MOVING IMAGES, THE MUSEUM &
A POLITICS OF MOVEMENT:
A STUDY OF THE MUSEUM VISITOR

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Abstract

This dissertation is an investigation of visitor experiences in the Screen Gallery at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI), in Melbourne. This thesis argues that visitors’ interaction with moving image art can yield expressions of agency which not only enrich the experience of visiting a new museum, but also find application beyond an institutionalised environment as a praxis for negotiating the conditions of everyday life. I term the articulation of this praxis a politics of movement.

The first chapter introduces the key terms and ideas which inform the study, while the second chapter situates the Screen Gallery within ACMI’s institutional environment and genealogical history. I argue that ACMI’s institutional hybridity and ambivalence reflect a distinctive typology of ‘new’ museum emblematic of this era of ‘reflexive’ modernity. However, these characteristics create an inherently complex organisational structure and pedagogical agenda from which to orchestrate visitation experiences. In the third chapter I draw upon Henri Lefebvre’s notion of ‘rhythmnanalysis’ and Brian Massumi’s ‘field of immanence’ to argue that a phenomenological and reflexive ethnographic framework be used to document these experiences, and to investigate their political potential. The fourth and fifth chapters put this framework to use. The fourth chapter examines the pedagogical relationship between the Screen Gallery and its visitors, arguing that it is mediated by visitors’ navigation of the Gallery as an ambient space. The fifth chapter investigates how the characteristics of moving image art elicit new modalities of agency, and finds that agency resonates most strongly at the levels of affect, reflexive perception and cognition.

Chapters Six and Seven investigate how pedagogy and agency interrelate as praxes. The sixth chapter argues that play elicits a praxis involving an aestheticisation of reflexive knowledge, where meaning emerges within an individual’s ability to integrate experiential and cognitive experiences as valid sources of knowledge, and reflects a literacy for negotiating the reflexive conditions of everyday life. Chapter Seven argues that stillness mediates a space for reflection through affective awareness. Drawing upon Gaston Bachelard’s account of resonance and reverberation, I argue that stillness enables visitors to realise their own creative self-capacities, and is an increasingly valuable praxis within the rapid, individualising environment of reflexive modernity. The final chapter follows visitors as they depart the Screen Gallery. I reflect upon their journey, as well as how the Screen Gallery has transformed in the years since my empirical research concluded. I evaluate the implications of these changes on the immanent potential for a politics of movement.
Declaration

This is to certify that:

(i) the thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD except where indicated in the Preface

(ii) due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,

(iii) the thesis is less than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices

Signed ............................  Date ............................
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction
Chapter One
Introduction

ACMI and Federation Square
The Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI) opened its doors to the public in 2002 as a part of a new cultural precinct named Federation Square. Financed by a dedicated ‘Federation Fund’, the square commemorates the centenary of federation of British colonies, and references a number of eras of significant cultural and industrial transformation in Melbourne. The Square was constructed as a large-scale site redevelopment of Melbourne’s much-maligned Gas and Fuel Corporation Towers [Figure 1.1]. All visible reference to this era of industrialisation was razed to the ground, and replaced by the Ian Potter Centre for Australian Art as a part of the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV), the Melbourne headquarters for Australia’s multicultural public service broadcaster, the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), the Australian Racing Museum, the National Design Centre, ACMI, and a swathe of bars and restaurants [Figure 1.2].

[Figure 1.1] Gas and Fuel Corporation Towers, Melbourne, 1967
[Figure 1.2] Federation Square, Melbourne, 2007

While Federation Square’s architecture, public screen and LED ticker panel reflect the more recent influence of information-based economies, parts of Melbourne’s earlier history prevail immediately below ground, as the square is built atop one of Melbourne’s busiest railyards. Federation Square’s designers endeavoured to inscribe this space with further possibilities for transformation, envisioning their task as “a reaffirmation of the original interactive nature of
civic existence” (Lab Architecture 2002). Indeed, in recent years Federation Square has been thoroughly traversed by festival-goers, sports-lovers, tourists, protestors, locals and onlookers.¹ At the time of its opening, John Brumby, then-Victorian state government Treasurer and Minister for Innovation,² also anticipated the way this new public space would become a hive of civic activity in Melbourne:

Federation Square is a central and unifying public space, a landmark and a cultural magnet bringing together open spaces and innovative architecture and engineering. Comprising an entire city block, Federation Square's creative mix of attractions embody all that is great about Victoria: fine art, hospitality, bold design, innovation and vibrant events (2002).

ACMI is spread across 7000 square meters and four floors at Federation Square. In recent years, it has not only developed its profile as a resident of this cultural neighbourhood, but has also begun to fashion a space within the city’s arts scene, receiving both national and international attention through the many festivals, symposia and exhibitions it has hosted, including collaborations with the NGV and SBS. However, it offers a space markedly distinct from the polished wood, white walls and bright lights of its neighbour, the Ian Potter NGV. It is also a far cry from the cobbled warmth of Federation Square, where, mined from the Kimberleys, the sun-kissed reds and yellows of the outback pave the thoroughfare to ACMI’s entrance. Instead, ACMI’s foyer flickers with plasma screens, where noiseless images nestle into white walls and compete soundlessly with the chaos of outside traffic [Figure 1.3]. Yet it is ACMI’s purpose-built Screen Gallery which most sets it apart from the NGV. This space is devoted to the exhibition of moving image art, and is historically and experientially distinctive from more traditional places of aesthetic contemplation.

¹ Federation Square was ‘ordained’ a public gathering space on February 14, 2003, when Melbourne hosted its largest ever political demonstration. An estimated 250,000 people gathered in the square and surrounding streets to joining millions of others around the globe as an expression of solidarity, and protest against, the impending war in Iraq.

² John Brumby became the Victorian state Premier in July 2007.
The Screen Gallery

To attend the Screen Gallery at ACMI, visitors pass below street level into an underworld of art and technology. The visitor encounters the first gallery projection as they begin their descent into the exhibition space. This is a large screen suspended at eye level, although it slips from sight as the visitor descends into a darkness that has occupied this area since its inception as a train platform in 1854 (DOI 2007). This history gently reveals itself in the faint vibrations of neighbouring platforms, a soft rumbling which accompanies ACMI’s patrons on their visit. Descending from the staircase into the Gallery, small beacons of light cut the dimly lit passageways, leading the way into rooms and corridors and opening lines of enquiry into the sounds seeping from exhibits [Figure 1.4]. These sounds blend overhead with the low-held murmur of public engagement as visitors interact with the Gallery’s pieces.

[Figure 1.4] Staircase entry into ACMI’s Screen Gallery

Since 2002 the Screen Gallery’s exhibitions have surveyed the breadth and depth of the moving image in a number of ways. Thematic explorations have considered issues of space, memory, globalisation, apocalypse, art history and identity. Artists have pushed scientific boundaries through technological innovation, using, for example, infrared sensors, multi-channel projections, biotechnology and locative media. Their work has reflected the rich and multifarious possibilities of aesthetic form, including dance-works, documentary, sculptural and abstract moving image art. In addition, while these works share an art historical lineage with painting and sculpture, they also reflect the scientific development of image-based media, such as panorama, photography, film, networked and surveillance technologies.³

These technologies create experiences which challenge the traditional conventions for viewing art, largely because the Screen Gallery’s works are often time-based. Some lie dormant awaiting visitors’ intervention, while others rotate on endless loops, cycling by unheeded. At

³ The historical relationship between panoramas and the moving image has been the subject of recent literature which explores, for example, the use of screen technologies in virtual and immersive environments. For comprehensive discussion see Grau (2003).
times, the collection of these works in a single exhibition space creates an environment of visual and aural collision. The optical flicker and aural stirrings of adjacent works distract, luring attention towards an elsewhere. Yet on other occasions, the Gallery’s art is bounded by walls, private enclosures which absorb perceptions of time into the surrounding darkness.

The Screen Gallery becomes a distinctive place of affective immersion due to this procedure of passage into a black box, rather than a white cube. The Gallery has come to define its practices by heightening these forms of encounter, and elevating the affective possibilities for interacting with art. The space is made soft with shadows, so that sensory perception is intensified by the enveloping darkness and kinaesthetic touch of light on skin. Curators have challenged traditional museum conventions by playing with these experiential dynamics. Rather than constructing a chronological journey through the annuls of art history, they have emphasised forms of self-exploratory navigation. As a result, some visitors hesitate in front of exhibits, unsure of procedure in the changeable environment. Others advance with energetic familiarity, seeking to challenge the boundaries of participation. There are also those who regard the space with disinterest, seeking instead a quick escape into Melbourne’s city daylight. This place of exit is a glowing escalator placed in the middle of the exhibition space, a curiously situated point for departure [Figure 1.5]. In some ways, the escalator references the fluidity of arrival and egress at ACMI, perhaps alluding to the Gallery’s occupation of a site historically designed for transit. Alternatively, as the Gallery is a quiet place nested within the chaos and bustle of the city, the escalator could also be read as a signal of the way the public are offered a point of experiential departure.

![Figure 1.5] Escalator exit out of ACMI’s Screen Gallery

Investigating experience and agency

While the Screen Gallery’s presentation of the moving image offers a distinctive museum experience, over recent years screen technologies have become an increasingly familiar presence in both art and non-art contexts. As art historian Oliver Grau observes, interaction with the image is becoming ever more sophisticated and innovative, making ‘visual’ culture a dominant form of contemporary communication:
Never before has the world of images changed at such a breakneck pace as over the last few decades. Images were once exceptional and rare, reserved mainly for religious rituals; later, they were the province of art, then of museums and galleries. Today, in the age of cinema, television and the Internet, we are caught up in a matrix of images. Images are now advancing into new domains. Television, for example, is changing into a zapping field of thousands of channels; gigantic projection screens are invading our cities; infographs permeate the print media; and cell phones transmit micromovies in real time. Currently, we are witnessing the transformation of the image into a computer-generated, virtual and spatial entity that seemingly is capable of changing ‘autonomously’ and representing a lifelike, visual-sensory sphere. Interactive media are changing our perception and concept of the image in the direction of a space for multisensory, interactive experience with a temporal dimension. Things that formerly were impossible to depict can now be represented; temporal and spatial parameters can be changed at will so that virtual spheres can be used as models or simulations for making specific types of experience (2007:7-8).

Our daily interaction with the image appears to share an increasing phenomenological kinship with the spatial experiences of the Screen Gallery. They find a commonality in the technologically-mediated literacy which both elicit. This mode of spectatorship reflects the communicative fluency required in a predominantly visual culture. The Screen Gallery is therefore especially distinctive as a form of contemporary museum, as it behaves like a microcosm for the kinds of technological interaction visitors encounter in their daily lives. My central research question emerges within this relation between museum experience and everyday life, and has three parts.

The first enquires into the way the Screen Gallery breaks with museum tradition to create an experientially distinctive place for moving image art. I aim to investigate how visitation to this new form of art museum can yield meaningful and empowering experiences. The second aspect of this question investigates specific modes of visitor encounter as expressions of agency. When referring to agency I take up the term with a view towards the philosophical lineage of classical sociology which commences with Georg Simmel, in which agency is considered in relation to the structural influences which may enhance or limit an individual’s ability to freely exercise their self-capacity. As I will argue throughout my investigation,

4 Contemporary sociological debates surrounding the relationship between structure and agency are concerned with attempts to reconcile their dualism. See, for example, Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of habitus which describes how structural forms are internalised according to one’s position within a social field (1977a, 1984), and Anthony Giddens’ theory of structuration (1984), which suggests that human activity produces structure, as much as structure conditions human agency. The debates about the relationship between agency and structure are taken up in the third chapter with reference towards Brian Massumi’s ‘field of immanence’ (2002).
processes of learning are central to the forms of agency I identify, as museums have historically engineered pedagogies which seek to educate their patrons. It is also my intention to detail how expressions of agency within the museum relate to everyday experiences. My investigation of agency is therefore primarily concerned with the forms of social and political mobility which individuals experience within structural parameters, such as institutional pedagogy, governmental regimes, cultural codes and the dynamics of globalisation and informationalisation.

The third aspect of my investigative question asks how the modes of agency which enrich visitation experiences within the Gallery may also find application beyond its walls. I therefore examine how devoting a short hour or two to visitation of a gallery can elicit what Gaston Bachelard has described as a powerful “increase of life”, where interaction with art awakens something innate through “a sort of competition of surprises that stimulates our consciousness and keeps it from becoming somnolent” (1994:xxxiii). This would be a substantial development to a contemporary politics, where an experiential topography explored through art could enrich an individual’s capacity beyond the immediacies of the art space. I employ a second term, *praxis*, to describe the practical forms of knowledge which visitor employ to negotiate the complexities of contemporary life. These praxes generate meaningful forms of encounter as ‘doxa’ which arise from practices of cultural interaction (Bourdieu 1977b). A detailed mapping of the complexities of subjective experience is therefore central to understanding contemporary agency and new forms of praxis. This requires an investigation of everyday contexts, interactions, situations, which, for this study, focus upon our relationship with technology, images and art.

**Studying the Screen Gallery**

While ACMI’s newness makes it a compelling object for examination, it also makes evaluation very difficult. On one hand, there is a dearth of literature which documents visitor experiences in the Screen Gallery, as very little, in general, has been written about ACMI. The majority of existing writing has appeared in art, architecture and design journals, or in the daily press, either surveying exhibitions and programs, or offering journalistic coverage of ACMI’s development. Moreover, at the time of its opening, ACMI was one of only a few institutions similarly concerned with creating new visitor experiences around the display of media and digital arts. These included Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie (ZKM) in

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5 For a descriptive account of ACMI see Radywyl (2006). Darren Tofts (2005) speculates upon the potential of ACMI as an example of a solidifying media arts sector in Australia.

6 These appraisals generally criticise ACMI’s development from a policy perspective. I examine the media coverage of ACMI in the second chapter.
Karlsruhe, Germany; Kiasma in Helsinki, Finland; Mediatheque in Sendai, Japan; NTT InterCommunication Centre (ICC) in Tokyo, Japan; and the Foundation for Art and Creative Technology (FACT) in Liverpool. The Screen Gallery therefore represented a very new style of museum, meaning that there were few conceptual analyses which examined comparatively similar modes of visitor experience.

