator of David Bowie Is, notes that when they were identifying musicians who may be appropriate for an exhibition, “they had to be pretty significant, they had to involve art and design and performance, they had to have some connection to today and so on.”190 The most compelling subjects have additional artistic expressions, such as Björk’s music art videos, and her artistic collaborations with film/installation artists and fashion designers, David Bowie’s visual artwork, costumes and designs, and Pink Floyd’s theatrical sets and stage production techniques which can be transposed to a museum setting.

The elements of a contemporary music exhibition based on material culture require access to a significant archive, usually provided by the artist or the artist’s estate. V&A have now defined the genre for an archival musician exhibition through their leadership in initiating this genre over the past ten years, which begins with access to a core collection of significant artifacts and performance recordings (usually significant video to provide essential visual elements). Artifacts include some mix of: recorded interviews, memorabilia (awards, tickets, album artwork, rare musical releases, promotional materials), photographs (both informal and staged), clothing, musical instruments or other equipment played or owned by artist, anything handwritten (usually lyrics or diary excerpts), and any other items or documents that capture the expanded artistic activities or the working process of the artist.

How these many historical objects are collected, ordered and then presented in order to tell a coherent story of the artist becomes the central curatorial challenge. Unlike in the visual arts, the value of the exhibition items is not usually related to any item’s artistic merit, but its

189 In the exhibition subjects considered here, Leonard Cohen is a notable exception, yet as we will see this did not negatively impact on the exhibition.

historical and emotional value as property of the artist, or as rare memorabilia. So called “biographical objects”, ideally these objects will function to help narrate or illuminate the biography of the artist. As art historian Caterina Albano writes, “the biographical narratives sustained by objects are the story of the objects themselves and that of the relationships with people when their stories interweave.”¹⁹¹ These biographical objects are often the most popular elements of an exhibition, such as David Bowie’s house keys or his crack pipe, which were noted by most reviewers, and provide a glimpse into the life of the artist beyond their public persona. And yet, for all their evocative power, the inclusion of biographical objects is not integral to creating a successful, deeply moving exhibition, as we will see in the case of the Leonard Cohen exhibition.

The new standard for musician exhibitions: David Bowie Is

*David Bowie Is* treats its subject not merely as a pop star, but as an artist who, in the spot-on words of the curators’ preface, “channeled the avant-garde into the populist mainstream without compromising its subversive liberating power.”

— Piotr Orlov, *The Record*²⁹²

Created when Bowie was still alive, the curators of *David Bowie Is* were given full access to David Bowie’s archive which was maintained to museum standards under the care of a full-time curator for four years prior to their visit (See Figure 29a-b).¹⁹³ The show included 400 items from the archive.

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¹⁹² Piotr Orlov, “David Bowie Is.”

¹⁹³ “David Bowie Is – an interview with the V&A curator,” *Phaidon.*
The curators were not Bowie fans; they were working from a long list of potentially museum-worthy musicians, searching for a replacement when their project on another (undisclosed) musician had to be abandoned due to copyright issues. Bowie agreed to the exhibition under three conditions: the curators could use anything from the archive, he would have no involvement, his archivist would check all final texts only to ensure historical accuracy.\textsuperscript{194} The exhibition ran almost three years before and over two years following his death, and visitor numbers were beyond expectations, before and after. The exhibition design is at the highest level, presenting displays that include costumes, handwritten lyrics, video, and photographs. In addition, as previously noted, the inclusion of several personal items seemed to be the most popular of all, such as Bowie’s cocaine spoon from the 1970s which he used to keep in his pocket, and a set of house keys from his flat in London. From reviews it seems these items, together with a number of handwritten diary entries, are vital elements for visitors, helping anchor a highly produced, immersive, sensorily overwhelming show back to the man behind the icon.

\textit{“Sound and Vision”: an intimate, solo encounter with the artist}

\begin{quote}
Sound and vision came first here ... They’re as much an object as any of the objects.  
– Victoria Broackes, \textit{Phaidon}\textsuperscript{195}
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{194} “David Bowie Is – an interview with the V&A curator,” \textit{Phaidon.}
\footnote{195} “David Bowie Is – an interview with the V&A curator,” \textit{Phaidon.}
\end{footnotes}
The exhibition is regarded as extraordinary, not only because of its sensitive, respectful use of unlimited access to Bowie’s immaculate and comprehensive archive, but because it deploys new technology to create a new kind of exhibition experience. The curators might be seen to have forged a new exhibition methodology, utilising technology to create an immersive, intimate encounter with the artist and his work. The curators chose to sacrifice the social interaction inherent within a regular exhibition in favour of giving each individual an immersive, total experience. The environment is designed to provide each visitor a private, one-on-one audience with David Bowie and his world for a couple of hours. Broackes was particularly inspired by the seamless exhibition experience the technology enables, which was the result of a collaboration with the German audio company Sennheiser: “We had not used or seen headphones of this type, where the sound follows you. You don’t have to press any buttons, it knows where you are and it plays you the right thing at the time.”196 The choice signals the curator’s intent that each visitor have a direct connection, as far as was possible in an exhibition, in the best possible sonic and visual quality, to Bowie himself. This attention to the audience experience was deeply appreciated and doubtless contributed to extraordinary popularity of the exhibition (see Figure 29b.)

Figure 29b. David Bowie Is, Victoria & Albert Museum, London. Photo by Roberto Serra.

The use of this technology is also very comfortable for many visitors, given it reflects contemporary behaviour around music consumption. Today, many people are privately immersed in their own technology rather than engaged in social interactions in public, watching video on phones and laptops and listening to their headphones. A gallery full of people wearing headphones also suggests a proto-virtual reality environment, where the next step is offering a headset and a place to sit so the exhibition can come directly to the visitor. The interesting distinction here is that the curators have found a way through technology to help anchor the visitor more intimately with the visual and archival materials displayed. Instead of having to read extensive wall texts, the exhibition experience becomes more seamless, delivered to the body of the visitor, finding them in space. One reviewer described sensory overload caused by this approach:

Making our way through the winding and visually stunning look into Bowie’s life and cultural impact, accompanied to great effect by high-tech, location-detection-enabled sound, it’s easy to get overwhelmed by the sheer mass quantity of information being thrust at you.197

Yet the accompanying sense of disorientation, while immersed in perfect Sennheiser sound in your own private Bowie universe, is also carefully anticipated and accommodated by the curators. Instead of having to follow a set navigational path, the visitor can instead drift from ‘station to station’, and will be supported by the technology, which will follow their path. This disembodied drifting fits well with themes in Bowie’s work and allows the visitor some sense of agency within what might otherwise become a claustrophobic environment, across a number of hours.

Rather than a chronological walk-through of the music legend’s life, David Bowie Is creates separate spheres for Bowie’s creations, encapsulated by the cities, people and artists that shaped them. The exhibit functions as a constellation of Bowie’s varied

experiments, where fans can ditch ground control and float between each era like Major Tom.\textsuperscript{198}

On the other hand, an exhibition that is designed to discourage exchanges between fellow visitors seem an important loss. This is particularly relevant for a music exhibition, given the strong emotional, personal connection people often form with particular music and musicians. Considering the wealth of memories and reflections that this exhibition would trigger, as visitors walk through many decades of Bowie’s and, in most cases, their own lives in parallel, not feeling able to easily turn to a friend, or even a fellow visitor, and share a comment, is a significant loss. It is not designed as a sharing, participatory space; interrupting the immersive experience of another would surely be an intrusion, akin to talking in a movie or theatre. It is relevant to recall that the curators are performance and theatre specialists, for the exhibition is very much staged, it is a performance to be experienced, an almost individualized concert. As Mary Von Aue wrote on the exhibition:

\begin{quote}
Rather than taking cues from other museums, Broackes’ reference points came from live events. Leading a team of performance designers and audio technicians, sections of the exhibit begin to feel like private concerts.\textsuperscript{199}
\end{quote}

Yet concert-going is inherently and intrinsically social. Similarly, in an exhibition, sharing memories provoked by hearing a certain song, admiring an extraordinary outfit or being delighted by a particular object, reminiscing or sharing inspiration, feels a vital part of a music exhibition experience.

In the Bowie exhibition, the life experience and participation of the visitor is not called upon, at least not actively. The exhibition is designed not to be shared but to be experienced in solitude. This individual focus, replacing the social experience of an exhibition, does allow for something extraordinary in its place: an intimate one-on-one engagement with the subject. Combined with the important freedom that allows the visitor to design their own exhibition choreography, rather than follow a linear narrative, it also provides a sense of privacy that may help intensify the experience: no one else knows that this line of the song makes you

\textsuperscript{198} Mary Von Aue, “David Bowie Retrospective.”
\textsuperscript{199} Mary Von Aue, “David Bowie Retrospective.”
cry, for example, as no one else is listening at exactly the same time. No one else is going to notice if you are stuck in place watching the same clip again and again because you love it or it reminds you of something special. Thus, the audible isolation creates a shield of privacy and the visitor creates a script that is uniquely their own. The immense popularity of the show proves this personal, immersive experience works. It is the opposite of participatory, in a social sense; the visitor’s role is to move their body passively and quietly through the space, to receive the experience.

The super-fan in the museum

Preparing an exhibition that speaks to very different audiences is a perennial challenge, especially when the audience will include those with casual familiarity with the artist all the way through to obsessive “super-fans” who have encyclopaedic knowledge of the artist and their work.

Co-curator Geoffrey Marsh speaks of this burden of expectations, anticipating intense responses from fans, yet also revealing he entirely misses the point with fans:

So we got to a point six or eight months ago where we realised we’re never going to get to the point for a typical V&A visitor who wants a definitive show, or to fans who just want to see the stuff or designers who want maybe something else again.200

Yet as writer Mark Dery so clearly explains, fans want the opposite of ‘seeing the stuff’. A fan wants the artist to be honoured properly, and hopes to see some depth and strong research behind the tribute. Dery is frustrated by the lack of emotional depth and intellectual rigour in the show, pleading,

If Bowie’s body of work is serious enough to merit the museum treatment, doesn’t it deserve serious scrutiny, and not just in the exhibition catalogue but in the exhibition itself? A wall text mentions “the weightier philosophies and writers – from the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche to the occultist Aleister Crowley – who are thought

to have influenced” Bowie’s song “Oh! You Pretty Things” (*Hunky Dory*) but tells us zilch about those ideas, or why they mattered to Bowie.\(^{201}\)

Dery’s passionate critique of the show, entitled *Ziggy’s Reliquaries*, notes that the darkened space with spotlit ‘relics’ feels like ‘perpetual twilight’, and talks of the overall ‘sepulchral feel’. He feels a loss that perhaps comes from the curators not being Bowie fans themselves, as the exhibition appears uninformed and uninterested in Bowie’s impact on his audience in deeper ways. He notices the absence of any thematic focus, such as sexuality or religion, two important threads in Bowie’s work. As an example, Dery talks about Bowie’s significant influence on fans in his role as “trailblazing gendernaut” who as a “polysexual androgyne gave countless gay, trans and genderqueer kids the courage to come out the closet.”\(^{202}\) He wonders why

*Bowie is* isn’t longer on that sort of fan ethnography and shorter on hagiography. After all, it’s the fans who make (or unmake) a messiah, teasing out the complexities and contradictions in his life and art through their microscopic scrutiny of every move he makes – the hermeneutics of obsession.\(^{203}\)

Similarly, visitors to Paisley Park Museum experience a curatorial void around Prince’s lifelong meditation and play on sexuality and God which is nowhere even hinted at, along with Prince’s sense of humour. A fan visiting Paisley Park gave a plaintive protest:

I didn’t want a children 12 and under tour through vignettes of movie clips alongside corresponding props and outfits, or a purple piano with scuffs on top from his dancing shoes. I wanted his life to bloom before us with insights and disclosures that didn’t really need to be taken to the grave.\(^{204}\)

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\(^{202}\) Mark Dery, “*Ziggy’s Reliquaries.*”

\(^{203}\) Mark Dery, “*Ziggy’s Reliquaries.*”

Dery’s point about fans’ obsessive knowledge is vital and instructive. As will be seen in the next chapter, fans can play a vital role in the museum, but currently this is not integrated into contemporary curatorial practices. This is inevitably experienced as a loss for many museum visitors who, as at Paisley Park Museum, may know considerably more than the curators. Dery’s focus on the fan helps emphasize the special contributions they could make, if only invited into the process:

Fans are close readers, wringing deep meaning out of pop texts the rest of us dismiss as disposable. They complicate matters, and this viewer, at least, found himself craving a little complication as he exited through the gift shop.\textsuperscript{205}

However there was one place for recognizing the fans within the exhibition, which is due to Bowie himself. In the New York iteration of the Bowie show, Brooklyn Museum curator Matthew Yokobosky added eighty new pieces and created a whole new section about David Bowie’s work in New York. One element particularly delighted audiences – a section dedicated to Bowie fan art. (see Figure 30).