To address this dearth of research, and also pursue my line of enquiry into the relationship between new visitor experiences, agency, and the conditions of daily life, I have undertaken a longitudinal study of visitation to ACMI’s Screen Gallery. By detailing how visitors interact in the Gallery, and the way they understand these experiences, I reveal the broader predispositions and conceptual issues underlying my research aims. All of these research parameters are united by the thematic of ‘movement’, as it has appeared as a steady undercurrent throughout my investigation, and informs the central investigative concept, a politics of movement.

Defining a politics of movement
At one level, the notion of movement appears within my institutional analysis, for ACMI, as a centre for the moving image, is dedicated to the presentation of technological forms of movement. The theme also resonates spatially and historically within the Screen Gallery. As described above, the Gallery is contained within a disused, underground train platform. The soft and persistent rumblings of trains passing through neighbouring platforms accompany the visitor’s movement through the Gallery, and act as a rhythmic auxiliary which references the Gallery as a space of transit, journey and travel. I therefore use visitors’ passage through the Screen Gallery as the structuring narrative of my investigation. By mapping visitors’ interaction with art and technology I also locate the emergence of conceptual movement. This form of movement describes the experiential transition which emerges through modes of learning, or an enhancement of one’s mobility as an experience of agency. As I seek to investigate the relationship between forms of agency within the museum, and their application in everyday life, I also interrogate the forms of movement which characterise everyday experiences. These are the dynamics of speed and flux which determine the pace of living, and shape the way we subjectively negotiate the conditions of contemporary life.

I draw all of these considerations together within the overarching concept of a politics of movement. By ‘politics’ I refer specifically to issues of power and autonomy, the forms of agency which visitors may encounter, learn and practice as a result of having interacted with

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7 For research which extensively documents these institutions as a part of a cultural shift in the presentation of new technologies in art institutions, see Papastergiadis and McQuire (2004-2006).
art in the Screen Gallery. Therefore, a politics of movement describes the passage from encounters with art to experiences of agency, and how these forms of agency may resonate beyond the museum as a praxis for everyday life.

However, at this introductory point it must be noted that my research only documents ACMI’s institutional development as far as is relevant to my analysis of the Screen Gallery. In studying a live, changing and (as is detailed in the second and final chapter) contentious cultural object, the politics of ACMI’s institutional life is less relevant to my larger aim of examining the museum as a social institution, situated against a backdrop of its contemporary environment. As such, I do not seek to develop a critical appraisal of ACMI’s relative success or failure, as the main research question of this dissertation stems from the themes relevant to a study of agency and visitor experience in ACMI’s Screen Gallery. These include the way museum histories account for the visitor, how contemporary sociological theory views ideas of agency and mobility in contemporary life, and a critical engagement with cultural theories which describe how we interact with new technologies and media art. I will now examine these different trajectories with reference to the overarching structure of my dissertation.

**Agency and museum history**

In the second chapter of this dissertation I detail the Screen Gallery’s pedagogical remit by mapping its relationship to ACMI’s policy framework. I then contextualise this institutional agenda within the cultural environment of the contemporary museum. I argue that literature which explores the transformation of the museum often keeps firmly in line with the theoretical parameters cast by a ‘governmental’ genealogy. This perspective describes how, from the nineteenth century to these early stages of the twenty-first, the museum has maintained a broad responsibility to educate its patrons. This genealogy demonstrates how, to varying degrees, themes of citizenship, aesthetic appreciation and the cultivation of cultural codes have each informed its governmental remit. Each generation of the museum therefore fashions visitor experiences in ways which reflects the political concerns of its contemporary environment.

However, in this chapter I also argue that this perspective of the museum offers limited parameters for understanding how globalisation and new technologies have influenced the museum’s development, forms of arts practice and modalities of visitor experience. As my genealogy shows, new forms of museum, such as the Screen Gallery, are based upon notions

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8 The use of the term ‘governmental’ explicitly refers to Michel Foucault’s (1991) notion of governmentality. The idea of the museum as a governmental institution will be explicated in Chapter Two.
of technological experimentation and highly-subjective forms of participation. This means that visitor experiences reflect the techno-culture of late capitalism, and exceed the terms of visitation set by a governmental perspective. Rendering the governmental perspective inadequate, I raise questions as to the kind pedagogy ACMI expresses by dedicating an entire gallery to the moving image, and how visitors’ experiences of agency reflect our contemporary politics.

This line of enquiry allows for conceptions of agency which are multi-sited, modal, or even transient. In this way, the politics of movement differentiates itself from the theories of everyday experience expounded by cultural theorists in the 1970’s and 1980’s, such as Michel de Certeau (1984) and later, Marc Augé (1995). These positions often sought a retaliatory agency against established structures, proposing that cultural practices could be ‘tactics’ of subversion and deployed through the spatial appropriation of streets, time, and burgeoning ‘non-places’. If, however, power now circulates within flexible, fleeting and transient structures, agency must be accounted for in new ways. This requires examination of how it operates within, rather than against structure, or alternatively, how structure and agency can develop a new politics co-constitutively. I develop my position to this issue with reference to Brian Massumi’s ‘field of immanence’ (2002) in the third chapter.

**Agency and contemporary sociology**

In the second chapter I therefore turn towards a discussion of agency from a sociological perspective, as it accounts for the way contemporary experiences of everyday life are shaped by cultural, social and economic change. In particular, I draw upon the work of sociologists Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens and Scott Lash, as they – each in their own way – propose that contemporary subjectivity is structured by what Beck and Beck-Gernsheim have described as a politics of ‘individualisation’ (2003). Beck, Giddens and Lash (1994) propose that such a politics is symptomatic of a reflexivity which now characterises the present phase of modernity, a ‘reflexive modernity’ in which the joint acceleration of technological progress, globalisation and new modes of industrialisation drive the ‘disembedding’ and ‘reembedding’ of early modern structures.⁹ These conditions require individuals to negotiate the forces of globalisation, technological progress and structural shifts between the state, its institutions and citizens. An individual’s expression of agency hinges upon their capacity to rapidly and reflexively navigate these dynamics.

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⁹ The second chapter explains these conditions of modernity in greater detail.
Giddens, Beck and Lash tend to take their perspective from a global, or ‘macro’ level. This means that their accounts of reflexive modernity overemphasise the atomisation of the individual without detailing the complex and nuanced possibilities of subjective experience within a politics of individualisation. I argue that within this era of individualisation a politics of the individual requires further interrogation and exploration. I therefore use my study to develop what could be termed a ‘micro-sociology’ of reflexive modernisation. My investigation of a politics of movement is therefore a ‘micro-sociology’ which shows how interaction with art can offer a substantive means of negotiating the subjective ‘political’ challenges arising from this era of individualisation.

My research firstly codifies the subjective ways that visitors experience agency as they move through the Screen Gallery, and interact with moving image art. By detailing the ways in which art and technology may produce forms of agency, it becomes possible to not only understand how museum visitation is transforming in new and significant ways, but to also extrapolate a substantial account of contemporary agency within this era of modernisation. Additionally, by linking the ‘micro-sociological’ analysis to the broader picture of modernity offered by the reflexive modernisation theorists, I show how these forms of museum visitation relate to the modalities of agency experienced in everyday life, and thereby chart how agency within the museum may find expression, and even application, beyond interaction with art. This study therefore moves beyond mere theoretical analysis of museum visitation by detailing the kinds of praxis these forms of agency involve, and also, in a contribution to theories of reflexive modernisation, considers the political potential they may elicit.

Agency and histories of technology

The lack of critical attention into ‘micro’ modes of agency relates to an associated problem in the way many theories of technology diminish the notion of agency, instead emphasising how the accelerating and dematerialising capacities of technology cast an indelible impression on our economies, societies and experiences of everyday life. At times, however, these accounts malign the significance of human intervention by over-emphasising the ‘newness’ and rapid progress of media and technology. Rather, as artist Raffaele Lozano-Hemmer (2001) argues, technology should be understood to convey “two attributes that are significant. Firstly, that technology is inseparable from contemporary identity, – there is no such thing as ‘what we were like before technology’ – and secondly that it is not something that has been invented or engineered, but rather that it has evolved through constantly-changing social, economic,
physical and political forces”. In addition, I argue that the increasing pressures associated with the present environment of individualisation demand a critical engagement with discussions of agency which explore how we, as individuals, can influence, and be influenced by, technological development.

I seek to redress a similar technologically-determinist orientation within literature pertaining to interaction with ‘new’ media art. The emphasis of these studies is directed towards the most technologically innovative characteristics of the art object, and the way that these features govern an individual’s interaction with it. Edwina Bartlem (2005) notes, for example, how the theoretical stakes claimed on the possibilities of immersive art rarely take into account phenomenological considerations. As a result, significant issues are overlooked, such as the way cumbersome VR helmets may inhibit the experiential potential of immersive art (Bartlem 2005). I wish to shift this determinist emphasis by aligning my research with a growing body of literature which offers alternative theoretical and methodological approaches for conceptualising how agency is mediated by technology-based art.

A number of these positions situate themselves by problematising the adage of ‘new’ which often labels contemporary media technology. These perspectives reorient the term ‘new media’ by showing that the historical development of technology is not linear, but often ‘remediating’ (Bolter and Grusin 1999), or that ‘newness’ ought to be attributed to its recombinant qualities (Manovich 2000). These suggestions locate newness in cultural and social usages of technology, as much as technological innovation. Scott McQuire describes how a recurring trait of modernity has been the ongoing presence of discourses which propose that the past is being ‘broken’ with. Examining these discussions in light of histories of technological development, he argues that these discourses are markers of a transitional phase, a “passage of negotiation” which develops between the first appearances of a new technology, and its assimilation and eventual subsumption into social practice (2008:14).

A growing cache of literature also explores visual culture and art from this perspective. As Darren Tofts writes, “it’s hard to shake off the connotation of novelty still associated with new media arts; a novelty that, to some extent, was necessary and responsible for capturing public attention for such work in the first place. The challenge is to amplify the visible and sonic presence of media art in the ambience otherwise known as culture” (2005:137). Margot Lovejoy similarly describes how terming a period as ‘post’ can signify an assertion of difference and even freedom from that which had preceded. In particular, she notes how within arts practice major cultural breakdowns have been perceived as an opportunity for a recreation of hierarchies, and thus allowed passage for a ‘positive good’ (2004:312-313).
A number of art historical studies offer a methodological suggestion as to how media art can be addressed within appropriate analytical terms. These ‘media art histories’ (Grau 2007) consider the relationship between technological progress and aesthetics, recharging trajectories set some seventy years prior by Walter Benjamin. William J. Mitchell (2007) argues for a taxonomy of visual culture, proposing that an empirical and phenomenological analysis will enable an investigation of semiotic and sensory nuances. In the same anthology (Grau 2007), Louise Poissant suggests that media art be used as an exploratory lab space for navigating the complex nature of the technological environments which we regularly engage with. While I situate my study within a social and political history of the museum as a public institution rather than the discipline of art history, I align my research with these ‘media art historical’ perspectives, as they engage with notions of experience, materiality and historical contextualisation. They do so by arguing that phenomenological work needs to be undertaken, if to better understand the complex historical lineage which aesthetic experiences and technological development share. A phenomenology of visitor experience therefore offers a way of critically appraising how technologies influence everyday life, and is used as the basis for my investigation into a politics of movement.

**Phenomenology, ethnology and empiricism**

The third chapter of this thesis is dedicated to the development of a research methodology and theoretical framework which integrates a phenomenological perspective with issues relevant to a study of agency. I commence the chapter by surveying studies of the museum visitor, exploring how phenomenological investigations offer perspectives from which a theoretical and methodological framework can be developed. This survey of literature exposes a lack of research into museum visitation, and points towards the need for an empirically-informed

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11 Mitchell argues that the development of a taxonomy of visual culture is a pressing issue as the categorical mixture of terms create analytical problems for visual culture as a field of investigation:

> Why does all this matter? Why quibble about an expression, ‘visual media’ that seems to pick out a general class of things in the world, however unprecisely? Isn’t this like someone objecting to lumping bread, cake, and cookies under the rubric of “baked goods”? Actually, no. It’s more like someone objecting to putting bread, cake, chicken, a quiche and a cassoulet into the category of “baked goods” because they all happen to go into the oven. The problem with ‘visual media’ is that it gives the illusion of picking out a class of things about as coherent as ‘things you can put in an oven’ (2007:403).

12 Poissant writes that art has always played a role in familiarising us with our environments, and that forms of 3D art invite an enhanced sensory engagement:

> Printing and alphabetisation made the world a book to be read, favouring abstraction and various formalizations, which science and the arts of the twentieth century espoused. Actual research in the domain of interfaces, particularly in art, aims more for a redeployment of the 3-D world. One want to touch, feel, relearn gestures, rediscover new forms of sensation, other layers of sensoriality, and other dimensions of space (2007:242).
phenomenology. I responded to this lack of empirical research by undertaking an ethnographic investigation of visitor experience in the Screen Gallery, as ethnography provides several qualitative techniques for gathering richly phenomenological material.

**Ethnographic study**

‘Ethnography’, a term loosely borrowed from social anthropology, traditionally takes the form of participant observation, where, as a ‘participant’ within a social or cultural setting, the researcher records their first-hand observations of a social and cultural environment. For example, symbolic interactionism has been an influential form of ethnographic analysis as it critiques quantitative, behaviourist paradigms by employing qualitative techniques to examine human beings as both products and producers of symbols. Symbolic interactionists argue that in order to understand the actions of a people, it is necessary to conceive their objects as they conceive them (Cuff et al 2006:141). Ethnography is therefore an empirical method which constructs a situated, qualitative and interpretive description of human behaviour, and fitting for a study of visitor experience.

While participant observation is a characteristic feature of the ethnographic approach, ethnographers often integrate additional empirical methods such as textual analysis, interviews and oral history. As anthropologist Clifford Geertz explains, the ethnographer is a scribe as much as an explorer, as “the ethnographer ‘inscribes’ social discourse” (Geertz 1973:19) so as to generate a ‘thick description’ (Geertz 1973:6) which details behaviour within its cultural context. In recent decades ethnographic research has flourished within particular fields, such as nursing and health sciences, studies of work and organisations, educational research, theatre and media studies (Atkinson et al 2001:5), although notably, has not been frequently utilised for studies of museum visitation.