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fan_art_in_david_bowie_is_new_york_2018.jpg}
\caption{Fan Art in \textit{David Bowie Is}, New York, June 2018. Photo by Arun Saldanha.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{205} Mark Dery, “Ziggy’s Reliquaries.”
“People made art for him beginning in the 1970s and he always kept all of his fan art,” Yokobosky said, “but it’s never been seen in public before.” In the final chapter, the multiple, complicating voices and viewpoints of fans and the artists’ diverse audience will be discussed as an important source for a museum dedicated to a musician.

**The immersive experience: Their Mortal Remains**

Building on the success of *David Bowie Is*, in 2017 curator Victoria Broackes created *Their Mortal Remains*, an exhibition on Pink Floyd. It broke the *Bowie* attendance records in London, attracting over 400,000 visitors, and is expected to do equally well worldwide on its own eleven city international tour.

A very different approach was needed to Bowie, as Pink Floyd is famously averse to publicity. The title of the review in *The Telegraph* sums it up: “Ambitious, fascinating and faceless – just like Pink Floyd themselves”:

> Imaginatively conceived, fascinatingly curated, beautifully designed and stunningly realised, the Pink Floyd exhibition is something of an audio-visual tour de force for a museum that has become adept at putting pop culture in a highbrow gallery space. If, ultimately, it does not have the revelatory impact and intense personality of the V&A’s ground-breaking *David Bowie Is* exhibition in 2013, that is perhaps inherent in the nature of an oddly faceless band.

The exhibition is remarkably impersonal, perhaps somewhat due to the lack of public personas of the band members who resisted being regular popstars. Critics note the one personal element was a photo of former band member Syd Barret visiting the band years after he left due to mental health issues. “He is affectionately recalled on one wall display but, without him, the rest of the exhibition is beset by a peculiar lack of human focus.”

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206 Mary Von Aue, “David Bowie Retrospective.”


208 Neil McCormack, “Ambitious, fascinating and faceless.”
However, the band is known for its theatrical stage sets and Broackes wisely focuses on this visual element (See Figure 31). The production design leads the exhibition, which is immersive and psychedelic. Broackes worked with the band’s creative personnel, characterising it as a:

massive collaboration between the V&A and Pink Floyd ... the band members, particularly Nick Mason, but notably the creative individuals, designers and architects they have worked with over many years ... That combination of authentic staging, amazing sound, rock’n’roll spectacle and the V&A has really shone through in the success of the exhibition and the popularity with not just fans, but with a diverse audience of all ages.209


This exhibition seems to tip the balance more to a straightforward music experience, rather than a curatorially rigorous exploration of the band, their music and its impact. Listening to incredible music on perfect headphones, while walking through installations of album

artwork, appears the key experience. The same David Bowie Is technology is used, with Sennheiser partnering to provide headphones and the location-activated exhibition experience.

It may be stating the obvious to say that music is vital to the Pink Floyd story, but this exhibition would be much diminished as a walking tour without the Bluetooth headphones bringing static installations to musical life. While it is a treat to walk through a darkened corridor illuminated by a holographic representation of the pyramid prism from Dark Side of the Moon, it is still the swirling keyboards and cosmic lead solo that really blow the mind. 210

This exhibition is an interesting provocation, as it seems to demonstrate, unlike the sophistication and rigour of the David Bowie show, that if the musician or band are popular enough, it would be sufficient to create a handsome, 4D immersive walk through of a band’s music and visitors will be satisfied. With a large international tour currently underway, Their Mortal Remains is expected to equal or surpass Bowie’s total visitor count of two million. 211 Arguably, this is simply a very different kind of experience, and becomes closer to a replication of seeing the band live, or at least restaging and evoking it, than an intellectual, emotional exploration of the deeper themes, history and influences of the subject. Critic Neil McCormick notes,

Three later rooms featuring recreations of overblown cover and stage designs that lack any intellectual rigour or artistic purpose, effectively a monument to a band who had by then become a monument to themselves. 212

In these ways it is interesting that the curator is the same for the Bowie and Pink Floyd shows and doesn’t talk much about the differences between them. When questioned she seems to consider them of one genre. When asked if she thinks Bowie was responsible for launching

210 Neil McCormack, “Ambitious, fascinating and faceless.”
212 Neil McCormack, “Ambitious, fascinating and faceless.”
the current interest in music exhibitions, Broackes agrees and attributes it to the combination of the technology with the powerful emotional connection of the audience to the artist:

Part of the reason for that, I think, was the way in which we brought live performance techniques, such as immersive sound and video, into the museum environment ... I think we’ve tapped into that desire for an experience, for the audience to be part of the show. In addition to the technological aspect ...[w]hat’s interesting about these kind of exhibitions is that, compared to a traditional museum exhibit, the audience already have a lot of strong opinions; they’re already totally invested in the artist or the subject matter.213

Broackes believe this curatorial approach allows space for the audience to bring their own story – though it is not clear how, unless she means as a deeply interiorised experience, for the experience is constructed as solo, private, silent:

What we’re doing here is not only showing wonderful things to inform, inspire and ignite the visitor’s imagination, but allowing people to bring their own story to the exhibition and experience the emotions associated with that. With David Bowie Is, people got so into the mood that they were hugging, dancing, singing, crying ...214

It is clear a new genre of music exhibition is emerging: hugely popular, high-tech, high production value, sensorily immersive. At the same time, Bowie contrasts sharply with Pink Floyd, as it still brought through the best qualities of more traditional exhibition practices—deeply researched, nuanced, expertly presented archival material. There is a danger that the immersive experience could become an empty form that trades on the visitor’s emotional connection to the music, and delivers a sensory experience, yet lacks a deeper engagement with the subject. Either way, the V&A model for curating music, as this could well be known, is likely to be strongly influential on the exhibition culture to come. Broackes notes, “Weirdly, we seem to have pioneered a genre that’s going to make lots of other people lots of money.”215

213 Jon Chapple, “A Museumful of Secrets.”
Another exhibition that features an artist working directly with the curator and institution is Björk at MoMA. Unlike the V&A juggernaut, this collaboration did not produce successful results.

**Curatorial indifference to the audience: Björk at MoMA**

It is difficult to find a recent exhibition so universally and viciously condemned by critics. *Björk*, held in 2015, was promoted as a major, mid-career survey, and was MoMA’s first exhibition dedicated to a musician. The contrast between the realization and reception of this exhibition compared to the V&A’s *David Bowie Is* is striking. Chief Curator Klaus Biesenbach approached Björk many years prior but the artist resisted. When asked about the exhibition in 2015 by the *Irish Times* just before the show opened, she said, “It’s a really functional problem, just how do you put music and sound in a visual museum? I told the curator that it couldn’t be just memorabilia because that would be very boring, all those dresses.” It is unknown why she changed her mind and agreed to do the show, but this same interview reports she is excited about the exhibition and its different elements, such as the way the videos and props are presented, making clear she has positive expectations for it. Whilst uncomfortable about including her dresses, she says, “We’re trying to somehow show people that these outfits I wore were an extension of the music and that they were part of an emotional journey.” The exhibition was promoted as a direct artistic collaboration between Björk and Biesenbach. MoMA released informal images of the two sitting on the floor looking over her diaries.

The introduction of a musician as subject into the MoMA was met with great resistance. The critics took issue with Biesenbach’s widely known obsession with celebrity culture and took this opportunity of a poorly conceived and realised show to launch broader attacks and even call for him to step down. Björk herself is an excellent subject for an exhibition, providing at least as many dimensions to work with as Bowie. All critics agreed on her qualifications as a subject. Her extraordinary, continually experimental output as a musician, her Icelandic roots which she has engaged throughout her career, her ever-changing theatrical personas for each new album, her extensive collaborations with visual artists and filmmakers for highly

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217 Jim Carroll, “Björk: ‘We need music so much.’”
innovative music videos and live shows, and with fashion designers to create other worldly outfits, and her profound feminist and ecologically sensitive lyrics all provide rich materials for a major exhibition. It is noteworthy too, that many of her collaborators have works presented in major art museums, for example, filmmaker Michel Gondry, and fashion designer Alexander McQueen.218

Most critics feel Björk is not well served by this exhibition. The title of Roberta Smith’s *New York Times* review captures it perfectly: “Björk, One of a Kind Artist, Proves Elusive at MoMA.”

Björk should have said no – not because her work isn’t museum-worthy but because, as proved here, the Modern is not up to the task. The show is billed as a “midcareer survey,” but its disappointing catalog indicates little of the research, documentation or context setting that such projects usually entail, and the exhibition hasn’t been allotted much more gallery space than one of the museum’s “projects series” showing work by emerging artists. Given the number of Björk fans it will probably attract, the show’s future as a logistical nightmare seems clear.219

Experiencing the exhibition, it is impossible to understand why it had been given so little floorspace, so little budget, so little care in preparation. It is equally impossible to understand why none of Björk’s sophisticated visual sensibility permeates, let alone takes over the space, to create an other worldly domain as she does in her music and her video works. This absence, of what might have been, is strongly present all around the experience of the exhibition. Instead of taking over the atrium’s large space, which many artists have successfully done, for example Pipilotti Rist, or Marina Abramovic, the exhibition was inexplicably confined to an enclosed, tiny, claustrophobic, temporary black pavilion within it.

218 The fashion designer Alexander McQueen was himself the subject of a highly acclaimed museum show, *Savage Beauty*, curated by Andrew Bolton at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. It opened in 2011, only a year after McQueen’s suicide. Exquisitely realised and featuring an extraordinary collection of McQueen’s creations, and including a hologram of model Kate Moss strutting a catwalk in his designs, it broke all attendance records in New York and again in London at the V&A, where it still holds the record as most popular show in the history of the museum, attracting 480,000 visitors in its five month run in 2015. See Mark Brown, “Pink Floyd exhibition set to become V&A’s most visited music show,” *Guardian*, August 30, 2017.

(see Figures 32a-b). This choice restricted the number of people who could enter, and thus made the viewing conditions pressured and uncomfortable, and the wait lines unmanageable for anyone but the most determined visitors.

Figure 32a. Björk pavilion built inside the atrium at MoMA, March 2015. Photo by Benjamin Sutton.

Figure 32b Björk at MoMA installation view. March 2015. Photo by Ben Davis
The visitor experience was severely compromised by the exhibition design. Given the popularity of MoMA and Björk together, it is inexplicable that no thought was given in the exhibition planning and execution to anticipate the large visitor demand. As Smith notes:

the Björk exhibition stands as a glaring symbol of the museum’s urge to be all things to all people, its disdain for its core audience, its frequent curatorial slackness and its indifference to the handling of crowds and the needs of its visitors. To force this show, even in its current underdone state, into the atrium’s juggernaut of art, people and poor design is little short of hostile. It superficially promotes the Modern’s hipness while making the place even more unpleasant than usual. Given that the pavilion seems designed to comfortably hold around 300 to 350 people, those Björk fans are going to spend a great deal of time waiting in line or, worse, near the pavilion.220

The space issues frustrated and confined the visitor experience. Critic Deborah Solomon identifies vital curatorial elements missing within this inhospitable environment: “There is absolutely no information to put her work into context or see how it evolves, and we can’t really feel anything because it’s so crowded and the traffic flow does not work at all.”221

The curatorial choices are inexplicable, apparently lazy, and perhaps intentionally provocative. Rather than taking the meticulously researched approach of the Bowie curators, with their evident delight in sharing a wide range of Bowie’s archives with an audience, Biesenbach engaged some commercial display tropes and offered no interpretive texts. The inclusion of life-size mannequins of Björk wearing various outfits throughout the show evoked, as Guardian critic Jason Farago noted, a celebrity wax museum, and the rooms dedicated to albums gave a feel of a display of props more akin to the Hard Rock Café. Farago sums up the major problem of the exhibition:

It’s not a show of material culture, like the Victoria & Albert Museum’s shows of Kylie Minogue or David Bowie. But it also isn’t a “mid-career retrospective”, as MoMA has eagerly billed it, and any ostensible effort to give music the same

220 Roberta Smith, “Björk, One of a Kind Artist Proves Elusive at MoMA.”
consideration as painting or sculpture seems not to have taken place. It’s one part Rock and Roll Hall of Fame exercise, one part science lab, one part synesthesia experiment, one part Madame Tussaud’s parody – but it is not two parts anything. What are its aims? I spent hours in it, and more besides with the catalogue, and I still don’t know. 222

The audio guide created by Björk’s close collaboration with Sjon also seems to have jarred with the audience. It was the opposite of the Bowie effect, with its surround-sound, concert-like experience. The curator used the audio guide as another work in itself, which narrates Björk’s career as a fairytale, following a girl through various kingdoms, interspersed between the songs. It was intended to accompany the visitor through the exhibition, but its timing was off, far too slow and long, given the crush of the visitors, the work displayed, and need to move along through the show. Overall the audio guide created confusion, annoyance or simply sensory overload as the viewer moved through the exhibition.

The exhibition teaches through its failures to respect both the artist and the audience. Respect for the artist would have necessitated more careful and creative planning and preparation, allocation of adequate gallery space, appropriate design and a clear curatorial frame to contextualise the artist’s work in a visual arts museum. Respect for the audience would have required anticipating the visitor numbers and designing the exhibition to accommodate, and provide a generous context for the work presented in order that visitors could have a deeper, more meaningful encounter with Björk’s work beyond gazing at artwork from albums and outfits.

Exhibition as homage: Leonard Cohen: A Crack in Everything

“I was crying all the way through,” the 83-year-old singer said. “My heart was beating fast. There were so many people and that was really encouraging. They needed to go, and me too. I needed to go.”

– Singer Nana Mouskouri, a longtime friend of Cohen, on visiting the exhibition.223


A very different model for a musician exhibition is one that features commissioned work of established contemporary artists on the subject of the musician-artist. *Leonard Cohen: A Crack in Everything* opened at the Montreal Contemporary Art Centre (MCAC) opened in November 2017, on the first anniversary of his death. It was the most ambitious, expensive and successful show in the MCAC’s history, attracting over 300,000 visitors and is probably the most accomplished art exhibition ever on an artist whether living or deceased. The museum was able to secure significant funding as part of Montreal’s 375th anniversary celebrations. It was in preparation for a couple of years prior to Cohen’s death and the curator received Cohen’s blessing when he heard it would not be biographical but about artists responding to his work. Curator John Zeppetelli commented on Cohen’s cooperation:

I think it’s because this wasn’t a hagiography, it wasn’t a collection of his fedoras. This show was contemporary art commissions where we invited artists to think about Leonard Cohen’s cultural output, to be displayed in Montreal, the city he came back to – to be buried.

Twenty works, engaging forty artists in total, from one hundred countries, were commissioned for the exhibition, which is significant as it means none of the work was created spontaneously as outpourings of love or admiration. On the other hand, the participating artists are all highly respected and even if not all Cohen fans, each responded through their different lens and practices to contribute to what became collectively a serious, sustained study, an honouring of the artist and his impact on his world. Zeppetelli noted that many of the artists were approached prior to Cohen’s death.

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Everything about the exhibition, from the huge banners with Cohen’s image posted on the building outside and street banners around town, to the vast gallery floorspace allocated, to the high production value of all the works, conveyed abiding respect for the artist. The only curious omission given such an expensive, major undertaking, was a lack of catalogue and any critical texts framing the exhibition.

It was evident that careful thought was given to crafting the visitor’s journey through the exhibition. There was a clear direction and sequence built into the design. The first main room was designed as a welcome: an enormous carpeted space with a large multi-channel video work *Passing Through* George Fok that wrapped three walls and took form as a documentary highlighting Cohen’s most iconic performances and career moments. (see Figure 33). The sound was full, and images were perfect. The room was packed with people on the weekend I attended, most of whom stayed for the entire twenty-minute film. There were tears and laughter and it was a warm community feel, with people sitting on the floor and on seats, in intimate proximity to strangers. It was a generous welcome to all, and a very effective way for people to quickly re-attune to the artist and prepare themselves for works about Cohen which were more subjective and idiosyncratic.

![Figure 33 Leonard Cohen Exhibition, Montreal, November 2017. Photo by MCAC](image)
In the second large room, another multi-screen documentary was playing more about Cohen’s writing and his process. This provided a deeper view into some details of his life-work. After this, the exhibition moved into smaller rooms and the work became less focused on direct images on Cohen, and far more interpretative and idiosyncratic, and the exhibition design encouraged visitors to chart their own journey through a very large exhibition.

The Cohen exhibition provides a somewhat ideal version of Annis’ three spaces of the museum. It invited the visitor to fully inhabit their own dream space as one is free to roam at will, in any order and pace, in the generous, calm space; it provided clear cognitive engagement through its excellent wall labels and thoughtful layout; and it allowed fully for the pragmatic social space of the museum to be experienced, with many visitors attending in groups and standing about chatting and sharing observations throughout the exhibition space and other visitors moving through in solitude, at their own pace. A beautifully rendered timeline was a popular highlight at the very end of the exhibition. It was text only and took over an entire wall, but many people seemed to read and linger over every detail, as if they didn’t want to leave the artist and his life after being in the exhibition for the past hour or two. Around me, some visitors cried at this quiet, culmination point of the exhibition, as it returned the focus back from interpretations of the artist and his work, to the biography of the artist himself and his long, extraordinary life.

_Candice Breitz: “Anthropology of the Fan”_

One work within the Cohen exhibition is worth particular consideration within the scope of this research project given its focus on the artist’s fans. The largest space of all within the Cohen exhibition was dedicated to _I’m Your Man (A Portrait of Leonard Cohen) (2017)_ a nineteen-channel video installation by South African artist Candice Breitz. Breitz is well known for her cycle of work on the ‘anthropology of the fan’ in which she films fans of a particular musician re-performing a full album, and then presents multiple channel video installations showing a number of fans all at once, in sync, acapella. She calls these installations portraits of the musicians, not the fans. She has made work focusing on the fans of Bob Marley, Michael Jackson, Madonna and John Lennon, filmed in Jamaica, Berlin, Milan and Newcastle respectively. In each of these earlier works, she had a clear, formal procedure. In her chosen city, she advertised on fan sites and in the local newspaper to invite...
fans’ participation. She had a selection process which included a detailed questionnaire to ensure from the hundreds of applicants she only worked with the most committed fans. Age, singing or dancing capacity or gender were not relevant to the selection process. She would film each person singing the full album, without giving any direction about singing or dancing or what to do. Fans could bring props and wear whatever they wished.

The effect is to highlight the vulnerability of the fan, and it can be moving and funny and weird. The artist provokes the viewer to meditate on what fandom is and her work reveals how together the different fans of one particular artist do add up to a portrait of the artist themselves. On a superficial level, one can immediately perceive the relaxed joy of Marley, the sass and self-confidence of Madonna, the earnest rage of Lennon, the style and fragility of Jackson. The formality of the work and its apparent sadism – imagine performing a whole album without break in front of a camera in a bare studio alone other than the crew and a director who gives no direction- does put the fan in a vulnerable, objectified position. It feels at times as if the structure of the work is set up to shame the fan who loves the artist so much that they would be willing to come and perform it in this way, in tribute to their hero. It’s problematic work, as if the fans are specimen under examination. On the other hand, the strong formal aspects of the work provide structure to what would otherwise not find a public platform. Breitz’s work is important to this current research, as it is one of the few examples of artwork being made on and with fans.
For Cohen, Breitz has created a more sophisticated version of her fan portrait work. In this commission, she called for men over 65 in Montreal who were long-term fans. This specification helps to refine the focus and of course echoes Cohen as older man from Montreal. Breitz chooses full-body portraits, reproduced almost life size on individual screens arranged in a circle. The audience walks into the circle at any point and can sit in the centre or walk by each man face to face and watch and listen to him performing not a full album but only a single song, “I’m Your Man”. An additional dimension to this work is the presence of Jewish male choir from the local synagogue where Cohen was a member. The choir has recorded the other parts of the song, to back up the men. There is a film of them performing this in the lobby before the main room. This adds a new layer of personal connection to Cohen, provokes reflection on Cohen’s religion and beliefs, and also suggests the support that a spiritual congregation can offer the individual, as they literally provide a musical foundation for the solo performances of the men inside of the room.

As with Breitz’ work on the fan, which advances the idea that a collection of individual fans expressing themselves adds up to a portrait of their favourite artist, so too the entire Leonard Cohen exhibition works to create a powerful, multi-voiced, multidimensional portrait of
Leonard Cohen, as seen through the eyes of contemporary artists. This is a powerful, informing idea for the People’s Museum for Prince which through the collection of his audience’s stories, personal objects and artistic expressions, aims to create a multi-dimensional, highly personal, group portrait of Prince, through the eyes and hearts of those whose lives he touched.

**Michael Jackson: arranging pictures On the Wall**

The National Portrait Gallery in London has been suffering well-publicised financial troubles in past years and it was speculated that a summer show on Michael Jackson, *On the Wall*, based on the success of the V&A music exhibitions, was a way to achieve a significant boost in visitor numbers. Reviews featured titles such as, “Can Michael Jackson Turn the Tide for London’s National Portrait Gallery? Hopes Are Pinned on a Blockbuster.” Given the show has a very light curatorial thesis, it’s perhaps not unfair criticism. Approximately half the works in the show were commissioned. Nicholas Cullinan, the Director of the Gallery, says the starting point for the exhibition was noticing that Jackson has long been a popular subject for contemporary artists: “All the artists included – despite coming from different generations and parts of the world, and employing a range of media – are fascinated by what Jackson represented and what he invented.”

Compared to Leonard Cohen’s exhibition, which creates a sense of artists deeply engaging with different aspects of the artist’s work and life and with a clear sense of homage, this show appears as an assembly of works made about Michael Jackson and has a more superficial engagement with the subject. Perhaps this is largely due to the two subjects’ very different personalities and roles in people’s lives, with Cohen urging people to look deeper within and Jackson celebrated as pop icon, obsessed with his image. One reviewer attempted to grasp the focus of the show:

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It is not a chronology of Michael Jackson’s life, nor does it seek to tell his story. It is just a gathering together of random contemporary artworks that are united by the simple fact that they depict the late singer in some way, shape or form.²²⁹

From the reviews, the overall effect seems more akin to an enjoyable, undemanding, entertainment than a more serious show delving into deeper questions of Jackson as icon. Candice Breitz’s *King* (See Figure 34) was included and much loved by critics. There were also a number of works that engage with race, which most critics highlight, including Kehinde Wiley’s equestrian portrait of Jackson, commissioned by Jackson but unfinished at the time of his death. The lack of any particular theme or focus which makes it feel like no more than assemblage gives an impression that the curator’s rationale for selection was to include any and all established contemporary artists who have created work on Jackson (with the notable absence of Jeff Koon’s infamous sculpture “Michael Jackson and Bubbles”). The publications accompanying the exhibition have a similarly broad focus: there is a fan-directed publication produced by the NPG for this exhibition which is simply a celebration of Jackson, with lots of photos. There is also a regular catalogue with essays by Zadie Smith and others.

Figures have not been released about the success of the show as yet, but it is reported to have a lucrative European tour already in place, and will open in Paris at the end of November 2018. Overall, the exhibition does not cohere into something greater than the sum of its parts, yet, as in the case of the Pink Floyd exhibition, dedicated music fans are keen to engage in all manner of tributes to their favourite musicians. Michael Barron, writing on a proudly opinionated music fan platform *xsnoize* take consolation in the music itself, noting that even though the artworks may not “break new ground”, the use of music in the exhibition is important, even revolutionary, in the way it dominates the gallery space:

The fact that people could admire the works, dance at the same time and reminisce over Michael Jackson and the happy memories associated with his music is something

no Picasso, Van Gogh, Da Vinci, Gauguin or Impressionist exhibition could ever be expected to accomplish.\textsuperscript{230}

Thus, even if an exhibition such as Jackson’s may lack of the highest quality of dedicated curatorial rigour and immersive spaces, compared with the Bowie and Cohen exhibitions, it can still provide the audience an opportunity to engage in the thrill of experiencing different artistic interpretations of their much-loved icon.

\textbf{Conclusion}

The recent emergence of extremely popular, lavishly prepared exhibitions on musicians in museums offers some new approaches and also demonstrates the ongoing challenges of making exhibitions about musicians and bringing the musician as subject into the museum. \textit{David Bowie Is} has created a new model, demonstrating what can happen when access to an artist’s archive is combined with the full cultural and material resources of an elite cultural institution and the curatorial freedom to take risks. Collaboration with a corporate sponsor is a regular museum practice today and in this case sponsor Sennheiser also worked as a creative, technical partner to develop creative sonic exhibition solutions that helped the museum’s curators realise their concept of creating a sense of being at a concert more than being in a regular exhibition.

\textit{A Crack in Everything}, Leonard Cohen’s exhibition, equally advances a different kind of model, a tribute exhibition, based on artworks created in response to the artist, instead of archival material. Here music itself is not the focus, nor the personal life of the artist. Instead, the artist’s music and biography are present only as they appear as inspirations or points of focus in each artist’s work. Creating a tribute exhibition in a major art institution necessarily suggests the need to commission work from artists of stature in the contemporary art world, whether or not they are fans themselves. This is an interesting, successful strategy which preserves the usual logic of the contemporary art museum. In contrast is \textit{Björk}’s disruption of MoMA, where the inclusion of outfits on life size Björk mannequins and music videos

seemed dramatically out of place, and resulted in denigrating rather than elevating the musician as artist.