I undertook participant observation in the Screen Gallery as a part of my ethnographic study. This process consisted of fortnightly visits for the duration of two exhibitions. I also conducted a number of interviews with the Gallery’s visitors, as well as its curators. This

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13 An early proponent of the symbolic interactionism was social philosopher George Herbert Mead, however the term was coined by Herbert Blumer (1969), who was strongly influenced by Mead’s work and translated it into a sociological doctrine (Cuff et al 2006:119). While this form of research has made a substantial contribution to sociological thought for relativising early sociological paradigms, and continues to be practiced today, it has been marginalised by the work of post-structuralist and post-modernists, who take the broader structures which condition social relations into closer consideration when conducting their analysis (Cuff et al 2006:141).

14 Clifford borrows this term from philosopher Gilbert Ryle (1971), who describes the many different forms of interpretation that the act of winking can elicit. He differentiates between a ‘thin’ description which details the action, and a ‘thick’ description which also creates a cultural context and interpretive meaning of the action.
ethnographic material is central to my analysis, as I used the voices of visitors to guide the thematic direction of the study, and thereby determine the direction of the ensuing analysis. My investigation is the first in-depth, qualitative analysis of visitation undertaken at the Screen Gallery, and therefore makes a contribution to research within the creative industry and policy sectors, as well as museology, as it details the relationship between artistic and museum practices, and new forms of visitation. This approach also makes an empirical contribution to existing visitor studies as it offers an original means of exploring issues of museum visitation and agency. While I will describe the empirical procedure in detail in the second chapter, at this point I wish to highlight a number of issues which arose when undertaking the ethnographic study, as they reflect many of the criticisms which have been levelled at ethnography, and in turn influenced the way I proceeded with my empirical research.

A prevailing criticism of participant observation relates to the positionality of the researcher, as empirical material gathered through first-hand observation will always, to some extent, be filtered through the subjective interpretations of the ethnographer. This issue was raised notably by Edward Said in *Orientalism* (1978), in which he questioned the authority of ethnocentric, Western representations of the East. Feminist critiques throughout the 1970’s have voiced similar concerns about the male voices which have dominated ethnographic writing (Spencer 2001:444). While Atkinson et al (2001:3) have argued that there has never been a stable, chronological or hegemonic order of ethnography, but rather an ongoing dialectic between what has been thought of as the dominant orthodoxy and centrifugal forces which promote difference and diversity, these issues came to a fore in James Clifford and George Marcus’ influential text, *Writing Culture: the Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (1986). The authors took issue with the positivist and authoritative voices which had featured prominently in earlier qualitative research by arguing that researchers needed to locate the ‘self’ in their ethnographies. This text was significant within the discipline of ethnography as it marked an ‘interpretive’ turn in qualitative research, and consequently spurned a new generation of qualitative studies, widely termed ‘new’ (Goodall 2000), ‘critical’ (Madison 2005) or ‘reflexive ethnographies’ (Davis 1999).

**Reflexive ethnographies**

Ethnographers have proposed a number of different ways to inculcate their research with greater reflexivity. D. Soyini Madison argues that contemporary forms of ethnographic research should begin with an ethical responsibility to address the complexity of observing a *lived* domain, stating that “when we turn back, we are accountable for our own research paradigms, our own positions of authority, and our own moral responsibility relative to representation and interpretation” (2005:7). Pierre Bourdieu similarly argues that researchers must be aware of the ‘symbolic power’ they wield as scholars. He
argues for a ‘sociology of sociology’ in which visitors confront their presuppositions by objectifying the subject of objectification, and thereby avoid casting categorical assumptions within their studies (Bourdieu 1990). Ethnographers have also begun to view their empirical fields of study with greater reflexivity. George Marcus (1998, 2002) argues that contemporary ethnographies should be multi-sited, as the pervasive influences of globalisation have fractured space and time to the extent that a study of a singular field cannot account for the complex way that contemporary social relations may traverse multiple fields. The study of material culture has also become a growing field of research for similar reasons, as ethnography offers a means of investigating how objects acquire and mediate social relations across multiple, and even simultaneous contexts (Tilley 2001).

The turn towards reflexivity has also placed the practice of ethnographic writing under greater scrutiny. As Paul Rock observes “the ability to write [ethnographically] must be recognized also as an ability to deform and sensor” (2001:36). In light of this recognition, ethnographers have examined the efficacy of field notes as written texts, considered new methodological strategies for recording empirical material, and experimented with new forms of prose and poetic language so as to undermine the authority of a single voice (Emerson et al 2001:352). Alternatively, ethnographers such as Norman Denzin advocate the writing of theoretically-informed studies, as an enhanced critical awareness can be used to frame the political subjectivity of the ethnographer (1997). Madison (2005:13) similarly emphasises the importance of drawing upon theoretical knowledge to inform the critical analysis, proposing that reflexive ethnography can become “the ‘doing’ – or, better, the performance – of critical theory”.

I have responded to these issues of reflexivity in ethnographic research by drawing upon suggestions to imbricate empirical investigation with theoretical understanding. I use this framework to account for my positionality as a researcher, and to inform my approach to the Screen Gallery and its visitors as a field of study. I have developed a methodological framework that draws upon the conceptual vocabulary of Henri Lefebvre (2004) and Gaston Bachelard (1994) as both writers – in different ways – offer theoretical interpretations of spatial experience, and phenomenological perspectives from which to consider notions of reflexivity. Lefebvre’s ‘rhythmmanalysis’ provides a framework for reflexively embedding oneself within an empirical environment, while Bachelard describes a ‘poetics of space’ in which intimate experiences resonate with immense and powerful forms of meaning. As I will detail in the third chapter, I draw these positions together by using my own experiential, sensory ‘positionality’ as a ‘rhythmmanalyst’ of the Screen Gallery, comparing visitors’ responses with my own experience, and use this as a basis from which to codify behaviour. In the fourth chapter I observe Marcus’ concerns with treating one’s empirical field as a
'globalised' space by investigating visitors’ spatial experiences of the Screen Gallery, while in the fifth chapter I address consider the recent trends towards materialist ethnographies by examining how visitors interact with the Gallery’s art as digital, technologically innovative objects.

By reflexively detailing the intimate, phenomenological reactions of visitors, I also address the deeply political concerns of my study. Critical engagement with Lefebvre and Bachelard’s work locates visitor behaviour within the structural influences of institutional pedagogy and political conditions of everyday life. Their studies draw a link between the subjectively experienced and the very contexts in which sensation, perception and cognition arise: from the simple pleasure of finding oneself in an intimate space, to the ceaseless commotion of urban life, or indeed, the internal disquiet which erupts as these spaces collide. Most importantly, however, underlying the work of both authors is a deep concern with the nature of everyday experiences, and the very political ways in which our environments and our interaction within them influence our awareness of self-capacity - or sense of agency. From the perspective of a study of the museum visitor, these phenomenological frameworks enable the integration of multiple phenomenological foci relevant to an exploration of agency, incorporating the subtlety of kinaesthetic sensation, perceptions of space, playful interaction with objects, movement through the broader exhibition environment, and the dawn of new meaning as visitors begin to imagine linkages between aesthetic experiences and the conditions of daily life.

**Locating potential**

A further aim of my research has been to develop a research methodology which is not only appropriate for the terms of this investigation, but has application beyond the specificities of this study and can be used for further exploration of agency in daily life. Brian Massumi’s ‘field of immanence’ (2002) is useful, as it offers a way to reflexively develop my study whilst reinforcing a theoretical framework which reconceptualises the relationship between agency and structure. By expounding a logic of relation, Massumi argues that agency and structure become constructs when fashioned by the realisation of their *immanence*. A theory of immanence therefore maps the dynamic of change by following the trajectory from a *potential* to an *emergence*. My research, and the way that I interpret these processes of change, are also constituents within this field, along with the range of material I draw upon to develop my

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15 Brian Massumi doesn’t explicitly describe his approach as a ‘field theory’, but I refer to it in this manner as he invokes Michel Serres’ analogy of a soccer match (1982), and Bruno Latour’s (1993) reading of Serres’ quasi-object, to develop his logic of relation. This is discussed in further detail in the third chapter.
analysis. This framing therefore entrenches movement into this study, both as a theme and a method. It ensures that I ‘move’ within and among a range of material to reflexively and qualitatively develop my study, as its immanence is realised through empirical evidence, theoretical analysis and historical discussion. By triangulating my investigation with interviews, observational analysis and theory, my study not only contributes to scholarly literature which details the transformation of the museum, art object and visiting public; it also extends the breadth of studies relating to museum visitation by developing a research methodology applicable to studies which endeavour to use phenomenological analysis for exploration of a broader politics.

Investigating agency and pedagogy
The fourth and fifth chapters put this framework to use by locating and analysing modalities of visitor agency as they arise and are expressed. In the fourth chapter I commence this integration of empirical material and phenomenological analysis by introducing my interviewees as they commence their journey to Federation Square, and proceed towards the steps into the Screen Gallery. This chapter specifically details agency through an investigation of the relationship between visitor and institution. Drawing from visitors’ perceptions of the Gallery’s darkened spaces, I analyse the way that the traditional forms of interaction in the museum have transformed, and appear to alter visitors’ spatial experiences. I demonstrate that visitors create their own pathways of movement through the Gallery by responding to largely affective cues. This means that a heightening of sensory perception characterises the spatial experience of the Gallery, where footlights, or perhaps a flicker of a work in the distance, become the navigational suggestions for movement.

This chapter also details the Gallery’s affective spatial ecology, formally defining it as ‘ambient space’. This is a term I refer to throughout the dissertation. In my definition I explicitly align ambient space with the concept of ‘ambient music’, coined by sound artist Brian Eno in 1978 (Eno 1996b). I intentionally develop this linkage between visual art and music, as it draws attention to the way that all art, regardless of its form, is actually a wholly sensory experience – even if one sense predominates over another.16 Indeed, despite the Gallery being situated within a centre for the moving image, in the interviews I conducted visitors frequently described a range of non-visual responses.

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16 Eno also draws this relationship when commenting upon the inspiration for his work: “It interested me because it suggested moving the process of making music much closer to the process of painting” (1996b:294).
By adopting the term ‘ambient space’ for use throughout my study, I also highlight and rectify this visual bias, which is also common to literature associated with ‘visual culture’. W. J. Mitchell pointedly argues that there are ‘no visual media’, yet despite this, artistic and technological development are frequently examined without any reference to further dimensions of sensorial experience (2007). Chris Schilling (2003:19) similarly notes the “absent presence” of the body in critical writing, and argues that this ‘disembodied’ approach requires rectification through further sociological study. I address this issue by using the term ambient space as a specific theoretical tool that demands an empirical and phenomenological account of spatial experience. This term encapsulates a whole spectrum of encounter with art, and therefore enables me to draw upon my empirical material with precision and integrity.

In the fourth chapter I also assess how the Gallery’s ambient space fashion distinctive modes of visitor agency which signal a transformation of museum pedagogy. While the Gallery engineers the parameters of visitor experience through architectural design, visitors’ self-determined movement through the Gallery creates new ways of seeing, moving, perceiving and meaning-making in the museum, and the grounds for a politics of movement. Ambient space is therefore an immanent space, as it is within this environment that new modalities for agency arise, and the potential for a new politics can be located.

The fifth chapter complements the discussion raised in the fourth. Where the fourth chapter examines the institutional conventions which elicit new forms of agency, the fifth chapter investigates the changing relationship between the art object and visitor. I document the differences between interacting with moving digital images, rather than still-imaged forms of art, as it is within the differences between object-based and spatial experience that a further potential for agency arises. Drawing upon visitors’ comments about their interaction with the Gallery’s art, I argue that modalities of agency resonate most strongly across three levels: affect, reflexive forms of perception, and cognition. The interrelationship between these modalities is largely determined by the conditions of ambient space, and the specific characteristics and contexts of the artworks. Together, these modalities of agency enable visitors to develop a new system of relations within the screen environment. Significantly, these relations reflect associations visitors make in their daily lives, which suggests that the agency experienced in the Screen Gallery has a correlative to forms of agency which are expressed outside of it, in visitors’ everyday reality.

**Examining praxes**

The sixth and seventh chapters focus upon the way these modalities of agency interrelate by equipping visitors with a praxis both within, and beyond the Gallery. My study reveals that
potential arises primarily within states of technology-mediated play and stillness. In the sixth chapter, I demonstrate that the museum becomes a site for play by relaxing its traditional conventions, and thereby enables visitors to playfully test and create their own rules of interaction. As anthropologists such as Johan Huizinga (1970) show, this process of playing is inherently linked with learning, which, in the Screen Gallery, is indicative of a further institutional transformation. The mediation of knowledge through play transforms the traditional role and conventions of museum pedagogy, as it circulates within an aestheticisation of reflexive knowledge. This term describes how, in a playful and time based art environment, meaning becomes bound within an individual’s ability to negotiate the simultaneity of both experiential and cognitive responses as valid forms of knowledge. This implies that knowledge in the Gallery circulates reflexively and subjectively, and is therefore fragmented and unstable. As a result, playful interaction with art requires visitors to exercise new forms of technologically-mediated literacy. This involves practicing reflexive forms of meaning production which span across multiple spatialities and temporalities, and the navigation of social relations which emerge within new, public intimacies. However, I also argue that while this agency may better equip its visitors with the literacy necessary for negotiating the complexity of everyday experience, some will struggle to shoulder the increasing self-responsibility it demands – a situation also replicated within the conditions of daily life.

As a thematic accompaniment to this chapter, Chapter Seven is dedicated to an exploration of stillness. Among the greatest difficulties I encountered when conducting my observations of visitors was finding a way to interpret an absence of movement or play. Quiet faces and still bodies reveal very little about the internal processes (or perhaps lack thereof) which arise from aesthetic experience. Discussion of these experiences prompted examination of movement from a different critical angle – from its absence - where it seemed that qualities of stillness, rather than movement, dictated visitor behaviour. Both of these states are modalities within a broad vocabulary of interaction, where visitors oscillate between movement and stillness, at times finding stillness in movement, and even movement whilst remaining still. I therefore reflect upon stillness and movement as related terms whose shared dynamic enables a better understanding of visitation experience.