Taken together, these exhibitions demonstrate the current state of representing the musician in the art museum. They each employ different strategies to engage the visitor, and shape their experience. From the sonically immersive yet free-floating narrative space of Bowie, to the claustrophobically constrictive pavilion of Bjork, that leaves no agency for the visitor, to the walk-through visual-album concept of Pink Floyd, the spacious, invitational journey through an artists’ homage to Cohen, to a breezy encounter with Michael Jackson, the visitor is constructed and addressed in multiple ways. The museum visitor to these exhibitions is also usually a member of the artist’s audience, drawn by their love for, or interest in, the musician. The next chapter considers a different kind of approach to musician exhibitions in the museum, shifting the focus from the artist to audience.
Chapter Four: The People’s Museum For Prince

This chapter begins with a discussion of the curatorial context that informs the development of the new People’s Museum for Prince. The second part introduces the model for this museum, and discusses how it was tested through its first manifestation as an exhibition in Minneapolis and the outcomes of this experiment. It concludes that the research yielded results and responses that indicate the model is successful, and that it is worth pursuing to a full realization in the future.

1. Curatorial Contexts

The institution as critical form

In the following discussion, I explore concepts relating to the exhibition as critical form, institution-as-project, institutional critique and new institutionalism – practices that have greatly influenced the People’s Museum for Prince project. I invoke some examples of practitioners and projects that directly inform my thinking on the museum.

As a curator and arts manager, my influences are informed by studying and working in graduate art programs at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) and Columbia University School of the Arts. Since my curatorial studies began in 2004 in Chicago, I was immersed in the contemporary, critical art practices that were emerging out of the late 1990s, including social and collaborative practices, and new institutionalism, which were especially emphasized at the SAIC. Collaborative, critical art making was a central focus. My master’s thesis work at SAIC was on collaborative curatorial practices and I worked with over thirty SAIC artists to realise two large-scale exhibition projects as part of my work. After graduation, I worked on a collaborative curatorial project to design a new art school, and set up a temporary school during my arts residency at Point B in Brooklyn that gathered artists for critques, workshops and critical discussions in an informal atmosphere.

In the present research, I frame the creative project as an institution, rather than a temporary exhibition. This is crucial to the work, for the museum is both a conceptual frame, invoking the gravity of a museum and its formality, and a statement of intent, that is, a vision for a physical institution to be created. My interest in institutions as critical, creative projects is
long standing. In my professional work in art schools in Australia, the USA, and Singapore, as student, manager, educator, and curator over the past twenty years, I have been engaged in questions of transforming the institution from within, and have had a sustained interest in and passion for questioning the art school as institution. Immediately preceding this project, I was engaged in research towards designing a new model for an alternative art school. As well as considering older, historical models for innovative art schools such as Bauhaus and Black Mountain College, my research focused on the institutions of art schools and experimental pedagogical projects, especially those emerging from what was named the ‘pedagogical turn’ in the early 2000s. At that time, many artists and curators became intensely interested in questions of art school and in experimenting with new and alternative forms, and initiated diverse forms of pedagogical projects that manifested inside and outside the art world, as art projects, biennales, symposia and publications. I will discuss a couple of these projects – Mildred’s Lane, an experimental arts residency, and Manifesta 6, an art school as exhibition – in more depth later in this chapter. Writing on the pedagogical turn in art in 2007, art historian Claire Bishop noted the potential contribution artists can make to the field of education: “The straitjacket of efficiency and conformity that accompanies authoritarian models of education seems to beg for playful, interrogative, and autonomous opposition. Art is just one way to release this grip.” These practices which playfully engage and seriously question the conventions of arts institutions, in this case, the art school, create a backdrop to the current research, informing my approach to the People’s Museum for Prince as an experimental institution.

New institutionalism and the role of the curator

James Voorhies’ recent book Beyond Objecthood draws on many disparate artists and practices to create a history of the exhibition as critical form, tracing its beginnings back to the curatorial innovations of Harold Szeeman in the late 1960s, through to new institutionalism and the rise of the new genre of curator-as-author. Voorhies notes: “The form


of the work, be it exhibition-as-school or an empty gallery open twenty-four hours a day, is
the critical challenge this work proposes, as opposed to blatantly political content.”

‘New institutionalism’ was a popular term in Europe, in the first decade of this century, but
never quite gained traction in the US. Claire Doherty has written extensively on this topic,
and defines it as “a field of curatorial practice, institutional reform and critical debate
concerned with the transformation of art institutions from within”234. It is seen as the
absorption of institutional critique back into the institution itself, as James Voorhies suggests,
creating “a continuous form of autocritique within the institution.”235

Voorhies aligns the rise of new institutionalism with the new position of the curator which
has shifted from keeper of a collection and organizer of exhibitions to a powerful cultural
agent. Harold Szeeman earlier redefined the role of the curator as a key creative force
through his work in the late 1960s, which caused many artists to resist and even publicly
protest what seemed to be a diminishment of their own agency. Today, Maria Lind is
emblematic of this new genre of curator. Doherty notes Lind “spearheaded a more
performative, authorial curatorial position which has become the touchstone of new
institutional practice, particularly in Europe.”236

The influential New York-based organization Independent Curators International scopes out
a similarly powerful role in its definition of the curator today as “a contextualising force”,
“one that develops infrastructure for contemporary artists and art discourse in different
contexts throughout the world.”237

When asked about the tasks of the curator, Maria Lind responded:

234 Claire Doherty, “The institution is dead! Long live the institution! Contemporary Art and New
235 James Voorhies, Beyond Objecthood, 72.
236 James Voorhies, Beyond Objecthood, 74.
237 Ksenia Kaverina, “Operating as a Curator: An Interview with Maria Lind” CuMMA Papers #21, (Helsinki:
More important to me is what you can do as a curator, and what you’re allowed to do. I like to be able to shape the situation quite thoroughly; it’s not only about selecting artists and putting up the show, but also how this invitation is happening, what the circumstances are in terms of the preparation period, production of new works, mediation activities and so on.238

It is largely because of this redefined role of the curator as author, as creative generator of the project, that it was possible to conceive of the People’s Museum for Prince as a curatorial project that works directly with a non-arts based public for the work and artifacts it displays. Viewing the exhibition as an artwork in itself, or the curator as artist, is by now a familiar trope in contemporary practice.

**Inside / outside the institutions of art**

This research, with its focus on the audience and fans of a musician, has required me to work outside of the sphere of the visual arts realm. In his book *Dark Matter*, Greg Sholette writes about how the mainstream art world draws on the dark matter or unseen work of innovative, experimental artists practising outside this visible art world, who do not have access to its benefits:

> Look again at the art world and the dark matter it occludes. Few would deny that the lines separating “dark” and “light” creativity, amateur and professional, high from low have become arbitrary today, even from the standpoint of qualities such as talent, vision, and other similarly mystifying attributes typically assigned to high culture.239

Working outside the visual arts world context that informs my curatorial practice has brought into stark relief how differently arts communities perceive and position work. What in New York would be immediately understood in context as a conceptual project was, in Minneapolis, perceived at times as simply an exhibition of outsider art or fan art. There is a long tradition of making a distinction between “ naïve” art and fine art, and popular culture and art. As curator, I was also aware that I was contributing to this perception because of my

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238 Ksenia Kaverina, “Operating as a Curator: An Interview with Maria Lind,” *CuMMA Papers #21*.

need to connect with a community outside the art world. Calling upon the Prince fan community and audience-at-large as my source of contributors, I chose language that focused on this audience, a vast majority of whom are not participants in the visual arts world. The idea of a museum that called for and exhibited the stories, artwork and personal objects of those whose lives were touched by Prince was already a new, unusual concept. I didn’t want to risk alienating any potential contributors who might feel excluded if I utilized the language and tropes of the art world. I experimented with different ways to explain the project, but in the end chose a plain language statement that merely communicates its essence on a pragmatic level.

I believe this was the correct approach for the first iteration, being sensitive to the communities I was seeking to engage. However, it also masked the other level at which this project was intended as it meant that it was operating outside its informing contexts. Even so, Andrea Fraser contests the idea that it is even possible to work in art outside what we understand to be the art world. In her influential *Artforum* essay on institutional critique, she writes,

… just as art cannot exist outside the field of art, we cannot exist outside the field of art, at least not as artists, critics, curators, etc. And what we do outside the field, to the extent that it remains outside, can have no effect within it. So if there is no outside for us, it is not because the institution is perfectly closed, or exists as an apparatus in a ‘totally administered society’, or has grown all-encompassing in size and scope. It is because the institution is inside of us, and we can’t get outside of ourselves.\(^\text{240}\)

Whilst this is true, in the sense that I brought my art education with me and it informed all my decisions and my framing of the project, on the other hand, if one presents work outside the contexts of the art world, then it is received in a different way. This is neither good nor bad, but it produced some surprising, unanticipated revelations for me as curator. For example, it challenged me to take responsibility for the fact that naming my project a museum meant that it was read as such, and indicated an institution that stands behind this first exhibition, or at least, a promise of a museum to come. Fortunately, this ethical

\(^{240}\) Andrea Fraser, “From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique,” *Artforum International* 44, No. 1, 2005, 278.
obligation that the audience and participants called for is one I am prepared to answer and I will be continuing to take next steps in the museum’s development beyond this current research.

**Institutional critique**

Every time we speak of the “institution” as other than “us,” we disavow our role in the creation and perpetuation of its conditions. ... It’s not a question of being against the institution: We are the institution. It’s a question of what kind of institution we are, what kind of values we institutionalize, what forms of practice we reward, and what kinds of rewards we aspire to.

— Andrea Fraser, *Artforum International*²⁴¹

Institutional critique defines a wide range of artistic practices usually dating from the 1970s to the 1990s, that take as their subject the critique of the institutions of art, including social, political and economic factors. A couple of examples can illustrate the usefulness of institutional critique as a method or approach as it applies to this current museum project. In 1968, Marcel Broodthaers’ *Musée d’Art Moderne, Département des Aigles* was a conceptual installation project that started in his house, showing eagles in glass cases and signs that stated this was not art. Over the next three years it manifested in various places and forms. It included a wide variety of items: films, art crates, found objects and copies of artworks. In 1972, Broodthaers announced the museum was for sale on account of bankruptcy. The announcement was made on the cover page of *Art Cologne* catalogue. There were no buyers.²⁴² His work questions the role of the museum by appropriating and subverting its form and methods. MoMA described the work as “a fictional museum he created between 1968 and 1972 to parody and critique official art institutions,” yet it is questionable if it is truly a fiction given that it was an elaborately developed concept, with numerous manifestations in art institutions.²⁴³ Broodthaers’ museum is inspirational as a model for my

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²⁴¹ Andrea Fraser, “From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique,” *Artforum International* 44, No. 1, 2005, 278.


own work in the sense of a museum that has flexible, ambiguous form. Amongst other readings, it could also be seen as a pioneering example of the now familiar concept of the nomadic, or even pop-up, museum.

In a different generation, performance artist Andrea Fraser’s work on the museum includes “Museum Highlights” (1989), a famous work in which she leads unbearable, hilarious tours as a museum docent in the Philadelphia Museum of Art and gives an overblown, dramatic reading of the works on display. Pointing to a water fountain, she expounds: “a work of astonishing economy and monumentality ... it boldly contrasts with the severe and highly stylized productions of this form!”244 The humour and sense of play that underlies so much of the work of institutional critique, while at the same time unearthing the deeply problematic aspects of the art world, are vital to their enduring appeal. Rather than a dry commentary of the problems of the institution, these artists apply their creativity to new ways of revealing, commenting on and possibly transforming the inner workings of the art world. It is this spirit of animating joy that I take into my own project as I propose a different kind of museum for an artist.

**Institution-as-project**

Moving beyond institutional critique, experimental institutions, such as the Mildred’s Lane, Manifesta 6 / unitednationsplaza, the Museum of Broken Relationships, and the Museum of Innocence have each influenced my current practice in their powerful reframing of the institution as a project in itself and their unique, innovative contributions to the field. At once real, existing institutions, and also experimental art works, they are run by artists, and engage in experimental approaches and direct institutional critiques of current art schools or museums. By being framed as art projects, offered within the art world, they are elevated to a conceptual level by their positioning, and through this highlight and make available for public view, the decisions, value and assumptions that underlie more conventional institutional forms. Two examples here critique the art school itself; the other two engage more directly with museums.

Mildred’s Lane

Mildred’s Lane is an experimental artist residency, far away from any city, deep in the woods in Pennsylvania. Artists Morgan J Puett and Mark Dion started the project together, with many collaborators and supporters joining them over the years. It has had a rich, long history of welcoming artists for visits, studies, educational programs, research, exhibition projects for almost twenty years. It also incorporates a museum, commemorating the first owners of the house. Art In America describes it as an “ongoing experiment in pedagogy, a social space, a site for artistic and architectural intervention, a residency program, and home to Puett ...”:245

The core of the practice and the educational philosophy at Mildred’s Lane is an attempt to collectively create new modes of being in the world – this idea incorporates questions of our relation to the environment, systems of labor, forms of dwelling, clothing apparatuses, and inventive domesticating.246

The commitment of the artists to this project is total. They have turned a farm house into a centre of experimental arts activity, drawing in artists of all kinds to participate in the experiment in the widest range of modalities. By now it has become “a living museum, or rather – a new contemporary art complex(ity).”247 They have established links with art schools and artists throughout the US and beyond.

From my background in arts management, Mildred’s Lane’s total subversion of the conventions of arts administration is rebellious, transformative and joyful. The language of Mildred’s Lane plays a vital role: it is emancipatory and trickster in spirit. Attempts to define it in conventional terms is always resisted. For example, if approached as an arts residency, instead of interacting with a residency coordinator, one has to communicate with the Director of Entanglement. (see Figure 36). If someone wishes to participate with the institution in some way, Mildred’s Lane welcomes you, for it operates as “an emergent event”.248

Morgan J. Puett is an interdisciplinary artist with a background in fashion design and received a prestigious Guggenheim Fellowship in 2016, awarded to those who have demonstrated exceptional creative ability in the arts. Conceptual artist Mark Dion’s practice beyond Mildred’s Lane is also engaged with upending the conventions of the institution, in particular the museum. He has worked with many museum collections to create special projects, such as his “Cabinet of Curiosities” works at university museums in Ohio and Minnesota. As curator Colleen Sheehy notes, on working with Dion at the University of Minnesota’s Weisman Museum, “In his installations of delightful physicality, Dion offers a serious intellectual prospect – to imagine alternate ways of conceptualizing the museum, the university, and our world.”

It is this quality that works throughout Mildred Lane also, and this practice of questioning the institutions of arts and education that I find a direct inspiration to my work.

Mildred’s Lane’s approach to the institution as a total installation offers the gift of seeing everything, all decisions relating to a project, become art, even down to how the items in the refrigerator are arranged (in glass jars, with cloth, no plastics). As the website notes, the “Mildred’s Lane site is a home where the Artist/Practitioner, the Student and the Institution have collapsed roles as they attempt to coevolve with an emergent strategy.”


Lane and its artists act as spirit guides to this research project, to remind me as a curator to play, to question everything, and to imagine the fullest possibilities for the museum, without limit. As an arts manager they urge me to dwell in and operate from a rich imaginary, rather than an overly pragmatic, managerial mindset.

Manifesta 6 / unitednationsplaza

Manifesta 6 was planned as an art school instead of a regular exhibition to take place in 2006. It was to take place in Cyprus, but was cancelled at the last minute due to political disputes. The project was to be an “Art School as Exhibition”. The curators prepared a comprehensive publication to accompany their project, and in the end this was the only work produced for the project. One of the curators wrote:

The Manifesta 6 School is a pretext, an excuse and an opportunity. It is a pretext for questioning and possibly challenging the methods of the institutionalised art world. It is an excuse to bring together inspiring thinkers and cultural producers to invigorate the position of art, and cultural production at large. It is a great opportunity for a wealth of critical endeavours.\footnote{Mai Abu ElDahab, “On How to Fall With Grace – or Fall Flat on Your Face.” In \textit{Notes for an Art School}, Mai Abu ElDahab, Anton Vidokle, and Florian Waldvogel, eds. Published and commissioned by the International Foundation Manifesta, 2006. https://manifesta.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/NotesForAnArtSchool.pdf.}

The idea for the school was to host a school that ran for the ninety days of the exhibition. Once Manifesta 6 was cancelled, one of the three artist-curators Anton Vidolke, remixed and restaged his part of the project in Berlin. Naming it “unitednationsplaza” based on the building’s location, it was a year-long project, an open structure that allowed participants to stage, create, gather, use resources in whatever way they wished and had a vibrant roster of famous and not-famous international artists engaged in diverse projects. The project is relevant here because its framing, not as art school, but instead as exhibition, positioned it in a way that made every action and element of the school appear as a deliberate act of institutional critique. Placing the institution within the exhibition frame, all aspects of the institution could be visible for critique and its meanings shift. This playful yet serious inversion demonstrates the power of framing.
In a similar way, but with different effect, when developing the concept of The People’s Museum for Prince, it was important to consider why it was vital to frame the exhibition not as simply a single one-off tribute exhibition, but as the first iteration of a new museum. This framing was necessary to indicate there was a strong vision for an ongoing “real” museum, and to communicate the serious of this venture – that is, that the people are worthy of a museum. Equally, it was essential to evoke the sense of the endless, uncollected archive of Prince stories and experiences, to gesture towards the vast potential represented by the Prince community as a whole, of which this first manifestation would serve as only a glimpse.

The Museum of Broken Relationships

An online and a physical museum that is both nomadic and has two permanent physical locations, in Zagreb and Los Angeles, this museum is experimental and highly successful. It is based on a deceptively simple, universally appealing concept: send in one object linked to your broken relationship with its story, anonymously, and it will be added to the collection, and may be selected by curators when preparing future exhibitions (see Figure 37). To date there have been fifty exhibitions around the world. Given almost everyone has experienced a broken heart, the museum has massive appeal for both potential contributors and visitors.

Figure 37. Exhibit at the Museum of Broken Relationships. Photo by Oliver Jones.
The museum does not exhibit artworks (unless what is donated as object is artwork) and yet it is embraced in the art world, featuring in galleries and biennials worldwide. It has found a sweet spot of bringing something new into the art world, and at the same time being instantly appealing to a general public. The museum is one of the top tourist destinations in Zagreb on many sites and publications.

The People’s Museum for Prince shares some of these approaches. Whilst the potential reach of Prince is admittedly far less universal than the theme of love, Prince’s audience represents still a vast, international, multi-generational public. Also, if one takes the People’ s Museum as a general principle – namely, the idea of a museum that celebrates the deep impact of any particular artist on people’s lives – then almost-universal themes emerge.

*The Museum of Innocence*

Turkish novelist Orhan Pamuk’s experimental museum is a fantasy scape that through its example provokes through its rich possibilities of the museum as a dwelling place for the interior world. Pamuk’s emphasis on the subjective, imaginary life provide important contexts for this current project (see Figure 38).

![Figure 38. A display case at the Museum of Innocence. Photo by Innocence Foundation and Refik Anado.](image-url)
Based on his novel of the same name, Pamuk utilises biographical objects from the characters to stage vignettes that invoke key scenes or themes direct from the novel. Out picturing the novel’s world, Pamuk obsessively gathered the contents for the museum over decades before finally opening it as an actual museum to the public. It was named European Museum of the Year in 2014. In his manifesto on museums, Pamuk states a museum should “reveal the humanity of individuals.” He emphasizes the importance of a focus on the subjective life of the individual:

We don’t need more museums that try to construct the historical narratives of a society, community, team, nation, state, tribe, company, or species. We all know that the ordinary, everyday stories of individuals are richer, more humane, and much more joyful.\(^{252}\)

Pamuk’s manifesto and his museum itself provide further context for the People’s Museum for Prince, with its emphasis on personal stories, and celebration of the artist via the subjective experiences of many individuals. My project’s intent to create a portrait of Prince via the collection of the stories and related expressive forms, differs from Pamuk’s, yet his invocation of a not merely subjective but fictive dream space created through the collection of objects, together with the stories within his novel, suggests future possibilities for the People’s Museum in the power of biographical objects to tell stories. Pamuk pushes me to further experimental possibilities, and point seven of his manifesto is an important provocation: “The aim of present and future museums must not be to represent the state, but to re-create the world of single human beings.”\(^{253}\)

Could it be possible to re-create the world of Prince, over time, in different ways, through various instances of his audience’s experiences and related objects? It’s a compelling, impossible project, but motivates a continual pushing of the experimental frame on the museum.


\(^{253}\) Orhan Pamuk, “A Modest Manifesto.”
Experimental preservation and the work of Jorge Otero-Pailos

The work of New York – based experimental preservationist Jorge Otero-Pailos, complicates the traditional approach to historical preservation.

Experimental preservationists gently frustrate and subvert illusory belief by choosing, as heritage, objects that have appeared too imaginary, too fantastic, too subjective to be understood as real heritage. By insisting on the illusory nature of heritage objects, experimental preservationists are opening up new and vital questions about the reality of heritage as an open-ended process of social negotiation.254

Otero-Pailos has staged numerous projects, and works as a kind of experimental-curator-preservationist, or quite often, an experimental curator within the realm of historical preservation. One recent project was done at the Morgan Library in New York City, where Otero-Pailos and his students from Columbia University conducted an experiment in the study of JP Morgan, to scientifically capture the smells of the objects in the room, which were then analysed by a master parfumier with a goal to re-create these scents, which could one day form a part of the exhibition.

“People in my field are interested in what makes buildings significant,” Jorge Otero-Pailos, professor and director of historic preservation at Columbia, said in an interview on Wednesday. “In fact, people’s memories are what make buildings culturally significant. And smell is the most direct way to those memories, but we pay so little attention to it.”255

Otero-Pailos’ most famous work is his “Ethics of Dust” project, in which he paints clear latex over historic walls and then removes and hangs these huge works as art. They reveal the dust and residue built up over years (see Figure 39). Experiencing a latex cast made from the wall of Westminster Hall, an art critic Adrian Searle writes of the evocative power of the work which appears to excavate history before the eyes:


But what is in the collected dust and smears of dirt? Given the age and history of the building, and the thousands upon thousands who have walked through here, appeared on trial (including Guy Fawkes and Charles I), and lain in state (all those monarchs, and Winston Churchill), one asks if the dead shed skin, if anger and anxiety somehow permeate first the air and then the stone.\textsuperscript{256}

Figure 39. Jorge Otero-Pailos, \textit{The Ethics of Dust}, 2016. Photo by Artangel

In 2018, Otero-Pailos worked on a project about choreographers, applying his latex technique to dance studios where famous choreographers created many works. He presents them in large boxes on the floor, as sound clips of the choreographers at work play from the box. This project reflects on the ephemeral quality of choreography – if it is not passed on, it disappears with the maker.

The practice of Otero-Pailos is important in my work because his questioning of traditional methods and of what is deemed worthy of preservation mirrors my own questioning of what is considered important in commemorating an artist. By focusing on the audience and their

stories and experiences, I am proposing that the traditional modes of commemorating an artist-as-genius, via his objects and house, is not sufficient to capture the great love he evoked and the way he transformed people’s lives. I propose that an artist’s legacy can only be understood in a full sense by including the audience’s own experience. The solo genius of the artist is not sufficient to capture how he impacted the world, as we see at the oddly impersonal Paisley Park Museum. Otero-Pailos’s gift is to make visible and place value on what was formerly unseen or considered unworthy, which provides a vital context for this current work.

These diverse practices, from alternative museums to art schools, share an ethos of investigating and upending the assumptions and practices of the institutions of the art world. In this research project, I bring the spirit of these critical, experimental practices of the art world to the problems posed by the death and the subsequent memorialization of a celebrated musician.

2. The People’s Museum for Prince

The People’s Museum for Prince emerged as a curatorial response to two years’ immersion in the contents of the wake of Prince’s life, death and afterlife. Conceived as a space to honour and reflect on the intimate, personal dimensions of our connections to an artist, the first exhibition of the museum, held in Minneapolis 2018, collected personal stories, artifacts and artwork in order to create a portrait of the artist through those who loved him.

More than a fan museum however, The People’s Museum for Prince is also envisioned to be a centre of artistic, curatorial and scholarly research, and a gathering space for the Prince community. The envisaged future museum would offer educational and community programs, welcome visiting scholars, host artists and curators in residence and offer an ongoing, active exhibition program. It would also house a collection of Prince artifacts and archives available to all in a library – study centre. The vision for the museum is to have a permanent home in Minneapolis, with nomadic manifestations in Prince-loving cities around the world, calling for local contributions in each.
Whilst inspired by the mourning for Prince, the museum is not focused on his death. Rather, it was his death that made visible his deep impact on so many people, and compelled people to speak out publicly, thus amassing an overwhelming body of testimony. As Judy Berman noted, writing about David Bowie, who died just three months before Prince, “His death finally dragged into the light everything he meant to people in private.”\textsuperscript{257}

The future museum is dedicated to encouraging and supporting ongoing creative and critical engagement with Prince’s life and work, and through seeks to make a vital active contribution to his legacy. As a counterpoint to the many commercial activities emerging in the wake of Prince’s death, the vision is to be welcome to all, with free admission to the exhibits, an active roster of low-fee community, educational and art programs, to cater to different people within the greater Prince community – children, adults, fans, scholars, artists, curators, activists and the merely curious.

The first iteration of The People’s Museum for Prince was realised in Minneapolis in May 17–24, 2018, at the Solar Arts Building, located in the North East Arts district (see Figure 40). There were three main events for the museum: A Purple Preview as opening event, Art-A-Whirl weekend, and a Community Roundtable on the future of the museum, held on the closing night. The setting of the exhibition provided direct engagement with a large population of visitors, who offered vital feedback on the concept and form of the new museum. This exhibition introduced the museum concept to the local community and received an overwhelmingly positive response, attracting many volunteers and offers of future support.

This first exhibition tested the premise of the concept of The People’s Museum for Prince. It was not possible to cover all aspects of the future museum, and this exhibition specifically focussed on the essential idea – an audience-centred exhibition. Can an exhibition centred on its audience of an artist as source of expertise and content produce a coherent compelling exhibition? How can participation be best solicited and engaged to produce a successful exhibition?