The seventh chapter therefore explores visitor experiences which emerge from conditions of immersive stillness, and are characterised by a state of focused attention. I argue that stillness is evidence of a qualitative, generative movement between states, where, by experiencing a slowing of time and heightening of sense-perception, visitors surrender to a distinctive aesthetic and affective immersion. I propose that a new potential for agency is borne of
stillness, as it invites a spatial participation which requires affective awareness – a sensitivity to the congruent ‘resonance’ one feels between art environment, artwork and the internal and external sensations of the body. Where in the sixth chapter I argued that technology-mediated play created new possibilities for communal behaviour, in the seventh I detail how technology-mediated stillness generates highly individualised, self-determined expressions of agency. While agency was something to be learned, appropriated and internalised when playing, when one is given the opportunity to appropriate time, become still, and pause to reflect, agency takes root internally and swells with experiences of aesthetic immensity. I argue that a politics of movement which emanates from stillness resounds from within, and then ‘reverberates’ as an external expression of the desire to create, learn and enrich one’s own life experience.

**Appraising a new politics**

Having trailed visitors as they interacted with the Gallery’s art and ambient space, the concluding chapter draws the narrative of the visitor’s journey to a close. In this chapter, I follow visitors as they depart the Gallery, and assess the robustness of the politics of movement. Reflecting upon the journey they have taken, I evaluate how the modalities of agency experienced in the Gallery will continue to find expression within its walls, and as an everyday praxis beyond them. To do so I describe how the Screen Gallery has transformed since the empirical study concluded, and propose that changes to ACMI’s institutional practice reflect the difficulties of presenting innovative technological art in a digital age.

A politics of movement is therefore concerned with the immanent potential which resides within new forms of art, new art environments, and new forms of subjective experience. It looks for a capacity for change. As Gary Warner suggests, museums absorb waves of cultural change and offer these as a new terrain of experiences to their visitors:

> Museums today, they know there are new conventions that have to be established in the encounter with new forms of knowledge, new cultural values and these new ‘immortal’ media. Museums are being forced into change by the cultures they serve. They’re like a landscape that gets forced into change – a tornado goes through, a drought or an earthquake – the change starts and opportunist species arrive in that landscape and establish themselves… Within any ecology there’s always a sense of succession and it doesn’t have to be a dangerous, feral malignancy that results. It can be a new ecology that arises because different conditions and opportunities begin to prevail (1998:20).

This study therefore looks towards the opportunities made possible by a distinctive juncture between art, technology and subjective experience. The following chapter commences this investigation by detailing ACMI’s emergence and situating it within a genealogy of the
museum. It describes the ‘ecology’ which visitors enter into as they begin to navigate the Gallery’s darkened spaces, and shapes their interaction with moving image art. As I will show throughout my investigation, this ecology yields powerful modes of visitor agency which not only find expression within the museum, but may also extend into everyday life as a new praxis, out of which a politics of movement may grow.
POTENTIAL
CHAPTER TWO

History, Hybridity, Ambivalence

Collections were first opened to the public on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays to ‘anyone with clean shoes’ according to an edict of 1792 (Slessor 1997:4).
Chapter Two
History, Hybridity and Ambivalence

Introduction

What we need to do is expand on people’s use and engagement in the moving image… If you look at the future of where ACMI is going… one of the critical things we’ll be doing is getting the next generation using that language

John Smithies, ACMI’s inaugural CEO (McLachlan 2003:61).

When you’re in ACMI, you are in the world of the moving image… Let’s imagine public architecture of the near future as an architecture built of moving images, moving light, moving colour. Already the project has become a research project into new forms of public space at the same time as it’s a cultural institution dedicated to the history of the moving image

Ross Gibson, ACMI’s inaugural Creative Director (Bersten 2002:20).

ACMI’s progenitors envisioned ways that the moving image could mediate new and significant forms of spatial experience in the museum. John Smithies describes the way the moving image circulates as a contemporary language. He foresees ACMI’s pedagogy as an investment into a system of communication which will equip future generations with a contemporary literacy. Ross Gibson too, alludes to a pedagogical transformation of the museum, rendering ACMI a “research project” which looks towards exploratory possibilities, as much as cultivating a repository for the cultural past. However, rather than language, he underscores the forms of spatial encounter made possible by the moving image. He suggests that it can be architectural, where colour and light form a new palette for spatial design, so that the moving image becomes a conduit for new experiences of public space. These comments about potential, new forms of pedagogy, spatial experience and technological innovation are the grounds in which my investigation of visitor experience to the Screen Gallery, and experiences of visitor agency, is located.

In this chapter I locate the Screen Gallery within its institutional and broader contemporary environments. I commence with a spatial description of ACMI which situates the Screen Gallery within its physical environment. This ‘walk-through’ reveals how, through an institutional hybridity, ACMI aims to promote public engagement with the moving image in many different forms. The Screen Gallery is especially distinctive as an art space, as it encapsulates this hybridity by inviting multiple forms of public engagement with the moving image. I then investigate the intentions behind this institutional complexity within ACMI’s
policy contexts. I draw together statements made by ACMI’s progenitors and members of government, specifically examining the style of rhetoric which appeared in press and policy statements. I explore the language of the new and unprecedented to investigate how ACMI has been crafted as a new, hybrid institution. Two of these figures have already been introduced: ACMI’s inaugural CEO, John Smithies, and its first Creative Director, Ross Gibson. Statements by former ACMI Chairman, Terry Cutler, and architect Don Bates, who, with Lab Architecture, headed the design and development of ACMI and Federation Square, will also be considered. The voices of various influential Victorian state government representatives also appear, including Steve Bracks, Victoria’s state Premier, Mary Delahunty, Minister for the Arts and Women’s Affairs, and John Brumby, Treasurer and Minister for Innovation.\(^{17}\) This analysis reveals that ACMI has been set a difficult remit as a new, cultural institution, as it must contend with multiple, and at times, conflated responsibilities, where education and civic responsibility are closely linked with generating social infrastructure and economic growth.

This multi-faceted set of aims creates a complex institutional and pedagogical agenda for ACMI, and unsurprisingly, a number of tensions arise as a result of the many tasks it has been set. The following part of this chapter therefore situates ACMI within a genealogy, so as to examine how the museum has historically been shaped by its political environment, as well as how specific visitation experiences have been cultivated through various expressions of the museum’s pedagogy. I differentiate between these phases of pedagogy by analysing how the relationships between the museum, art object and visitor have evolved since the inception of the museum as an institution of the emerging liberal democratic state in the nineteenth century. I argue that the many institutional roles ACMI purports to undertake reflect an accumulation of these pedagogical histories, and that visitor experiences are to be understood as much from the modes of individualisation that are encountered in daily life, as from the perspective of the pedagogical agenda visitors encounter upon attending the museum.

I then extend ACMI’s genealogical history into the present, arguing that ACMI’s institutional hybridity, and the complex but ambivalent aspirations which have driven its formation, together reflect processes of ‘reflexive’ modernisation. While these characteristics are typical of a number of ‘new’ museums which have proliferated in recent years, I argue that the Screen Gallery is distinctive within this transitional phase of the museum, as it is an ‘augmented space’ which heightens conditions of ambivalence. This raises a number of pedagogical questions for the Screen Gallery, namely how the promise of new and unprecedented visitation

\(^{17}\) At present John Brumby is the premier of Victoria (as well as Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Veterans Affairs), the Minister for the Arts is Lynne Kosky, the minister for Women’s Affairs is Maxine Morand, and Treasurer and Minister for Innovation is Gavin Jennings. Bracks and Delahunty have retired.
experiences, such as those articulated by Smithies and Gibson above, may materialise as expressions of visitor agency, and cultivate a political potential. These are questions of the present, and therefore mark the end of my genealogical narrative, and launch my investigation of visitor experiences within ACMI’s Screen Gallery.

**Institutional hybridity**

From the moment that we step off the undulating, cobbled warmth of Federation Square and into ACMI’s smooth, white foyer, a distinctive space for public participation with the moving image presents itself. From the reception area, a heavy-set, cement staircase leads up to two state-of-the-art cinema theatres. These have played host to fora, symposia and a diverse range of events, such as international film festivals, Melbourne’s weekly Cinémathèque, as well as ACMI’s own successful cinema programs. Moving past these stairs, an escalator awaits to take patrons down to the ground floor foyer. This space is alight with plasma screens, a digital wallpaper connecting the entrances to ACMI’s Screen Gallery, the Memory Grid, Games Lab and Screen Pit [Figure 2.1]. Also located within this space is a brightly-lit reception desk, the collection and drop-off point for ACMI’s Lending Collection, and an information hub for visitors.

![ACMI’s reception desk](image)

ACMI expresses its institutional pedagogy within each of these areas by offering the visiting public a specific form of engagement with the moving image. The Lending Collection is a means of generating moving image literacy through public-access library and archive services. These consist of the National Film and Video Lending Service’s Special Collection, the French and Chinese Embassy Collections, and a growing Student Collection drawn from Victoria’s tertiary and secondary institutions. ACMI also promotes moving image literacy by fostering educational links with school and tertiary institutions, as well as film, video and

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18 The Special Collection consists of 1000 significant 35mm and 16mm films. The National Film and Video Lending Service is managed by the National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA 2007).
digital media industries. Drawing upon these resources, it has developed educational programs, facilitated technological and content production of the moving image, funded research, and collaborated with international, interstate and community groups to expand its archive of moving image material.

The Memory Grid is dedicated to a further fostering of collaborative relationships with community. Seeking to create a culture of access and participation, the Memory Grid is an expanding collection of over one hundred hours of film created and submitted by members of the public. The growing collection is exhibited for free in interactive ‘pods’, where groups of visitors sit together and curate their own, intimate viewing program via a touch-screen interface [Figure 2.2]. The Memory Grid presents the everyday experiences of Victoria’s community in a number of different forms. For example, in Memory and Place visitors can ‘MAP’ their visual memories of Victoria’s backyards, streets, and towns. Alternatively, they can seek out the more recent histories of their neighbourhoods in exhibitions such as Women’s Qesa: Stories of Sudan, a collection of digital stories told by newly-migrated Sudanese women.

![Figure 2.2] A screen pod in ACMI’s Memory Grid

Adjoining the Memory Grid are ACMi’s production spaces, the Screen Pit and Digital Studio. These too are places of learning and education. The Screen Pit [Figure 2.3] is a fully-equipped television studio and a site for a number of educational programs. These include Screen Adventures, in which children explore traditional story-telling techniques in a chroma-key environment. It can also be transformed into an amphitheatre for performances, and the research and development of experimental, new media works. The Digital Studio [Figure 2.4] is a fully-equipped media workshop which assists participants in the conceptualisation, production and execution of their own digital storytelling and moving image projects.

These have included works such as Scorched Happiness by Adam Nash (2004), Intimate Transactions: The Evolution of an Ecosophical Networked Practice by Keith Armstrong (2005) and Demi-Pas by Julien Maire (2005).
ACMI also attempts to cultivate educational interaction with the moving image through modalities of play in its Games Lab. This space is often curated in theme with the Screen Gallery’s exhibitions and cinema programs, although it has also hosted a number of stand-alone events. These range from machinima festivals to in-house, networked games, a forum about Sonic the Hedgehog, and exhibitions about political gaming.

Returning along the corridor to ACMI’s street-level foyer is the entrance to the Screen Gallery. As detailed in the introduction to this dissertation, to attend the Gallery the visitor descends a heavy-set staircase into a darkened chamber [see Figure 2.5]. The passage of descent marks a point of experiential transition, as the exhibition space offers a distinctive spatial experience as compared to the white walls, polished wooden floorboards and bright lights of the nearby NGV. The Screen Gallery’s pliable architecture generates new spatial encounters with art. With each new exhibition, for example, rooms may form, corridors can collapse and disappear, or the ceiling may split in half as moveable walls and a retractable mezzanine are curated as part of a new exhibition design.

The Screen Gallery fashions itself as a contemporary art space by exhibiting the moving image in multiple forms. It has displayed archival material, invited the public to play with interactive forms of media art, commissioned purpose-built works whilst also running educational programs and public tours. The Screen Gallery therefore also reflects the many possible
modes of engagement that the moving image may elicit not only within ACMI, but also within forms of encounter in visitors’ daily lives.

Not long after ACMI’s opening, John Smithies reflected upon the possibilities that could be generated by this institutional hybridity:

It is possible to include ACMI in the family of a museum, library or gallery but this too easily ignores the significant differences. The Australian Centre for the Moving Image is an example of a new generation of cultural institutions - one that will move beyond the limitation of a physical site and one that fully embraces and celebrates the dominant pervasive mediums of the past 100 years and the future (MATP 2003:25).

‘Embracing’ and ‘celebrating’ both history and potential, Smithies’ statement is imbued with the language of transformation and opportunity. While he locates ACMI’s foundations within histories of technological innovation, he also proposes that as a new, hybrid institution, it has the capacity to exceed the limitations of the present. Smithies alludes to possibilities which overcome the physical limitations of Federation Square and extend the familiar pedagogical boundaries carved out by traditional public institutions. These possibilities are articulated within specific internal policy aims, as well as the policy statements of the Victorian state government. Together, they define a distinctive pedagogical and institutional agenda which links ACMI’s hybridity and its capacity for transformation with industrial contribution, economic growth and cultural wealth.

**Policy trajectories: creative industries and new technology**

ACMI was a product of a profound policy shift in Australia in the mid 1990’s, in which trends towards economic liberalisation began to substantially reframe the relationship between cultural institutions and government through an industry-development approach to arts funding (Stevenson 2000:78). These transformations are characteristic of ‘cultural’ and ‘creative’ industries. The term ‘cultural industries’ gained purchase in the 1970’s and 1980’s to describe commercial industries that had become ‘cultural’, while ‘creative industries’ is a more recent term which has appeared in policy, academic and industrial contexts (Cunningham 2001). This policy direction was also influenced by the dotcom boom of the mid to late 1990’s, where new industrial and economic reform was rendered possible through the joint forces of globalisation and technological progress. This shift was initially articulated within Prime

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20 Cunningham makes an argument for distinguishing between ‘creative’ and ‘cultural’ industries, contending that each term emerged from a specific context, and therefore requires differentiation in the development of theoretical debate, and when referring to policy instruments and industrial strategies (2001).
Minister Paul Keating’s federal *Creative Nation* policy in 1994, and generated a subsequent wave of state and federal investment in museums and libraries towards the end of the 1990’s. ACMI’s was conceived as a part of this trend, billeted as a new state centre for film within the Victorian Kennett government’s *Arts 21* policy in 1994.