The model was formed as a direct response to the study of the public mourning for Prince and institutions emerging in the wake of his death, especially Paisley Park Museum. As it became clear that the audience’s experience of Prince was not being honoured in the legacy-building activities, I conceived of an institution-as-project that reverses usual practices and takes the audience as a primary source of authority.

**The original vision for the museum**

My original vision for the museum was to present an archival, chronologically arranged exhibition, *A Year in the Mourning of Prince*, which tells a multi-voiced story gathered entirely from the public domain. The exhibition would be a bricolage of found objects, including diverse materials such as newspaper articles, social media posts, formal essays,
tribute artwork, as well as carefully selected excerpts from the voluminous estate proceedings, a formal inventory of Prince’s belongings, official documents from his death investigation, highlights of the Chanhassen City Council proceedings over the transformation of Paisley Park to a museum, and items from auction catalogues of his many possessions being suddenly sold off by friends and lovers. This bricolage approach would require working with both an exhibition designer and graphic designer to work on a strong visual concept to provide cohesion and a compelling narrative through the work.

In a future, permanent museum, this gallery devoted to Prince’s mourning would be supplemented by a gallery dedicated to his afterlife, depicting the world of Prince without Prince (tracking the emergence of his legacy), as well as a gallery that is dedicated to his life which is presented through the eyes of his audience. Conceived as a three part – Life, Death, Afterlife – this would be a permanent yet evolving exhibition in the museum, supplemented by a gallery dedicated to more experimental and temporary exhibits for visiting curators and even school groups working with curators to realise.

However, not only would this project require significant resources to negotiate permissions and fund a production designer, I realised this archival project lacked a vital component as a first iteration of the museum: a direct, active engagement with the Prince community. The archival project remains to be realised in the future museum, but first I needed to work in a more communal, collaborative context to develop and test the ideas for the museum. It was important that the museum was audience-centred from the start. I conceived the museum as an active, evolving, shared space, rather than a singular vision that I need to realise.

Curatorial process

To create an audience-generated exhibition, I issued a call to the Prince community through the main social networks to invite participation. The exhibition call solicited personal stories, artwork and objects linked to Prince’s transformational impact on people’s lives, and also welcomed volunteers to help in realizing in any aspect of the project. The vision for the future museum will integrate archival and research components alongside the personal stories and artworks and in this first exhibition, it was possible to present a few small tests of these components, in the form of featuring the selections from the archives of two Prince
collections, and in the creation of the collaborative research project, *Houses of Prince*, which proved to be the most popular exhibit of the show.

In addition to posting calls through the Prince community, I conducted local outreach and studio visits to artists working in Minneapolis. There had already been many Prince-related events in Minneapolis since the first year since his death, so I realised I would need to actively reach out as some artists may miss the call or feel they had already done their Prince tribute. I researched all Prince-art tributes to date and spent time connecting with artists and art centres. There was a selling show of Prince tribute art organized by Erin Sayer at Gamut Gallery in June 2016, featuring sixty artists. Erin also created Prince stencil murals all around town. Erin agreed participate in the People’s Museum, and contributed a giant, pink and purple glitter-bombed work that greeted visitors, and included a prominent Prince quote “A Strong Spirit Transcends Rules”. (See Figure 41). I discovered a stark intaglio print of Paisley Park at the art show within the 2017 Minnesota State Fair – the largest midwestern state fair, which has curated many Prince-related events – and contacted the local artist, Kaitlin Frick, who submitted the work and provided a moving story to accompany it. Painter Linda Clayton had created an entire cycle of works on Prince, and on other musicians before this. In Art-A-Whirl in 2017, Linda’s studio at Northrup King building for became an intimate gallery for visitors who were greeted by a series of paintings each inspired by Prince song with mp3 players and headphones set up for each. This created space for long viewing and some emotional scenes. Following a studio visit in which we discussed Linda’s own Prince story and her experience of creating this space of mourning for others, we decided on one large work – “Free Urself” – to feature in the museum. Another young artist, Dana Lemoine, contributed two Prince prints, and her story spoke of her experience visiting Paisley Park. Thus my efforts to connect with local artists brought significant results and ensured the show had local roots, which was vital given my status as an out-of-town visitor.
There were over forty responses to the call for submissions, resulting in a final presentation of 32 contributions. Submissions came largely from across the USA, with a few international submissions from the UK, Australia, Switzerland, Canada and Germany. To be included in the museum, all contributions required a personal story, and an object, either an artwork or a personal item that was linked to the story. Most people sent in artworks, which included tribute quilts, paintings, prints, illustrations, photos, video, books, an original song with the sheet music, scrapbooks, miniature Prince dolls and one giant papier-mâché ancestor puppet originally made for the Minneapolis May Day Parade 2016. People without creative works contributed items from prized Prince memorabilia collections, which I tightly edited in conjunction with the collectors.

As soon as the submission review began, it became clear to me that instead of selecting a small number of the best written stories and most beautifully executed artworks, it was possible and important to include every voice, every contribution. I decided to take an inclusive approach to the materials for this first experiment, as I wanted to test out the premise of an audience-centred museum. All submissions were heartfelt and authentic, with contributors making special efforts to put together their stories and artwork. I realised my responsibility as curator in this project was to honour all voices. My task was to find a compelling way to present each contribution, so that it could best find and connect with the museum visitors. (See Figure 42).
As noted in the previous section, it was my first time working outside of a professional arts context, for, even when I worked with students, they were training at art schools so already being formed as professional artists. This new terrain required me to bring my expertise as curator in the capacity of creating a professionally produced exhibition that has a visual logic and makes curatorial sense, as well as finding the appropriate way to frame the presentation of this unusual content. In addition, it was particularly challenging and rewarding to set up an institution-as-project outside the visual arts world context, where visitors would not necessarily be familiar with the tropes of social practice, institutional critique and new institutionalism. Thus it set up a challenge to work at a number of different levels, both conceptual and practical, all at once.

Soon after reviewing the submissions, I realised it was vital to present a photo of each contributor, to help connect the exhibition visitor to each personal story. The emphasis on the personal required this intimate element. Adding in personal photos also worked to help deformalize the space, as I did not want to present a formal gallery of fan art and stories, but something more complicated. In this, I was influenced by the practice of the New York art collaborative Group Material, who integrate a wide range of non-art materials in their
exhibitions, creating richly textured critical exhibitions on a range of subjects including the AIDS crisis. In deciding how to arrange each person’s contribution, I opted finally to print each person’s story in a consistent font and paper stock, and frame in a simple black frame. The artwork was hung nearby, and the photo itself was stuck directly to the brick or plaster wall. Thus every installation had a minimum of three elements, three ways to draw a visitor to it (see Figure 43). One of the curatorial challenges in this project was attracting the visitor to stay long enough to read some of the story. The tripartite attraction of photo, artwork and story and sometimes other elements was part of that strategy.

Figure 43. Visitor at Dana Lemoine’s installation in The People’s Museum for Prince. Photo: Steven Cohen.

Volunteers & Local Community

A core team of eight local volunteers stepped forward to participate and help realise the project. It was a largely unfunded project, supported by my Australian Government Research Training Program (RTP) Scholarship and generous Jim Marks Postgraduate scholarship of $3000 was awarded just in time and covered the studio rental. Thus, relied on the generous participation of others who believed in the value of the project. All volunteers participated because they identified the value of the project and wanted to pay tribute to Prince. We painted the walls hues of purple, did endless trips to Home Depot, wired lights, framed the thirty-plus stories, and hung curtains, a mural, two tribute quilts, and many artworks. We transported and installed a giant ancestor puppet of Prince that was designed for the annual May Day parade which has a section that honours those who have died in the past year. We printed, framed and carefully hung the Houses of Prince photo project, and assembled the texts. We picked fresh highly perfumed lilacs which were in bloom briefly from all around
the neighbourhood daily, to fill five large vases around the exhibition, both in reference to
Prince’s love of flowers, beauty and his famously scented Paisley Park, but also to counter
the presence of the brewery below. One core volunteer and Prince scholar Suzanne Wint
generously baked special Prince-themed treats for the receptions. Carolin Drewitz, a Prince
fan based in Germany, donated her graphic design services to produce all the materials
needed for the museum. I invited the volunteers to actively contribute to the installation and
work together with me to solve the range of creative and logistic problems we had to solve
each day. As a visitor to Minneapolis I relied on the goodwill of many local Prince
supporters. Heidi Vader, long-time Paisley Park attendee and Prince superfan who recently
started the non-profit organization Purple Playground to celebrate Prince’s legacy, generously
connected me with local artists and others for the project, and volunteered throughout the
exhibition’s busy open hours to welcome guests to the space.258

I understood my role as curator working with a team of volunteers as creating a frame for this
project but allowing each person to make a vital contribution rather than just follow
directions of what was needed. It was important to the vision of the project that there was a
plurality of voices and contributions, not only in the stories but in the realisation of the
exhibition itself. Given space to contribute, many volunteers contributed vitally, adding extra
touches, such as bringing in props they thought would work, such as extra tables, flowers,
lamps, art and solving various logistical and creative challenging. My vision was clear but
not fixed, and the Museum evolved through the active collaborations of the artists and
volunteers. As such, the idea of the People’s Museum for Prince was embodied both in the
process of its realization as well as the contents of its display.

258 Amongst its activities to honour Prince, Purple Playground has launched the Academy of Prince, a music
summer school for teens, taught by some of Prince’s former musical associates, and is available free to
participants. See Purple Playground, https://www.purpleplayground.org. Also see Chris Riemenschneider,
“Prince fans hope to carry on his ‘legacy of giving’ via Purple Playground,” Star Tribune (Minneapolis), April
playground/480147943/.
Exhibition elements

There were five key exhibition elements in the first exhibition: personal stories, artworks, biographical objects, Prince collections and the *Houses of Prince* research project. Each played an important role in realizing the vision for the museum.

*Personal stories*

Personal stories about Prince’s impact or role in people’s lives form the core of the exhibition. In the call for submissions, I deliberately gave few guidelines about style or length as I wanted contributors to speak in their own voice and express themselves naturally. In this first trial I wanted to try this open approach, to measure response. My intention here was not to frighten people off with too many requirements. All authors gave permission for me to edit their work. I opted to edit very lightly, only cutting sections if the story was too long.

The rawness and intensity I discovered in the testimonies online in the fresh wake of Prince’s death was softened in these submissions. Self-consciousness and more formality had entered in through the process of submitting a personal story to a museum project. The stories were compelling and held visitors’ attention, but felt muted compared to the emotional charge of the spontaneous tributes in the wake of Prince’s death. I was reminded of my first impulse for the project, to create a documentary exhibition, taking the artifacts of mourning direct from the internet to the exhibition wall.

For future iterations, given that stories are the heart of the museum, it will be vital to consider a range of other storytelling modalities – such as offering to film or record people’s stories, doing interviews, and holding story-writing workshops, like the ones held by the University of Minnesota’s Urban Research and Outreach-Engagement Center as part of their Prince celebrations. One workshop was entitled “Love Letters to Prince”, and one of the letters from this workshop is included in the People’s Museum. Engaging collaborators to hold

259 Kevin Nickelson, owner of a Prince memorabilia collection that was part of the exhibition, volunteered vital copyediting services for all exhibition stories.
storytelling and writing workshops, and collaborating with an oral history project on Prince would be excellent future additions.\textsuperscript{260}

In addition, there have been several publications about Prince collecting different fan essays and memoirs, so working with published stories and collaborating with some key Prince websites and podcast producers is another resource. Should the museum start to work on these collaborative ventures, it will open up a wide range of possible material, and will require a more formal selection process. A selection panel of Prince experts may be formed, and perhaps special themed exhibitions will be required to help provide focus. Finally, to return to the original idea for the museum, it could also be possible to launch a labour-intensive project to gain permissions from the authors of the social media content that was published in the wake of Prince’s death.

The stories in this exhibition were long, and in the future a limit of 250 words would be ideal. Pop-out, large text excerpts from longer stories may also work. Yet the length of the stories did capture many visitors and several returned multiple times to read more of these. This time commitment asks too much of the visitor overall, however, and an obvious solution would be to offer a publication with all the stories that people could take with them, or could sit on the couch and read onsite. An online archive is also possible.

\textit{Artworks}

The artworks were an eclectic mix of arts and crafts: meticulously laboured scrapbooks, hand-stitched quilts, a selection of fan art that includes portraits of Prince in oil, prints, collage, shamanic oil paintings of Prince’s spirit, a giant papier-mâché ancestor puppet and a long-running project, “Le Petit Prince”, in which Troy Gua recreates photographs of Prince album covers and famous scenes linked to his songs, working with Barbie-doll size figurines wearing tiny, immaculate recreations of Prince’s elaborate outfits and perfectly recreated miniature scene sets and props (See Figure 43). The diversity of the artworks enabled a true

\textsuperscript{260} There are no formal oral history projects underway for Prince as yet, but several people are currently exploring this, including Zaheer Ali, Oral Historian at the Brooklyn Historical Society and a serious Prince fan, who teaches on Prince and presents his work at Prince conferences, and ethnomusicologist Suzanne Wint, who is conducting an ethnology of Public Mourning for Prince. This work could also be done as part of a larger project on the Minneapolis Sound, of which Prince is a vital part.
bricolage of ideas, objects and perspectives, creating a multilayered, many-voiced exhibition held together by a central focus on Prince.

Figure 44. Troy Gua, *Le Petit Prince*. Installation view, The People’s Museum for Prince. Photo: Daniel Pratt.

**Biographical objects**

As discussed in the chapter on Paisley Park Museum, personal items in exhibitions on artists, or in their house museums, carry a special significance for visitors and can be treated as quasi-relics. They are often the most discussed items in an exhibition. David Bowie’s crack pipe from the 1970s and his house keys in the *David Bowie Is* exhibition are examples. The power of biographical objects in artist’s houses and exhibitions and their promise of a closer connection to the artist can be intoxicating. I wanted to see if there was a way to apply this to an audience-centred exhibition practice. Could everyday objects invested with a person’s emotional connection to Prince, explained by an accompanying story, yield a new dimension to the exhibition? This practice of including objects was inspired in part by the Museum of Broken Relationships: “At its core, the Museum is an ever-growing collection of items, each a memento of a relationship past, accompanied by a personal, yet anonymous story of its
contributor. In this iteration of the People’s Museum for Prince, the contributors are named and their photos shown, but it is interesting to consider if anonymity would encourage contributors to share their stories and objects more freely.

In the call for submissions, I specified that contributors did not need to contribute artwork, but were welcome to provide an object of personal significance linked to their Prince story. I realised that it was a novel idea, and spent some time explaining the concept to people interested in submitting stories and artwork. The intention was to try to attract some strong biographical objects to add further dimension to the stories and the texture of the exhibition. One instance where this worked very successfully was in the contribution from Bon Mott, fellow PhD student at the Victorian College of the Arts, who offered a catsuit she wore when dancing on stage with Prince in Sydney in 2012 to display alongside her story that recounts this and other life-changing incidents (See Figure 45).

Figure 45. Bon Mott, Catsuit, Installation view, The People’s Museum for Prince. Photo: Daniel Pratt.

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Working creatively with biographical objects is a seed of a practice that bears further development: to show the everyday personal items of the audience, that are infused with some personal significance, and are linked to their connection to Prince. It is a direct reference to and inversion the practice of visiting the artist’s house and casting an aestheticizing eye on every object displayed in that house. What if we could bring that attention to objects contributed from the artist’s audience, elevated from the everyday by their link to Prince and their public display? Other successful instances of biographical objects in the exhibition included a copy of a much-treasured invitation to Prince’s birthday party that the contributor Marie Kruger had pulled out from her bosom when she jumped out from behind a bush behind the party venue to ask Prince to autograph it when he was leaving. (Bemused, he did.) Including the original invitation however, would have increased the aura of this piece, having been literally touched by Prince. Still visitors treated it somewhat as a relic, studying his signature carefully.

Another contributor, Jeannine, wrote a sorrowful tale about the paisley design shirt she had made for herself many years ago, and how she never wore it or only rarely and it represented something beautiful that is out of reach. I asked if she would lend it for the exhibition, but it was too precious to send. Instead we chose to display a photo of it beside her story. Similarly, Geoff Bell from the UK told me his most precious Prince items were plastic red carnations and fake dollar bills that rained down at a Prince show in the 1980s. He wasn’t prepared to send me the originals but sent me a photo I could print up of the bills. With his blessing, I bought some red carnations from the craft store to display with his book on Prince and his story, to accompany his photos of himself as a teen, dressed up in elaborate Prince outfits his mother made for him. Thus, the inclusion of biographical objects was a nascent but promising practice in this first exhibition.

Prince collections

In this exhibition I worked with two Prince collections. This is an area of great interest for the future museum, as working with different Prince collections, if interpreted creatively, could offer rich materials for exhibitions in the museum, and possibly help attract funding.
The first collection of Prince memorabilia is owned by Kevin Nickelson, a friend of the collector, known as ‘e’, who went missing several years ago, presumed institutionalised or deceased. e spent a large portion of his income buying Prince albums and rare collector’s item releases, comics, magazines and posters, and then having them professionally, and often creatively, framed, with ornate frames and colourful backgrounds. In one work, which I selected, e includes a photo of himself amongst the Prince paraphernalia. The present owner was a friend of e’s and drove across the country to save the collection from destruction by e’s ex-partner who threatened to burn it after the break up. e was a flamboyant African American man who adored Prince, and his collection filled every inch of wall space at home. In this exhibition I worked with Kevin to tell e’s story, and I chose to crowd a selection of his extensive collection into a corner installation that crept up the ceiling, to echo e’s obsessive display. (See Figure 46). I selected works that included a focus on Prince’s queer sexuality and flamboyance, as a way to create a portrait or a hint of e himself. The owner allowed me to present a portrait of e himself in a prominent space within the display. I highlighted it by directing an extra light on it to draw the eye amongst the surfeit of Prince images.

Figure 46a (left). e’s Prince collection, Installation view, The People’s Museum for Prince. Photo: Daniel Pratt.
Figure 46b (right). K.L. Peterson, Portrait of e. date unknown.
The second collection I worked with is an archive of newspaper clippings and paraphernalia relating to Prince events, supplemented by more traditional fan memorabilia such as rare posters and albums. I worked closely with the owner Rich Benson to work out a compelling presentation. His archive is vast and well organized. This extensive archive deserves its own full exhibition and The People’s Museum for Prince would be an excellent location for a library based on this collection, made accessible to researchers. However, for the premise of this exhibition, it was extraordinarily challenging to help the owner identify a small presentation to focus on. It was also difficult to elicit Rich’s personal story relating to Prince, as Rich is a super-fan who always returned the conversation to Prince himself. Finally we settled on an event that was the most significant for Rich personally, and he selected a range of clippings about the event. We displayed his prized heavily framed rare poster from the event, with the clippings and some photos from the time around it. (see Figure 47). This experience inspired me to want to work with more Prince archives, imagining whole exhibitions around particular years from Prince’s career, seen through the eyes of his fans, gathering materials from fans, collectors and press archives to present the experience and impact of this time on the present.

Figure 47. Visitor at Rich Benson’s installation in the People’s Museum for Prince. Photo by Steven Cohen

Several people contacted me to enquire if I would accept donations to the museum’s collection, offering Prince-related memorabilia and other linked items they wanted to
contribute in order to share with those who would value them. In the future, with a permanent location, housing a collection would be ideal and could be a source for exhibitions and visiting researchers.

_Houses of Prince research project_

The _Houses of Prince_ project was a collaboration between local historian Kristen Zschomler and myself (see Figure 48). Over the past year during the course of my research on Prince, I had worked on a photo documentary project, creating a large archive of images of almost all key Prince sites in Minnesota. It was important to present a portion of this research in some mode, as my experience meeting locals and talking about my research with them during my visits to Minneapolis revealed strong interest in learning more about Prince’s historical links throughout the area. It was also important to trial a research-based project in the museum, to test the response. My premise was that people would be fascinated by research done on Prince if presented in a compelling way. It would be easy to do an entire exhibition based on Prince-linked properties and to fill a couple of galleries. However I needed to limit the scale for this first exhibition.

Figure 48. Visitors at the _Houses of Prince_, May 2018. Photo by the author.
Originally I had considered filling a wall with photos and captions, like a mind-map, with connections between all the different sites connected with Prince. However, the decision to present a simple chronological photo story of all the houses Prince lived in, from the hospital where he was born through to Paisley Park, proved the right solution.

I invited Kristen Zschomler to contribute the text for each property (see Figure 49). For this project we also included a brief introductory text and short biographies and our photos, in keeping with the other contributions. By far this was the most popular exhibit in the museum, with visitors lining up to view it over the weekend. People were fascinated by the information and curious to see all the houses where Prince has passed his life. As they viewed the work, many shared personal anecdotes about the locations with each other. It is important to note the popularity had nothing to do with the quality of my photos. I had tried to find another person to take professional photos. In the end I was encouraged by others to use my own personal photos, as the informal, subjective, snapshot feeling of the images was appropriate for a work appreciating and mourning an artist.

Figure 49. Kristen Zschomler explains the Houses of Prince project to visitors, May 2018. Photo by Steven Cohen.
The popularity of and engagement with this work was a strong encouragement to expand on collaborative, research-based, pedagogical projects for the museum for future iterations. Working with prominent Prince experts from across different fields on special projects would also be an attractive programming feature to help draw in the Prince community.

**Exhibition design and layout**

The space comprised two rooms, one large rectangular studio/gallery space with brick walls on two sides and a window; and one adjoining room functioning as a lobby area that is in the common space but was allocated for the use of the museum, as it was located at the end of the building. The Solar Arts building is a converted warehouse and has a raw, industrial aesthetic which worked well for the eclectic installations and the improvised lighting. Working with a large number of diverse items and needing to create space to tell over thirty stories required some clear visual cohesion. To create a setting for the exhibition, we painted each wall a different hue of purple.

One of the first decisions I made was to have a large central table, which I secured from the building (see Figure 50). This gave an immediate shape to the exhibition flow. The central table offered a way for people to informally engage with a variety of materials and this was popular with visitors. There were a couple of photobooks made by contributors, both focussed on personal experiences at Paisley Park, an art book for “Le Petit Prince”, a loose pile of large photo prints of ornate, intricate scrapbook page for people to flip through (eliciting many offers to purchase). There were also some framed stories people could pick up and read, and some framed prints of Prince-linked locations. The concept was to layer the type of materials and create an informal arrangement so people felt welcome to browse and engage. (see Figure 51).
Figure 50. Installation view, The People’s Museum for Prince. Photo by Daniel Pratt.

Figure 51. Table at the People’s Museum for Prince. Photo by Daniel Pratt.
A large purple couch was installed alongside the table became a lounging area, where people gathered and often sat just to take in the full view of the gallery space. There were also purple headphones available so people could watch a documentary about mourning fans in Atlanta on the computer set up on the table. The film was very popular, the headphones were an important factor, enabling visitors to switch off from social engagement and focus wholly on the emotional content.

**Venue and Art-A-Whirl event**

The choice of Solar Arts Building was determined after viewing many options around Minneapolis. Any other option, such as galleries and community centres, would involve the challenge of attracting an audience to visit the museum, and require significant marketing resources. By contrast, Solar Arts Building was placed in the heart of the Art-A-Whirl weekend and the studio offered was available for this event, and featured The People’s Museum for Prince in their promotional activities. (See Figure 52)


Art-A-Whirl is an annual arts event in which hundreds of artists open their studios to the public and thousands of people visit over the weekend. It was estimated by the building management that one thousand people visited the museum over the weekend. The event
offered an extraordinary opportunity for the museum to gain wide public exposure and be seen by a large, local, arts-friendly community. This is especially important, given the permanent museum is envisaged to be based in Minneapolis, so it was vital to gain some feedback about how a future museum for Prince might be received and supported.

The only drawback of this choice of venue was that the location of the museum is deep in the heart of the affluent, largely white, arts district. Ideally, in future iterations and for the future home of the museum, a setting that is outside the usual arts world, and more connected to a broader local community is desirable, so that all feel welcome. A residential house in North Minneapolis, which is predominantly an African American neighbourhood and where Prince grew up, would be the ideal permanent location from the point of view of achieving a popular and progressive affirmation of Prince’s lasting legacy. Prince fans will go wherever Prince events happen, and local residents could have the opportunity to be involved through various programming initiatives and possibly generate income through affiliated businesses and non-profit activities such as a coffee shop, book or record store.

Future iterations as exhibitions could be tested in North Minneapolis, perhaps in a community arts centre, and conversations are already underway with local organizations about the future. The University of Minnesota’s Urban Research and Outreach-Engagement Center in North Minneapolis has held many Prince events, spearheaded by Hawona Sullivan Janzen, who is an enthusiastic advocate for the People’s Museum. Another neighbourhood that may work well is Central neighbourhood, where Prince went to high school. Prince attended Bryant Junior High School, now the Sabathani Community Centre, which has publicly celebrated its connection to Prince, throwing a block party the Saturday after he died, and hosting other events.