ACMI was formally legislated as a part of the *Film Act 2001*, where the Victorian government, in an effort to boost Victoria’s flagging film industry, abolished Cinemedia to form Film Victoria, a film-financing body, and ACMI, as a cultural centre for film (DP&C 2001a). The ACMI complex was built as a part of the Federation Square development with a $50 million federal grant from the Centenary of Federation Fund, and an additional $30 million donated by the Victorian government for building infrastructure and technology (Bock 2002:5). The legislative alignment with Victoria’s film, television and media industries was a strategic attempt to identify and exploit emerging markets, as ACMI Chairman, Terry Cutler, explains:

> We are a sort of cultural window into an increasingly important economic sector. The areas that we don’t widely recognise such as computer games are now as big globally as film and television and we’re talking megabucks. The Australian output in the digital game industry is already more than $200 million and growing faster than the wine industry. People are saying that in five or ten years if we get it right our production success story could be bigger than wine (Pheasant 2003:64).

*Creative Nation* marked a significant shift within Australia’s federal policies on culture, as it enmeshed issues of Australian identity, nationhood and multiculturalism with the arts, media and economic practice. By fusing the economic and cultural, Keating envisioned Australia as competitive in the global arena (Johnson 2000:31). Keating stated that

> The level of our creativity substantially determines our ability to adapt to new economic imperatives. It is a valuable export in itself and an essential accompaniment to the export of other commodities... It is essential to our economic success (Commonwealth of Australia 1994).

Kylie Message notes how in Australia this process reached its height in 1998 with the opening of both the Immigration Museum and the Hellenic Antiques Museum in Melbourne, the expansion and relocation of the NGV and Victorian Archives, as well as the further planning and development of the Melbourne Museum, Federation Square, the State Library of Victoria and the National Museum of Australia in Canberra (2002:2).

*Arts 21* was a policy statement which aimed to position Victoria as a global leader in creative industries through the combination of artistic endeavour and technological innovation (Office of the Premier of Victoria 1994). Despite the conservative nature of the government, *Arts 21* was supported by an unprecedented level of funding in recognition of the substantial investment into culture and the arts that was required if Victoria was to gain global recognition, especially within an information age.

Cinemedia, formed under the Cinemedia Corporation Act 1997, was a body responsible for the development, support and promotion of film, television and new media in Victoria. To indicate the extent of investment into ACMI and the Victorian film industry, the government’s funding allocation was as follows: up to $40 million for the Docklands Studio development; increased recurrent funding of $31.6 million over 4 years for industry development and investment in film, television and new media production; extension of the Department of State and Regional Development's strategic initiative industry program to film and television; and recurrent funding of $13.1 million over 4 years, and capital funding of $13.8 million in 2001-02 for ACMI (Arts Victoria 2001).
ACMI’s productivity was specifically linked to the cultural and economic dynamism that it could generate by enhancing the circulation of the moving image. In ACMI’s first annual report, Smithies suggested that

As ACMI evolves it is purposefully positioning itself within a global creative movement that is contemporary with the implementation of digital technology and the growth in telecommunications networks. There is a growing understanding about how to use digital technology to convert ideas, images and artefacts into bits and the ability for a world to share those bits and reconstruct the ideas, images and artefacts with anyone else online. ACMI aims to lead in the development of moving image technology and culture (2003:5).

ACMI was placed to make this style of impact through collaborative partnerships with arts organisations, educational institutions and private industry sectors. ACMI responded to this aim with creative development strategies which aimed to fund research and promote innovation, such as plans to commission a large portion of multimedia and new media works, whilst also setting a stipulation that 60% of these works would be Australian (Bock 2002:5). This investment into locally-produced works reflects the way that a creative industries approach to arts funding is also closely tied to civic and cultural responsibilities.

Policy trajectories: civic and community wealth
State government policy statements dictated that the arts industry should actively contribute to Victoria’s financial stability and health by engaging the Victorian community through the promotion of technology, culture and business. For example, Growing Victoria Together is a government vision statement which describes how the creativity of the arts sector can benefit Victoria both culturally and economically (DP&C 2001b):

Nothing illustrates the creative strength of our society as clearly as our cultural life. Our dynamic arts sector imbues every aspect of our lives with imagination and a sense of connection. The arts make a vital contribution to our economy, stimulating creativity and attracting tourists. We are all enriched by our engagement with a creative community (Bracks and Delahunty 2002).

Creative Capacity +, the Victorian government's policy framework for the arts, articulated these aims within a set of shared values which linked economic contribution with community creativity and a participatory culture:

Communities connected by caring. An economy driven by innovation. Education as a lifelong opportunity. These are the values of Victorians, values which depend on creativity as a social resource, a sound investment and an essential aspect of our lives (Bracks and Delahunty 2002:5).
ACMI’s charter specifically articulated an ambition to cultivate a relationship with the Victorian community by promoting literacy of the moving image, as it declares an aim to “research, collect, exhibit, create, teach, nurture and advocate the use of the moving image in all areas of society” (Cutler 2003:4). As Smithies suggests, this was envisaged as a way to strengthen the Victorian community through the shared cultural understanding dictated by government policy, while also pitching Victoria as a global leader in new technology:

Communities that can understand this changing environment and harness its strengths will grow and prosper. The ability to convert vast amounts of human knowledge into the language of the moving image will change humanity and the pace of human understanding. It is not just the language but also the technologies that make it accessible from anywhere in the world (Smithies 2002).

These policy aims are complex grounds from which to establish a museum pedagogy, as they are premised upon a mixture of government support and institutional self-responsibility. Government support is contingent upon institutional responses to ‘values’ which frame pedagogy in terms of education, community membership and citizenship. At the same time, the government has set a creative industries agenda which seeks to bolster Victoria’s economic wealth by improving civic infrastructure and community education through ‘dynamic’ creativity, and promoting Victoria as a global leader both culturally, and through industry. ACMI’s own response to this framework underscores new forms of literacy, spatial experience and public participation which would broadly encompass the multiple faces of its visitors: as Victorian citizens, tourists, consumers, as a general public, and as members of communities. By drawing all of these aims together within its pedagogical agenda, its practices would mediate between global and experiential agendas, straddle multiple visions within its innovative exploration of new technology and art, and thereby incorporate an institutional flexibility which keeps pace with technological innovation and contemporary cultural practices, whilst also maintaining organisational stability to ensure the financial viability required for ongoing government investment.

This complexity reflects pressures which are symptomatic of an era of modernity in which the dynamics of globalisation and neo-liberalism have significantly transformed the relationships between the state, its institutions and the public. Moreover, the challenges generated by late capitalism are the source of a growing tension in the historical relationship between museums and the state. By contextualising ACMI’s inception within a genealogy of the museum, and detailing how museum practices have historically reflected the concerns of their political environment within their pedagogical practices, it becomes evident that the policy aims
articulated by ACMI and the government represent a significant shift in the way the museum is cultivating its pedagogical agenda.

**A genealogy of the museum: politics, pedagogy and practices**

Museums opened to the public in the very late stages of the eighteenth century in Europe, publicly exhibiting objects belonging to exclusive and private collections of a feudal society. However, the mid to late nineteenth century signals an important phase in this genealogy of the museum, as the museum emerged as both a product and articulation of the early stages of modernity. In the process of transition from a feudal society, middle-class reformers became concerned with an increasing division between classes. For example, throughout the eighteenth century leisure consumption was dictated by class, as libraries, zoos and museums were often run for profit or by expensive subscription. Even public spaces were the domain of the wealthy, as commons, footpaths, gardens and highways were often closed to the general population, or patrolled by policemen. In an attempt to strengthen the national economy and more effectively manage the state, state administrators recognised a need to create social order by enforcing a cohesive and unified ‘public’ culture. Reformers began to make parks, museums and libraries publicly accessible, and open for ‘rational recreation’ (Hooper-Greenhill 1991:12-13). The arts, in particular, were considered to have rationalising capacities, and throughout the nineteenth century funding for the arts was often attached to discourses of citizenship, universal suffrage and education (Hooper-Greenhill 1991:14).

Public interaction with museums played an important role at this time. By making their objects publicly accessible, museums could enforce a pedagogical regulation of moral codes, and in doing so constitute the individual as both a subject and object of knowledge. By the end of the nineteenth century the educational role of the museum became formalised, and entrenched the museum as an integral public institution of the emerging liberal democratic state. Tony Bennett’s (1988, 1992, 1995, 1997, 1998, 2003) ‘governmental’ account of the museum describes how museums were responsible for management of the social through their cultural practices. This type of discussion about museums developed as a part of a project concerned with re-examining culture in terms other than those commonly found within cultural studies frameworks, as it highlights the formal relationship between the public and the functions of the state. Bennett’s accounts of the museum draw upon Michel Foucault’s notion of

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25 See, for example, Hooper-Greenhill (1991:187) for an account of the Louvre, which opened in 1792.

26 The genealogical trajectory I investigate is derived from a European history of the museum, as Australia’s museum model is largely Europe-influenced. Unlike the system of patronage prevalent within the United States, Australian museums are generally state-funded. See Stevenson (2000) for a comprehensive account of the historical lineage informing art and museum funding structures in Australia.
‘governmentality’, a form of power exercised as a mentality or rationality of government. In his study of governmentality. Foucault describes how agencies of the emerging liberal democratic state, such as hospitals, prisons, schools, and indeed, museums, regulated the conduct of the population by drawing from formations of knowledge and related professional expertise to project disciplinary technologies. Governmentality is therefore a decentralised form of power referring to the political rationalities which inform the arrangement of strategies and procedures coordinated by the state, and exercised through its agencies. In this manner, attending to the needs of all individuals within the population had become the focus of governance "the birth of a new art… of a range of absolutely new tactics and techniques" (Foucault 1991:100). In short, the pedagogy of the museum, as well as other state institutions such as hospitals, schools and prisons, reflects the political climate of the time, as the broader political agenda of the state is circulated as knowledge through these ‘disciplinary’ sites.

Bennett’s historical studies of the museum describe how the hegemonic power of the state was reinforced through processes of cultural edification. On one hand, visitors would be ‘enlightened’ by new forms of knowledge, whilst on the other, disciplined to accept their position as citizens of the state by interacting with objects which reflected narratives of modernity and progress. Bennett writes that

The museum object was to perform its work of government in a custom-built environment in which the architectural organisation of relations of space and vision and the arrangement of exhibits in the form of an ordered itinerary combined to regulate the conduct of visitors in a manner calculated to cultivate appropriate forms of comportment for public and civic spaces. This work of government… was to take place within the scene of writing through mechanisms of meaning and effect that were dependent on the mediation of objects through systems of visualisation which transformed the travelling objects of colonialism into pieces of historical discourse (Bennett 1998:210-211).

The museum has therefore been instrumental as a technology of citizenship, mediating state power through knowledge and hegemonically prescribing forms of visitor agency. This meant that museums not only displayed narratives of modern development for the sake of civic education, but also offered modern ways of seeing the world. In this sense, museums not only exhibited objects of modernity, but were also important contributors to the very constitution of modernity (Macdonald 1998:9-10).

However, while this governmental perspective describes how visitor agency has historically been fashioned as a reflection of institutional power, it offers a limited perspective from which to develop a genealogy of the museum. Modern experience is only described in terms of disciplinary power. This understanding of power is tied to a bracketed understanding of the
liberal democratic state, as agency is only defined in terms of citizenship. This account fails to capture, how at this time, the emergence of consumer capitalism was also generating new phenomenological experiences which constituted the individual in new and often contradictory ways. In addition, the democratising agenda of the museum was being informed by the new modes of individualism which were generated through tacit, as well as disciplinary forms of knowledge.

**Alternate narratives of modernity**

The everyday spatial experiences of individuals in late nineteenth century Europe were rendered increasingly complex through processes of industrialisation, as the early tides of consumerist culture began to transform urban environments into metropoles and sites for leisure, entertainment and tourism. Furthermore, the redevelopment of urban spaces required a negotiation of social relations between classes, as the public began to gather and mix in new social circumstances (Ward Thomson 2002:60). These opportunities for public cohesion were coupled with experiences of increasing fragmentation and alienation, as technological developments generated new sensory associations. For example, the circulation of image-based objects such as plate-glass windows, postcards and photos contributed to a ‘separation of the senses’. These ‘multi-sensuous’ ways of experiencing reality became arguably more sophisticated through the democratisation of photographic technologies, as well as conceptions of landscape and maps, as they each contributed to a different way of ‘seeing the world’ (Urry 2000:83).

The conception of the museum visitor therefore extends beyond a disciplined citizen of the state to include modern forms of behaviour which Walter Benjamin (1999) has notably detailed as ‘flânerie’. Through the figure of the flâneur, a lone walker who wandered the streets of nineteenth century Paris, Benjamin observed how burgeoning processes of industrialisation were transforming public space with new phenomenological experiences. ‘Tacit’, rather than disciplinary forms of knowledge circulated in the flâneur’s sensory world, as its objects were symbols of commodity and spectacle. This alternate account of modernity suggests that the modern individual’s interaction with cultural objects involves pleasure and agency as much as power and constraint, meaning that these histories of consumerism and modern experience also shed light upon the way that the nineteenth century museum constituted its visitors.

For example, by tracing a lineage between the Crystal Palace, built to host the first World Fair in London in 1851, and contemporary forms of ‘media museum’, Kylie Message (2002:38) describes how some museums created expositions of progress and innovation by exhibiting the technologies of the day as signifiers of modernity, and also using these technologies to augment the experiential qualities of visitation.\textsuperscript{28} By inviting public interaction with objects of technology and commodification, some forms of museums circulated tacit and popular forms of knowledge through new forms of phenomenological experience.\textsuperscript{29} Andrea Witcomb’s historical account of media technologies in the museum also shows how democratic forms of participation were made possible by incorporating styles of readership associated with the popular press.

Witcomb specifically responds to Bennett’s ideas about the relationship between government, institution and visitor by presenting the governmental history as only one of many trajectories relevant to a genealogy of the museum. She argues that the museum’s history must take into account the multiple narratives which have influenced its development, for “in this way of viewing the museum, the museum is never a closed repository – a mausoleum – but an institution which is closely connected with other sites of cultural production” (1998:25).\textsuperscript{30} This perspective allows for a culturally sensitive analysis of museum practice which focuses upon the role of the museum’s visitors by integrating additional conceptions of individualism and subjective experience. This position shows that by mediating these forms of knowledge and experience through objects of commodification and new technology, museums conditioned the public as consumers, as well as ‘disciplined’ citizens.

The pedagogical agenda of the museum shifted in the years following the First World War, as museums increasingly recognised that objects alone could not explain the recent past, but required contextualisation within social, cultural and industrial histories. Museums began to draw upon images, sound and text to create a richer historical perspective. This shift in exhibition style required a greater range of source material, and as a result, ‘archiving’ began

\textsuperscript{28} See J.A. Auerbach (1999) for a detailed account of the Crystal Palace.

\textsuperscript{29} Benjamin also equates these developments with experiences of alienation resulting from the commodification of everyday life: “The world exhibitions glorify the exchange value of commodities. They create a framework in which commodities’ intrinsic value is eclipsed. They open up a phantasmagoria that people enter to be amused. The entertainment industry facilitates this by elevating people to the level of commodities. They submit to being manipulated while enjoying their alienation from themselves and others” (1978:152).

\textsuperscript{30} Witcomb’s work responds to the lineage of criticism stemming from Adorno’s Marxist critique of the museum, where the museum is positioned either as ‘old’ for upholding out-dated nineteenth century values, or is heralded as a ‘new’ site for retaliatory cultural resistance. Witcomb argues that the functions of education and entertainment need not be polarised, and a trajectory can be created in which recent changes are regarded an accumulation of, rather than a break with, past events (2003:13-26).
to develop as a professional practice.\textsuperscript{31} Therefore, in the 1920’s education was no longer the exclusive aim of the museum, as the radical social potential which had characterised its formative years lost priority to collection practices which sought to preserve and maintain history. In addition, this shift from strongly positivist accounts of culture to socially-sympathetic perspectives marked the advent of a controversial phase of transition for museums. Museum had for the first time allowed the domain of the private into the public space of the museum, both in the historical stories being narrated, and the pedagogical suggestion that visitors could ‘interpret’ exhibitions, rather than be ‘taught’ (Kavanagh 2000:7).

Following the 1920’s, curating and education became further differentiated as professional practices. Specific educational remits were developed for school programs and adult visitors. The museum began to offer new educational resources, such as loan services to schools, guided tours of their collections, developed closer working relationships with universities, and also began to define professional practices as modes of expertise. Curators withdrew from the public, and instead began to use their exhibitions as a means of communication (Hooper-Greenhill 1991:9). This emphasis on museum curatorship was reflected in a greater attention to exhibition display, which was in part influenced by the formalisation of consumer retail practices. This professionalisation of museum practice therefore drew an even closer association between visitors’ encounters with objects of ‘cultural value’ and objects of commodity, as museums and retail spaces began to increasingly resemble one another. In the 1920’s and 1930’s in the United States, for example, museums attempted to combat a drop in visitation by replicating the merchandising strategies of department stores. As a consequence, museums and retailers began to jointly compete for the public’s attention as arbiters of taste (Harris 1990).

Throughout the 1960’s and 1970’s museums continued to professionalise their practices and specialise modes of staff expertise. Display methods were subject to further research and development as museums began to appoint designers and press officers. Their educational remit also became more specific as it attempted to target specific education ‘groups’, rather than a general public (Hooper Greenhill 1991:45). However, by the 1980’s these new museological practices were characterised by an increasing tension relating to the difficulty of applying universally representative politics whilst also maintaining the normative assumption of equal access (Bennett 1995:7). Museums professionals subsequently became more self-reflexive in

\textsuperscript{31} Modernist avant-garde art exhibits also influenced the spatial and political environment of the museum in the 1920’s, as artists such as El Lissitzky and Kazimir Malevich experimented with graphic design and architecture to create new exhibition experiences.
their practices. This transition has been termed ‘new museology’ (Vergo 1989), and describes how museum practices have further displaced the museum object to encompass more broadly-conceived narratives and themes (Witcomb 2003:86, 1998:22).

These issues reflect an expansion of the museum’s remit from an ‘enlightened citizen’ paradigm to include a pluralist pedagogy, where, rather than inculcating a singular and universal ‘truth’ or knowledge, the museum has instead stressed the co-existence of manifold ideological positions. These professional shifts are arguably a response to the increasingly complex relationship between state, museum and public, where, as processes of globalisation have pushed multiple narratives, beliefs and ideologies into a larger but increasingly dense cultural arena, museums sought to right the homogenising capacities of citizenship by reformulating their practices. This movement has also been characterised by, for example, a growth in community and local heritage museums, as well as attempts to repatriate anthropological artifacts. The museum therefore became positioned as a site for discourses of community which could encompasses heterogeneous forms of representation, and reformulate expressions of state power from narratives of domination, to participation and access.

In the final decades of the twentieth century museums also began to reassess their communicative roles, undertaking audience research in an effort to better understand the increasingly plural needs and demands of their visitors. As a result, museums began returning to a more strongly-defined educational focus, and implementing professional strategies concerned with furthering both school-level and adult education (Hooper Greenhill 1991:10). However, a great deal of the audience research which commenced in this period also reflects the influence of neo-liberalist economics on museums, as the research undertaken was as much concerned with marketing and attracting greater attendance numbers, as better delivering its pedagogical remit (Young 2006). As professional expertise became a more precise instrument with which to target specific collections and visitor outcomes, new typologies of museum began to emerge. These ‘discovery centres’, such as science, technology and children’s museums, often attempted to facilitate learning through highly interactive technological displays and modalities of play (Hooper-Greenhill 1991:183-185).

**The ‘new’ museum**

Throughout the 1990’s, museums began to increase in number across Western cities, spurred on by the late capitalist projects of cultural tourism, urban renewal and creative industry. The

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32 In the third chapter I detail and contextualise these studies within the broader discipline of museum visitor research.
role of the museum has subsequently expanded beyond its traditional pedagogical agenda to include responsibilities as partner, colleague, learner and service provider to remain viable as an institution. This task of negotiating complex new territories marks a significant shift in the genealogy of the museum, some commentators even labelling its present form as the ‘post-museum’ (Eilean Hooper-Greenhill 2000b). Kylie Message has similarly perceived a rupture away from institutional tradition, detailing the emergence of the ‘new museum’ which defines itself within a “highly self-conscious image of newness” (2006:603). Citing examples such as Gehry’s Guggenheim in Bilbao and Liebeskind’s Jewish Museum in Berlin, she describes how the external image of these museums has come under unprecedented focus, as they attempt to distinguish themselves as multi-faced ‘cultural totems’ within a globalised arena. ‘New’ museums increase their presence by undertaking a number of strategies. Extensive publicity agendas attempt to draw local and international visitors to architecturally innovative buildings (2006:603). They also increasingly seek to establish a ‘virtual’ presence, both in aid of extending their pedagogical function and expanding marketing strategies, whilst also asserting their presence within a globalised arena. However, as Message illustrates, by positioning themselves within these broader, global contexts, new museums also struggle to maintain their local relevance:

While they may aspire to the multitude of claims that are made on their behalf – that they are contemporary, relevant, exciting and politically engaged – success tends to be evasive. They exist, instead, as deeply compromised, complicated and complex institutions that balance a series of seemingly historical factors and contemporary bureaucracies, boundaries and constituencies at the same time as they project an image of newness to their visitors (Message 2006:605).

The museum has subsequently attempted to reassert its relevance within contemporary society by increasing its scope for visitor interpretation. ‘New’ museum practices often blur knowledge boundaries and aestheticise their collections, incorporating new technologies and highly-interactive interfaces. By allowing objects to be viewed (both literally and figuratively) from a number of different perspectives, visitor interaction in the museum has become increasingly playful and self-determined.

What this genealogy has highlighted is the various emergent phases of the museum which have impacted upon visitor experience. The complexity and contradictory characteristics of the

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33 For example, the Victorian Cultural Network was launched in October 2007, and links the state’s primary cultural collections, including ACMI, Federation Square, Museum Victoria, the National Gallery of Victoria, the State Library of Victoria and the Arts Centre, as well as metro-regional organisations including Bendigo Art Gallery, Geelong Performing Arts Centre, the Koori Heritage Trust, Mildura Arts Centre, and the West Gippsland Library Corporation (Arts Victoria 2007).
‘new’ or ‘post’ museum specifically reflect the way globalisation and informationisation are shaping the contemporary conditions of modernity, and have also recently transformed the museum in significant ways. Therefore, while I have argued in the previous chapter that the term ‘new’ can be a problematic label as it signifies a complete breaking with the trajectories of the past, the use of the terms ‘new’ and Hooper-Greenhill’s ‘post’ to describe the museum reflects a significant moment of transformation within its genealogy.\(^{34}\) Indeed, institutions comparable to ACMI which could also be classified as ‘new’ have dropped the label of ‘museum’ altogether, instead labelling themselves as ‘centres’, ‘foundations’ or ‘mediatheques’.\(^{35}\) The phases of the museum presented in this genealogy are by no means successive, but rather, reflect a series of orientations and partial trajectories that have gained momentum within various historical and cultural contexts. Many traditional museums, for example, also incorporate strategies which are process, rather than object-based. These recent shifts are indicative of a ‘reflexive modernity’, where the ordering categories of earlier modernity are increasingly fragmenting under the pressures of globalisation and new modes of industrialisation, and as a result, elevate a politics of individualisation.

**The contemporary museum in reflexive modernity**

Sociologists Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens and Scott Lash, propose that these dynamics of hybridity and complexity are characteristic of a contemporary modernisation of modernity, a ‘reflexive modernization’:

> If simple (or orthodox) modernization means, at bottom, first the disembedding and second the re-embedding of traditional social forms by industrial social forms, then reflexive modernization means first the disembedding and second the re-embedding of industrial social forms by another modernity (Beck 1994:2).

This reflexivity can be defined according to two characteristics. Firstly, it can be structural, where, as Lash describes, agency is set free from abstract structures of modernity such as the nuclear family, class and nation. Secondly, reflexivity can be self-reflexive, where agency reflects on itself (1994:115). These modes will now be examined with reference to the genealogy of the museum, and the historical associations I have detailed between pedagogy, agency and politics.

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\(^{34}\) See discussion in Chapter One which problematises the terms ‘new media’ and ‘new media art’.

\(^{35}\) Some of these institutions are listed in the introductory chapter with reference to museums which emerged at a similar time to ACMI. These include Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie in Karlsruhe, Germany; Kiasma in Helsinki, Finland; Mediatheque in Sendai, Japan; ICC in Tokyo; and the Foundation for Art and Creative Technology in Liverpool.
Reflexive modernisation is characterised by a process in which the dissolution of early modern structures is accompanied by waves of innovation. Beck describes this as an “image of a state that, like a snake, is shedding the skin of its classical tasks and developing a new global ‘skin of tasks’” (Beck 1994:38). The “withering away” of the state is an inheritance of simply modernity, as the long legacy of categorisation and rationalisation has begun to unravel, rendered inadequate for capturing every possible ‘consequence’. Beck contends that waves of institutional innovation arise when the “unintended consequences” characteristic of reflexive modernization become legitimised through a “rationality reform” (Beck 1994:33). This destruction of modernity’s own ordering categories means that the remit of state institutions now extends beyond ‘nationhood’ to address global themes. Within these wider-set parameters, state institutions have become intersystemic and mediating, and also, as Beck describes, “multivalent, permitting and making possible ambivalences and transcending [of] borders” (1994:29). Scott Lash similarly argues that national borders are becoming weakened by global flows of information, business and people. This has resulted in a displacement of social institutions and structures, as early modern modes of industry (such as manufacturing) are becoming increasingly replaced by information and communications, “the new and third nature of the global information society” (Lash 1994:110; 2002:68). Therefore, as Andreas Huyssen suggests, a study of the museum must observe the way changing categories of modernity inform museum practices and the subjective realities of its visitors:

What needs to be captured and theorized today is precisely the ways in which museums and exhibition culture in the broadest sense proves a terrain that can offer multiple narratives of meaning at a time when the metanarratives of modernity, including those inscribed into the universal survey museum itself, have lost their persuasiveness, when more people are eager to hear and see other stories, to hear and see the stories of others, when identities are shaped in multiply layered and never-ceasing negotiations between self and other, rather than being fixed and taken for granted in the framework of family and faith, race and nation” (1995:34).

ACMI as ‘new’
The ‘newness’ and hybridity which Message ascribes to the museum is a reflection of the way museums have transformed under conditions of reflexive modernisation. ‘New’ museums dissolve and innovate the many histories of modernity they are constituted by, and adopt a hybrid character in response to their global environment. As both the policy analysis and Message’s account of the new museum have shown, the museum’s institutional hybridity also elicits a complex and seemingly contradictory set of aims which is characteristic of the ambivalence underlying the ‘newly’ innovated within this era of modernity.
At one level, ACMI appears exemplary of the ‘new’ museum. In comments already drawn from Smithies and Gibson, ACMI has been described as a hybrid institution which is both mediated and mediating, where, as a 
\textit{centre} for the moving image it facilitates the intersection of histories, technologies and modes of interaction in a manner which extends beyond the traditional bounds of a publicly-funded cultural institution. For example, when Smithies suggested that “it is possible to include ACMI in the family of a museum, library or gallery” there is an explicit affiliation between ACMI and institutions of an earlier modernity which had been responsible for processes of classification and ordering. Smithies had also described how a singular institutional definition of ACMI “…too easily ignores the significant differences”, suggesting that, as “an example of a new generation of cultural institutions” (in Lindsay 2002:63), it operates within a new rationality which both extends and exceeds older institutional formats, as it undergoes the processes of dissolution and innovation characteristic of reflexive modernisation. Therefore, while the rhetoric surrounding ACMI’s inception foreshadowed the emergence of an institution without precedence, it can now be understood to have sprung from the ‘unintended consequences’ unleashed by global processes of modernisation. However, while ACMI emulates many of the features of the ‘new’ museum, the Screen Gallery is also characterised by its own distinctive style of ambivalence which, in light of the genealogy of the museum I have presented, indicates an emerging genre within a new phase of the art museum.