**Purple Preview and Community Roundtable events**

In addition to Art-A-Whirl, there was a Purple Preview event for Prince fans. The event was attended by approximately 100 people over the course of the evening and ended with a dance party. Guest DJ was Michael Holtz who regularly played for Prince at Paisley Park and donated his services for the evening. (see Figure 53). Many visitors stayed for the evening, some taking time to quietly read all of the stories posted. More than ten attendees came back to visit again at least once during the following weekend.
For the closing night, there was a Community Roundtable to discuss the museum and its possible future. (see Figure 54). Thirty people participated. There were many fans of Prince, as well as writers, artists, musicians, arts managers and others working on Prince-related projects. The local response to the museum was overwhelmingly positive, and all attendees contributed actively to the discussion which took on a sense of being a work session to strategize next steps to attract funding and local support in order to launch the museum.
Local media coverage and guest book

The exhibition received some supportive coverage by the local press, as well as generous comments in the guest book. Perhaps the most significant was recognition by Minneapolis-based public radio station The Current, which has long been a champion and friend of Prince, receiving early releases of his music, regularly playing a lot of Prince and publishing regular Prince articles on their blog. After his death, The Current switched to playing all Prince. This was a vital public service for mourners around the world who were able to tune in online, for Prince had taken his music off all major music streaming sites. On the first anniversary of his death, The Current programmed a whole day of Prince music. In April 2018, The Current launched Purple Current, a live stream channel available 24/7 anywhere in the world, exploring Prince’s musical legacy. It plays a lot of Prince, mixed in with his influences, contemporaries and protégés. It is funded by the Minnesota Legacy Amendment’s Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund. For the exhibition, Jay Gabler of The Current sent a photographer to cover the Purple Preview of the People’s Museum for Prince and featured the museum on its Prince blog.²⁶²

Radio station KFAI is also a strong supporter of Prince. Quinn Villagomez is host and co-organizer of KFAI’s annual Prince-themed fashion benefit show, The Purple Ones, which invites local fashion designers to design a look inspired by a specific Prince song. Quinn contributed her story to the museum. KFAI conducted an interview with me on the breakfast show on May 18, 2018.

On May 19, 2018 local TV station KTSP Eyewitness News filmed the exhibition and a short interview with me, and included it at the end of the evening news broadcast. Helped by association with Art-A-Whirl, The People’s Museum was also featured in various listings and promotional write-ups in the week leading up to the opening. Local journalist Tony Kiene included a mention of the museum in his write-up on Prince-related legacy activities, calling it an “inspiring, labour of love” and plans to write a future article on the museum as part of

his newly established regular column “Purple Music” on the Minneapolis sound for the *Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder.*

A guest book was available in the gallery throughout the exhibition. This is a selection of comments to provide a sense of the reception of the museum, which go to the heart of the interaction between an artist and his audience.

This is beautiful and so comforting. Reading the stories from purple fam filled my heart and supported this continuous healing process. Thank you. – Rachel, California.

Thank you for creating a space for us to soak up more of him. – anonymous

I’m so honoured to be surrounded by so much love for our believe Prince. Thank you. – Patti P Brach

Thank you for bringing him back to life for us! – Amanda.

This collection is AMAZING! Love live the PRINCE!

Absolutely Incredible. Just super. – Greg Foley, St Paul.

What you have put together here is an inspiring as it is lovely. Thank you so much for your time, dedication and artistry. So amazing. – Tony Kiene.

Thank you for an experience so moving and beautiful. – Jennifer.

Beautiful, love-filled effort. Thank you for sharing your passion and vision with the rest of us. – Kevin Nickelson.

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Thank you for the love and dedication you’ve put into this project. I look forward to all of us creating a permanent home for the honouring of Prince and his impact on our lives. – Jen.

Your dedication to honouring Prince’s legacy is full spirit and true inspiration… May we all continue to find ways to celebrate the passion of the purple one... – Chilly

Conclusion

This first iteration of The People’s Museum for Prince proved that there is a demand, strong interest and forthcoming community support in Minneapolis for a museum that explores Prince’s legacy via the stories, art, and other contributions of his local, national, and international audience. Working without the auratic resources of Prince’s home and collections of his personal property, I set out to test whether it was possible to make a museum dedicated to him, using the deep experience, expressive powers, personal collections and expertise of the audience as the heart of the enterprise. Engaging the contributions of more than forty people, as well as the significant resources of generous volunteers, the exhibition presented personal stories, artwork, biographical objects, Prince collections and a research project Houses of Prince, to create a multi-voiced, multidimensional tribute to Prince through the hearts of those who loved him. From the positive response of the contributors, the visitors and the Prince community-at-large, there is evidence this is compelling model that warrants further development. In practical terms, this research project enabled the development of strong connections within the Prince community in Minneapolis and beyond, and has created a base from which to move forward into the next phase of development of the museum.
Conclusion

There's a door that you can walk through
Where there used to be a wall.

– Prince, “Breakdown”

In this research, I studied public mourning for Prince as a demonstration of how profoundly an artist can touch many people’s lives, and also considered how these public expressions can be curtailed and diminished by legacy-making institutions. I also considered the challenges facing an institution, in this case Paisley Park Museum, that seeks to memorialise an artist in the wake of his death, and the curatorial and management factors that can powerfully shape the visitor’s experience, for better and worse. To set the curatorial context for this project, I studied contemporary exhibition practices that take musicians as their subject and examined how the musician is currently represented in the art museum, and the factors that shape the visitor’s experience of the exhibition. I also presented my own curatorial context, looking at the diverse practices from institutional critique to experimental art schools that inform my work.

Drawing on the disparity between the ways the general public and the formal institutions memorialise artists, I created and tested a new model for a museum that places the artist’s audience centre-focus. The central premise is to honour the audience’s experiences of the artist as a valid source of expertise and a worthy subject for a museum. This new model of an audience-centred artist museum could be applied to the memorialization of any beloved artist. As a curatorial strategy, it could also be applied as an intervention in existing artist museums, as a way to bring new energy and perspectives, and bring the audience into the heart of the museum. I conclude this study with a consideration of the applications of the research and a final discussion on the artist’s gift as a way to reframe the project within the greater scope of the arts and life.

Applications of the research and scope for future development

The development of The People’s Museum of Prince beyond this research looks promising. This project has enabled the development of a strong, local support network of interested people ready to help establish a permanent base for the Museum in Minneapolis. In addition, a Prince 2020 symposium in Minneapolis is being planned and the organizer has invited the
museum to manifest in collaboration with its program. Talks are underway to secure funding and venue. At the same time, the next steps will be to explore the viability of founding a permanent organization, which will include forming a board of advisors, creating a thorough business plan and seeking seed funding.

Outside the United States, Prince was also beloved in Europe, and toured there regularly. There is an opportunity to create a temporary manifestation of the People’s Museum in Amsterdam in 2019, which is currently under consideration. Amsterdam is an ideal location in Europe to stage a Prince project, given Prince’s immense popularity in the Netherlands and neighbouring Belgium. Prince regularly played here, at times performing more than once a year. Amsterdam was also chosen as the second location of Paisley Park Museum’s travelling exhibition *My Name Is Prince* in 2018, where its run was extended.

Beyond Prince, this curatorial model that focuses on an artist’s audience could be applied to creating new standalone museums for artists of any discipline, of which any number of musicians would be ideal candidates. Artists who provoke a strong, emotional or creative response in their audience would be rich subjects, for example in the literary field, Emily Brontë or Alfred, Lord Byron. This model could also adapt well into existing artist’s museums, or the museum exhibitions such as those studied in chapter three, as a series of curatorial interventions, generating new engagement with the audience, attracting more visitors and could perhaps be tied in with a special anniversary celebration of the artist’s life or death.

**The gifts of the artist and the labour of gratitude**

Anthropologist Marcel Mauss’s essay on gift exchange in different cultures observes the strong morality invoked in the economy of the gift and its socially binding functions. He specifies three phases to the gift exchange: the obligation to give, to obligation to receive, the obligation to return the gift.

Following Mauss, in his book *The Gift*, Lewis Hyde extends the concept of the gift into the context of the arts:
The art that matters to us – which moves the heart or revives the soul, or delights the senses, or offers courage for living, however we choose to describe the experience – that work is received by us as a gift is received.\textsuperscript{264}

Hyde writes on the gifts of the artist as a way to better understand the economy of the arts, which largely operates beyond the logic of the market. Hyde provides a way to understand the largely immeasurable impact of the arts on our lives by applying Mauss’ three parts of the gift to the arts. It begins with the artist’s need to give, to share the gift of their artistic talent. The art is received by an audience with a feeling a gratitude, as we recognise the artist’s gifts have somehow enhanced our lives. Hyde proposes that even if we have paid for a ticket to see a concert, we still receive and perceive the art itself as a gift: “When we are moved by art, we are grateful that the artist lived, grateful that he laboured in the service of his gifts.”\textsuperscript{265}

Hyde’s conceptualization of the gift economy of the arts is helpful in understanding the powerful response to an artist’s death. Faced with the death of an artist we have loved, we are forced to account for their presence in, and their contributions to, our lives. Perhaps the disquiet we feel is not only grief but also an obligation to repay the gift we have received. In his observations of the Native American potlatch rituals, Mauss speaks of the heavy burden of receiving a gift:

\begin{quote}
In principle ... gifts are always accepted and praised. You must speak your appreciation of food prepared for you. But you accept a challenge at the same time. You receive a gift ‘on the back’. You accept the food and you do so because you mean to take up the challenge and prove that you are not unworthy.\textsuperscript{266}
\end{quote}

Hyde proposes the concept “the labor of gratitude,” which is the work we do to honour the gift we have received. The artist’s gift, of course, is very hard to repay, but we are obliged to respond.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{265} Hyde, \textit{The Gift}, xvii.
\textsuperscript{266} Marcel Mauss, \textit{The Gift} (London: Cohen and West, 1966), 40.
\end{flushright}
A gift that has the power to change us awakens a part of the soul. But we cannot receive the gift until we can meet it as an equal. We therefore submit ourselves to the labor of becoming like the gift. Giving a return gift is the final act in the labor of gratitude.267

The outpouring of testimonials and the many expressive acts of tribute and pilgrimage following the death of an artist could be seen as this labour of gratitude, just as much as it is also the work of mourning. The concept of labouring to become like the gift is more esoteric and compelling. How could one become more like the art (or artist) that has transformed us?

Perhaps this transformative potential helps to explain why, in the wake of a death of an artist who mattered deeply, people often find themselves reaching beyond everyday language to express a notion of the divine or the sacred. Perhaps the liminal state of grieving itself allows for this mode of expression, as people attempt to account for what this artist has contributed to their lives. Written in the raw, shocked days following Prince’s death, Heather Havilesky spoke for many when she attempted to name the gift she felt she had received:

Prince blows the doors off our limited notions of what makes up a human being. He’s a luminously sexy motherfucker who makes space for us to be larger and brighter and more complex than we ever thought we could be. Prince didn’t just demonstrate how to own the full scope of your feelings, no matter how the world feels about them. He showed that, by celebrating the rawest, most painful, most dangerous, sexiest, strangest, most freakish parts of your soul, you can touch the divine.268

This concept of labouring to become like the gift also suggests why in mourning, people regularly draw life lessons and inspiration from the artist’s life and vow to try to become more like them. These sentiments were powerfully present in the mourning of Prince which many experienced as a kind of spiritual wake-up call. A month after Prince’s death, after the first shock had passed, many longer, reflective essays were published, including Siri Liv

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Myhrom’s “The Collective Grief of Losing Prince,” seeking to understand why Prince’s death was so deeply felt by so many, including those who were not fans.

We know – in our bones we know it – that when we have heard or watched Prince perform, we have seen a person, since he was a child, who was uncompromisingly himself. We cannot underestimate how powerful it is to bear witness to this, because it is so rare. And, yes, we sorrow for the fact that he is no longer here to be that. But, even deeper down, we sorrow for ourselves and all the ways we are compromising who we are each day: the jobs and relationships that are killing our spirits, the bitterness we refuse to let go of, the small ways we diminish and silence our God-given gifts for the sake of safety and approval. How to be yourself completely.269

The People’s Museum for Prince could perhaps best be understood as a labour of gratitude, generated in response to witnessing the powerful impact Prince had on many lives which was made clearly manifest in the wake of his death. Upon witnessing Prince’s audience disappearing from view as the mourning faded and the official commemorating began, it became imperative to act and to find a way to re-establish the audience’s presence and their contributions towards his emerging legacy. The People’s Museum for Prince is a curatorial response to two years of research on the mourning of Prince, an experimental institutional frame through which to offer back the gifts of the artist by paying tribute to the many ways artists profoundly shape and transform the lives of people throughout the world.

Bibliography


Casey, Edward S. The Fate of Place, Berkeley: University of California, 1998.


Creative Work for Examination

Documentation of the creative work is provided in the images provided throughout chapter four, and in the appendix which begins on the following page. The appendix comprises PDF images captured from the website www.peoplesmuseumforprince.org which was created to document and promote the project. In addition to showing the main pages of the website, the PDF images also provide two samples from the “People, Art and Stories” blog, which feature the stories and artwork of the participants in the Museum. The website fully documents the creative project but is not provided for examination itself as it is a live site.
Appendix

The following pages are PDF images from the website www.peoplesmuseumforprince.org.
Author/s: 
Balazs, Emma Catherine

Title: 
The People’s Museum for Prince: inverting the curatorial lens from artist to audience

Date: 
2018

Persistent Link: 
http://hdl.handle.net/11343/222544

File Description: 
Redacted thesis: The People’s Museum for Prince: inverting the curatorial lens from artist to audience

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