In an early Creative Direction Statement Smithies specifically located ACMI’s emergence within the dynamics of globalisation and technological progress, proposing that “the creation of ACMI is a response to a changing world”, and further, that “the power of the digital moving image will allow new collaborations and catalyse the unimagined into existence” (2002). Ross Gibson also made comments which similarly situated ACMI’s dedication to the moving image as a reflection of larger transformative processes. He identifies changes within the structures of urban life and subjective experience where “there's a shift in human consciousness and aligned with that human practices are changing… Architects are changing, people are building media into new buildings. Street and city design is starting to incorporate that complexity” (Pheasant 2003:64). As a key architect involved in the design of ACMI and Federation Square, Don Bates also anticipated forms of public interaction that could be made possible by environmental shifts and emerging technologies:

ACMI is one of the four or five centres for new media production and presentation anywhere in the world. It's not just variation on what's already existed. The greater challenge was how to conceptualise the use of public spaces for activities that have never existed before and imagining how the public can interact with events and specific new forms of media that have never existed before. We've known for 200 years what an art museum can be, but we've only in
the last five or 10 years started to imagine labs and galleries for moving images” (Bersten 2002:20).

These comments emphasise how ACMI offers a distinctive architectural site of engagement in which visitors can experience the moving image in all of its forms. Yet, more specifically, it is the Screen Gallery which plays a central role in generating these forms of visitor encounter, as it is devoted entirely to the forms of experiential immersion which moving image art can elicit.

**The Screen Gallery and Ambivalence**

It is ACMI’s dedication to technology-mediated experiences which renders the Gallery a distinctive form of ‘new’ museum, as it overlays material space to become what Lev Manovich has called an ‘augmented space’ (2003). Manovich describes how the shift from 2D to 3D art installations were characterised by an associated shift in the white cube as a ‘singular surface’, to the white cube as a ‘cube’ rather than collection of surfaces’. He proposes that a subsequent phase of museum may involve a mediation of dynamic and interactive information by “placing a user inside a space filled with dynamic, contextual data with which the user can interact” (2003:82-83). Manovich argues that the ‘augmented’ space characteristic of the information age is inherently unstable, as it is “not a symmetrical and ornamental space of traditional architecture, rectangular volumes of modernism, or broken and blown-up volumes of deconstruction; rather it is a space whose shapes are inherently mutable, and whose soft contours act as a metaphor for the key quality of computer-driven representations and systems: variability” (Manovich: 2003:88). Therefore, while ACMI embodies an institutional ambivalence as a hybrid cultural institution, the Screen Gallery intensifies this ambivalence as a site dedicated to the ‘variability’ of technology-mediated visitation experiences. However, this instability also generates new pedagogical possibilities for the museum, as Manovich further elaborates:

> Can cultural institutions play an active, even leading, role as laboratories where alternative futures are tested? Augmented space – which is slowly becoming reality – is one opportunity for institutions to take a more active role… museums and galleries as a whole could use their own unique asset – a physical space – to encourage the development of distinct new spatial forms of art and new spatial forms of the moving image… Having stepped outside the picture frame into the white cube walls, floor, and the whole space, artists and curators should feel at home taking yet another step: treating this space as layers of data… it is at the interaction of the physical space and the data that some of the most amazing art of our time is being created” (Manovich 2003:90).

Where the modern museum orchestrated visitation experiences through hegemony, control and ossification, the Screen Gallery reflects a contemporary ecology of globalisation and
informationalisation by creating experiences characterised by mediation, fluidity and ambivalence. The museum’s presence as a site for material encounter takes on a new importance within the context of heightened variation, hybridity and transformation, for, as art theorist Nicolas Bourriaud writes “the gallery is a place like any other, a space imbricated within a global mechanism, a base camp without which no expedition would be possible” (Bourriaud 2000:65). However, the extent to which the spatial conditions of the Screen Gallery can mediate the forms of experience dictated by its policy aims remains questionable, as the complex reflexivity enacted at institutional and structural levels is also inscribed at the level of individual agency, and therefore influences the modalities of individual museum experience.

Agency, individualisation, experimentation

The dissolution of capitalist structures and decline in the organisational capacity of state institutions like the museum corresponds with an increased responsibility and allocation of agency to individuals. This suggests that ambivalence is a condition that must also be negotiated by individuals in daily life, as well as within the museum. Beck & Beck-Gernsheim define this as the ‘individualization’ which results from the collapse of previously existing social forms:

To this extent, from the viewpoint of cultural history, it can be said that modernity, which dawned with the subject’s claim to self-empowerment, is redeeming its promise. As modernity gains ground, God, nature and the social system are being progressively replaced, in greater and lesser steps, by the individual – confused, astray, helpless and at a loss. With the abolition of the old coordinates a question arises that has been decried and acclaimed, derided, pronounced sacred, guilty and dead: the question of the individual (2003:8).

Agency therefore becomes a measure of one’s ability to ‘actively’ and rapidly negotiate new, reflexive conditions (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2003:3). Giddens describes this as a ‘social reflexivity’, both a condition and outcome of a post-traditional society where “decisions have to be taken on the basis of a more or less continuous reflection on the conditions of one's action” (1994:89). For Lash, continuous reflection becomes a matter of strategy, as the individual is not placed freely in this position but, as a ‘combinard’, must constantly negotiate the demands of active contribution and self-responsibility (Lash 2003:ix). Reflexive modernization therefore influences individual experience at a micro-sociological level, as these dis-embedding and re-embedding processes increasingly affect how we experience agency in our daily lives. Image-based media play a specific role in these processes, for, as Celia Lury (1998) argues, they act as a conduit for experimentation in which it becomes possible to construct one’s self-identity. This perspective highlights how a study of visitation
to the Screen Gallery becomes a distinctive opportunity to investigate how moving images can mediate new forms of agency in an era of individualisation.

Lury specifically links notions of individualised and individualising behaviour with visual culture, describing an ‘experimental individualism’, in which “an individual who in looking in the mirror of the technological order no longer sees a reflection, but looks through the mirror to what he or she could be” (1998:23). She argues that while liberal democratic societies have produced a self-determined ‘possessive individualism’, in an emerging post-plural society, the constitution of agency and self-responsibility are practiced through techniques and strategies of experimentation within a ‘prosthetic culture’ (1998:16). This form of experimentation has ambivalent implications for self-identity, as it disrupts the given order of relations between body, memory and consciousness:

The primary capacity of the individual with a flexible body... is the ability to be disembodied and then re-embodied at will, that is, to be disembedded from specific social relations, to be deracinated, without gender, class, sexuality of age, and then to display a combination of such natural and social characteristics as required through an assertion of a claim to the significance of their effects: to turn the substitutability of the customised individual in a postplural society into the individual art of colouring by numbers... If successful, the individual may be reconstituted as such through the possession of individuality as a set of cultural or stylistic resources, the proprietor of a technologically mediated or prosthetic auto/biography” (1998:24).

While Lury specifically examines how the photographic image becomes a prosthesis through modes of individual perception, one of her underlying concerns is with an ethics of prosthetic culture, as she asks how new forms of visual technology “can be seen to extend the potential of

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36 In her account of prosthetic culture and experimental individualism Lury offers a concise differentiation between individualism, individualisation and individuality. She describes the historical emergence and transformation of individualism, where notions of embodiment, consciousness, memory, moral responsibility have each contributed to what has largely been a rationalist conceptualisation of the individual. However, the schema which identifies individuals also individuates, as it operates as a form of surveillance which differentiates individuals through systemic categorization. Individuality differs from both of these doctrines, as it is characterised by processes of self-development which are “concerned with the interior qualities of the person, with expressivity, and subjective conscience, personality and will. The cultivation of these qualities is what marks one person off from the other” (1998:10-11).

37 Lury argues that photography acts as a ‘perceptual prosthesis’ in an increasingly post-plural society, as it can mediate a ‘retrodicitive prophecy’ through processes of outcontextualiation and indifferentiation (1998:219). Outcontextualisation occurs when “the previously naturally or socially-determined aspects of self-identity are taken out of context and refashioned... a reconstitution or regrouping in order to make visible the ability of a thing, an object, a part to be taken out of context” (Lury’s emphasis) (1998:19). This in turn contributes to indifferentiation, a practice or doctrine of selection which overcomes the relation between cause and effect, active and passive, or subject and object (1998:18-19).
teaching to anticipate, acting as perceptual prosthesis” (1998:226). In my study I take up a similar line of investigation, enquiring into the ways that visual technologies mediate the individualised and individualising behaviour visitors encounter in daily life, and the extent to which these experiences are meaningful, and yield expressions of agency. I therefore examine how the Screen Gallery, as a distinctive form of ‘new museum’, can formulate a pedagogy which enables visitors to navigate a contradictory and ambivalent art environment, as well as how moving image art may elicit modes of agency which enable visitors to develop a praxis of ‘experimentation’, and negotiate the contemporary conditions of individualisation.

**Conclusion**

This genealogy of the museum has shown how the complex aims which informed ACMI’s formation are a reflection of the many pedagogical phases and histories which ‘new’ museums embody. I have argued that while visitor agency in the museum has been associated with citizenship and education, modern experiences relating to industrialisation, the growth of a commodity culture and urbanisation have created profound sensory and phenomenological encounters in which forms of knowledge circulate outside of governmental terms. The ongoing transformation of the museum is reflected in practices which recognise the increasingly fragmentary and pluralist politics of its visitors.

I have argued that ACMI is a culmination of these many preceding pedagogical trajectories. While ACMI can be considered a museum, library and gallery, it also evades all three definitions. Although almost entirely government-funded, it blurs commercial and state roles with its foundations spread across entertainment and film industries, research and innovation, and industrial and economic contribution. ACMI is therefore emblematic of a ‘new’ museum, as its hybridity and ambivalence reflect the contemporary conditions of a reflexive modernity. ACMI’s visitors experience these characteristics of modernity as ‘combinards,’ and ‘experimental individuals’ where agency is a measure of the dexterity taken to keep pace with structural and individual reflexivity, and navigate the ambivalence which conditions everyday life. These are the conditions which visitors embody and perpetuate as they move through their daily lives, and as they enter ACMI and descend into the Screen Gallery. However, the Screen Gallery represents a distinctive typology of the ‘new’ museum, as it is a highly ambivalent ‘augmented space’. This raises a number of questions about the pedagogy the Screen Gallery will develop in response to an external environment increasingly shaped by a politics of individualisation, and how this pedagogy will create opportunities for expressions of visitor agency and political potential within conditions of ambivalence.
Scott McQuire suggests that it is within phases of ambivalence that opportunities for a new politics can surface, for, “At the crossroads, the contradictory tendencies and ambivalent currents of new phenomena can often assume a marked political tenor. What may in retrospect seem the ‘logical’ pathway of future development is not yet inevitable; other possibilities remain open” (2008:14). This is precisely the moment in which my investigation is located, a period in which the potential for a new politics heightens with waves of technological innovation, intensifies with phasal change, and signals the structural shifts in which a new politics may be emerging. The Screen Gallery, while highly ambivalent, can therefore be regarded immanent with the potential for a new politics.

However, I have also argued in this chapter that while histories of the museum offer a number of relevant historical trajectories, no one account could support a study of visitor experience and agency within ACMI. Ulrich Beck & Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim have rightfully observed that “a sociology which confronts the viewpoint serving the survival of institutions with the viewpoint of individuals is a largely underdeveloped area of the discipline” (2003:14), meaning that a study of museum visitation must commence from the perspective of the visitor. I therefore use my genealogy of the museum as a tool for investigating visitors’ experiences of the Screen Gallery, and ascertaining how these experiences may form a praxis for the reflexive negotiation of everyday life. The following chapter therefore develops a theoretical framework and methodology appropriate for conducting this study of visitor experiences, whilst also capturing the wider dynamics which shape these experiences, including recent practices in contemporary art, institutional strategies, technological innovation, and the political, social and cultural contexts of visitors’ everyday lives.
Without knowing it (which does not mean ‘unconsciously’), the human species draws from the heart of the universe movements that correspond to its own movements. The ear, the eyes and the gaze and the hands are in no way passive instruments that merely register and record. What is fashioned, formed and produced is established on this scale, which, it must also be understood, is in no way accidental or arbitrary. This is the scale of the earth, or accidents on the earth’s surface and the cycles that unfurl there. This does not mean that production is limited to reproducing things and naturally given objects. What is created does not refer back to this scale, it either exceeds or transfigures it

(Lefebvre and Régulier 2004:83).
Chapter Three
The Suffering Drovers

Introduction

In written histories, visitors to museums, like patients in hospitals, are transient, silent figures. Their most important feature is the number of them that have annually passed through the doors of the institution in question. At least patients, as a class, receive mention for the diseases they have borne in their suffering droves (Hicks 2005:66).

As Megan Hicks notes, the museum visitor has rarely been a celebrated subject of museum research. Instead, while studies of visitation often detail how visitor experiences are shaped by museum practices or governmental agendas, they are rarely informed by the subjective modalities of visitor encounter which may enrich or even challenge these research positions. This dearth of visitor research is a pressing methodological issue for my investigation, as the central tenet of my study is this very relationship between experience and agency, and how it may elicit a politics of movement in the museum. As argued in the previous chapter, ACMI expressly aims to cultivate new modalities of agency by inviting visitor interaction with the moving image in the affective spaces of its Screen Gallery. This aim is set within a complex pedagogical agenda. At first, this agenda is a culmination of several pedagogical histories which reflect various phases of the museum since the nineteenth century. ACMI must also address a government policy remit which demands that it enhance Victoria’s civic and economic wealth by making a contribution to its creative industries. Moreover, the forms of agency it seeks to cultivate are determined by the conditions of reflexive modernisation. This is a contemporary environment in which life flows quickly according to the dynamics of rupture, individualism and ambivalence - where ‘successful living’ is contingent upon one’s ability to fluidly negotiate these forces. A study of new possibilities for agency is especially urgent at this time, for this politics of individualisation is progressively intensifying with the pace of globalisation and technological progress. These issues will only continue to gain prominence as tensions arising from political, social and cultural change force their negotiation across a number of arenas, such as the museum.

In this chapter I therefore develop a theoretical and methodological framework with which to examine visitation to ACMI’s Screen Gallery. In light of the broader political concerns stated above, and with reference to the ethnographic debates presented in the first chapter, I also aim to develop this framework reflexively, so that it can be used beyond the parameters of this study as an investigation of ACMI’s Screen Gallery. This will enable the underlying politics driving this investigation to be explored beyond the museum, and perhaps within further
research areas which links new phenomenological experience with contemporary forms of agency.

To develop my research methodology in this chapter, I firstly survey existing empirical studies of the museum visitor, so as to determine how the issues of experience and agency have conventionally been linked. I specifically appraise the benefits and limitations of these studies in terms of their efficacy for a study of affective museum space, as well as how they could be employed to address the wider political concerns of my investigation. Phenomenological studies are found to encompass these concerns, as they place the notion of experience at the heart of their investigation. A phenomenological account extrapolated from ethnographic material is richly qualitative, as it privileges, first and foremost, the highly subjective, bodily, human responses to space, as these reactions undergird all other replies, thoughts and reflections. In this chapter I therefore argue that a phenomenology of museum visitation is the necessary framing from which to conduct my study.

However, in this chapter I also recognise that a reliance on phenomenological frameworks alone would limit the scope of my investigation. Just as the studies I seek to extend have only detailed the structural influences of museum practice and government, an entirely phenomenological perspective of museum experience and agency could become overly relational and subjective. I overcome this problem by developing an integrative framework which considers the relationship between structure and agency, rather than preferencing one notion over the other. I take this perspective by following the work of Brian Massumi and his notion of a ‘field of immanence’ (2002). Massumi argues that by positioning structure and agency within binary terms they are forced into an unworkable dichotomy, as one will always be defined in terms of the other. By placing their immanence at the centre of his philosophy, he proposes that dynamism and change can be conceptualised through a ‘field’, in which structure, agency and a number of other elements become associated with another according to a logic of relation.

I argue that Massumi’s field enables a useful reconceptualisation of the relationship between museum pedagogy and visitor agency, as it avoids the making of assumptions about the contemporary relationship between structure and agency. It also offers a means of locating the potential realisation of a new politics through the notion of ‘productive tension’. Massumi views tension as an essential element within processes of transformation, for it is within a transductive shift of energies between elements in the field that tension finds a resolution, and

38 This is a similar problem which has arisen in the practice of symbolic interactionism, detailed in the first chapter (footnote 14) with reference to forms of ethnographic research.
a change transpires. By viewing the complexity and ambivalence which condition ACMI’s Screen Gallery as markers of productive tension, I use my phenomenological study to locate forms of tension within visitor experience, and thereby identify the potential for change which may elicit a politics of movement.

To locate these sites of tension I draw upon Henri Lefebvre’s notion of ‘rhythmnanalysis’ (1996, 2004), as it integrates phenomenological concerns with empirical examination, whilst addressing a politics of everyday life. Rhythmnanalysis is a deeply political strategy for identifying how one’s internal experiences may correspond to - or be at a tension with - one’s external environment. Lefebvre’s work is also a means of developing the self-reflexive dimension to my investigation. By invoking the figure of the ‘rhythmnanalyst’, I use my own experiential responses within the empirical environment to guide my ethnographic process. I embrace what a study of affective space offers museum research by making spatial experience a feature of the empirical framework, as well as the focus of a phenomenological investigation. I do so by drawing attention to the way that art spaces affect the ethnographer, and therefore place the subjective viewpoint of the researcher as an essential measure of the research methodology.

The discussion then details how both Lefebvre’s rhythmnanalysis and Massumi’s field of immanence were integrated to inform the empirical process. I describe how these perspectives were drawn together by undertaking participant observation and visitor interviews, as well as maintaining keen awareness of my own experiences in the Screen Gallery as a ‘rhythmnanalyst’. The discussion also ‘walks through’ the exhibitions at which the empirical studies were undertaken. While the account offers a spatial mapping of the exhibitions, it is also a mapping of narrative, as the following chapter introduces my interviewed visitors and accompanies them as they cross ACMI’s threshold and take their first few steps into the Gallery.

Investigating visitor research

As Megan Hicks noted above, the museum visitor has largely been conceived of in quantitative terms, revealing little about the cultural, political or social forms of engagement that a cultural institution may foster with its visitors. Some accounts omit the visitor altogether in their examination of institutional processes and dynamics, meaning that the actual experiences of visitation have no place at all within the parameters set by these studies. For example, detailed sociological examinations such as Howard Becker’s (1982) considers the institutional, industrial, professional and critical practices involved in the production of the ‘art world’, but significantly overlooks the role of audience and reception of art in these processes.
Later studies somewhat compensated for this position by considering how the social and institutional character of the museum could impact upon the visitor’s experience, although again, the studies neglected to include information about actual visitor behaviour within, and perception of the museum (Bourdieu 1984, 1991, Luhmann 2000). Some studies do attempt to include discussion of visitors’ perception of the museum, although do so as far as is relevant to museum practitioners (Silverman 1995, Falk and Dierking 1992); framed in quantitative terms for the purposes of marketing, policy or curatorial research (Bennett and Frow 1991); or to demonstrate how market research can be used to differentiate museum visitors (Davies 1994). While each of these studies examines visitation from a number of relevant structural and institutional perspectives, for the purposes of my investigation the failure to document the subjective experiences of visitors limits how newly emerging factors within the museum – such as the strongly affective qualities of the Screen Gallery - may influence visitation.

A body of work which does explicitly address an individual’s museum experience is an area of research concerned with cognitive processes. Some researchers closely examine the psychological, mentalistic and cognitive understandings of art and creation of art works (Puttfarkin 2000, also contributions in Goguen 1999, 2000), while others use this strategy to address debates within art theory about the ways that the formal characteristics of the object influence perception (Arnheim 1974, Gibson 1986, Neisser 1976). Scientific methodologies have also been employed to research the social, drawing from cognitive studies and psychology to assess and enhance the ability of exhibits to attract and hold attention, as well as their capacity to clearly communicate with visitors (Shettel 1973, 2001). Such studies of cognitive response develop notions such as ‘holding power’ and ‘dwell time’ in relation to exhibition devices such as labels and exhibition lay-out (Falk & Dierking 2000, Hein 1998). However, the analytical focus of these studies is exclusively perception-based and fails to take into account the many influences and contexts which may also inform modes of perception. While this research highlights the intrinsic qualities which attract visitors and hold their attention (Screven 1976, Shettel 1968a, 1968b), they often undermine the capacity of visitors to challenge or circumvent these qualities. 39

Consideration of context

As Falk’s (1988) pilot study relating to memory of museum visitation found, the notion of context is an important research consideration, as it corroborates a diverse range of factors which may influence visitor experience. These include the social, geographical and temporal

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39 Heath C. & vom Lehn D. (2004) situate these studies within a comprehensive account of the field of visitation research.
dynamics of visitation, duration of stay, perception of space in terms of architectural and interior building design, and the ‘mood’ culminating from these factors. For some visitor researchers the context of museum visitation became incorporated as a part of their empirical research designs. This strategy has resulted in models which consider an interplay of personal, social and physical dynamics (Falk and Dierking 1992 in Hicks 2005:69), and question, for example, how people in daily, ordinary circumstances might experience museums and artworks (vom Lehn et al 2001a, 2001b; Heath & vom Lehn 2004). These studies reveal the value of employing frameworks which not only consider issues of context, but also emphasise the influence of ‘everyday’ interaction with other visitors in the museum. However, while these studies link visitor experiences with context, they seldom delve into the new forms of visitor agency which these experiences may elicit.

**The active audience: looking towards media studies**

Eilean Hooper-Greenhill’s (2000a) research draws together the notions of visitor experience and agency by detailing a correlation between museum visitor and media audience reception studies. She uses this theoretical relationship to argue that museum professionals must overcome the paradigm of the museum as a ‘transmitter’ which ‘broadcasts’ information, and develop practices which acknowledge and respect the visitor’s capacity to be active. Hooper-Greenhill is specifically referring to medium-dependent media effects theories such as the ‘hypodermic needle’ approach, where television audiences were portrayed as passive ‘receivers’ of broadcasted transmission, and were therefore highly susceptible to its less-desirable effects.\(^{40}\) This tradition of media effects theory emerged in the 1930’s, and grew in popularity throughout the 1950’s and 1960’s over concerns relating to the effects of television on the viewing public. Subsequent audience research refuted the media effects paradigm, as it over-simplified the relationship between the mass media and its audience. For example, in the United States the popularity of ‘uses and gratifications’ research in the 1970’s established the audience’s sovereignty to produce meaning by investigating how an audience’s behaviour is dictated by their particular needs.\(^{41}\) These studies spurned research throughout the mid-1970’s which was concerned primarily with audiences’ formation of polysemic media messages (Taylor & Willis 1999:100). This trend in research of subjective behaviour reflects a broader shift within literary studies, where new forms of cultural theory began to recognise that media reception is a heterogeneous activity, and neither wholly active or passive.\(^{42}\) Since the 1980’s

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\(^{40}\) This was also called the ‘magic bullet theory’, developed by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955).

\(^{41}\) See especially McQuail (1972) and Blumler and Katz (1974).

\(^{42}\) In the 1990’s this phase was challenged, criticised for focussing too narrowly on audience ‘activity.’ This view is similar to that of the Frankfurt school, but insists upon placing the media within the context
reception analysis and ethnographic research has continued to proliferate, especially taking into account the influence of everyday contexts on media reception, such as the activities which accompany television viewing. A number of museum studies have examined the exchange between museum and visitor within the theoretical trajectory set by these media studies, some even attempting to incorporate reception theory with contemporary research in the history of art (Baxandall 1985). Just as media reception theory began to gradually differentiate audiences in terms of identity, interests and behaviour, museums studies also began to discriminate between different types of visitors and modes of visitor experience (Bicknell & Farmello 1993). However, despite this research, many museum practitioners have been “noticeably uncommitted” in furthering their understanding of visitor reception, despite great interest shown in concepts such as Donald Shoen’s ‘reflective practitioner’ (Silverman and O’Neill 2004). Hooper-Greenhill illustrates how these ideas only began to receive broader acceptance and application in the 1990’s, citing Miles and Tout’s (1994) findings after conducting research at London’s Natural History Museum, that “the initial emphasis was entirely on the subject matter and the efficient transmission of information, and it was only later that we began to understand and respond to the meaning of a museum visit to the visitor” (2000a:18). Museums have only very recently begun to invest further attention towards these forms of study. This has allowed museums to develop a more complex representation of their visitors, as seen, for example, in Illeris’ empirical study (2005) of young people which considered how the day-to-day consciousness of youth influenced the way they produced meaning in galleries.

This appraisal of visitor studies does not seek to undermine the contributions made by researchers, as the illustrations of the museum visitor described thus far are not in themselves incorrect or ineffectual. However, what visitor researchers often fail to acknowledge within their studies, is that they constitute a representational part, rather than a descriptive whole, of visitor experience. As a result, many museum visitor studies have failed to take into account the full context of visitation, whether the intimate, highly subjective and phenomenological, or the broader political and cultural contexts which influence an individual’s experience. Others of the cultural industries of which they are a part, as well as the influential capabilities of media conglomerates and corporations.


44 Schon’s ‘reflective practicum’ (1983) echoes the work of John Dewey to detail how education can be bettered when both students and teachers jointly collaborate in practical learning activities, and reflect together upon these processes. Dewey’s philosophy is discussed in further detail in Chapter Six.
neglect the idea of agency altogether by suggesting that artwork alone can provoke specific forms of visitor behaviour. This subsequently limits how forms of subjective experience can be explored and understood.

While drawing from media reception studies has been helpful for trying to conceptualise how an individual may respond actively in a cultural space according to a variety of contexts, such studies impose a number of constraints upon a study of visitation to the Screen Gallery. Media reception studies generally attempt to interrogate private and domestic viewing arenas, rather than institutionalised public spaces such as museums. Furthermore, and as argued in the previous chapter, ACMI’s institutional composition is an expression of government policy as much as creative direction, meaning that these factor must also be taken into consideration when investigating visitor experience. Additionally, the studies I have surveyed have, for the most part, examined visitation to historical museums or traditional forms of art gallery. As I detailed in the previous chapter, the Screen Gallery differs significantly from traditional museums and galleries, as it is richly experiential and dedicated to moving image art.

A theoretical and methodological framework for investigating visitor experiences in the Screen Gallery therefore needs to extend beyond the framing of existing studies, and consider how the museum visitor is a product of lived experience, and embodies a subjective viewpoint comprising of the many political, cultural and social complexities which condition everyday experience. A holistic study of the museum visitor must therefore be attentive towards the complexity of experience, and recognise that an expressions of agency can be highly subjective, and its articulation multifarious and nuanced. Methodologically, the study must take the visitor’s enunciation of experience as a starting point, and therefore integrate qualitative research with theoretical enquiry. This framework seeks to reveal perceptions of, and perceptions within, the museum, and detail the intimate relations which emerge within visitors’ impression of museum space, art, and subjective experience. In short, this framework is a phenomenology of museum visitation.

**Developing a phenomenology of museum visitation**

To date, there have been very few phenomenological studies of museum visitors. A recent investigation worthy of note was undertaken by Megan Hicks at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney (2005). Noting the dearth of such phenomenological studies, Hicks reconstructed the museum as a house of living memory by asking interviewees about their recollections of the Powerhouse from childhood.45 Hicks located her study within a corpus devoted to memory

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45 Although Hicks notes that Hayllar and Griffin’s (2005) study on urban tourism is comparable.
and the museum, such as investigations concerned with long and short term memories of visitor experience (Falk 1988, Falk and Dierking 1992, Stevenson 1991, McManus 1993, Radley 1991, Kavanagh 2000) and identifying memory categories which disperse recollections according to objects, episodic events, feeling and ‘summary memories’ (McManus in Hicks 2000:69). By taking these strategies into consideration, but also integrating phenomenological material, Hicks’ highly descriptive account re-imagined the museum as the place of many smells, sights and sounds which had been described by her interviewees. Her study reanimated the past by interlaying historical narrative with oral history.

Clare Melhuish (2005) developed a similar methodology to reinterpret the function of a residential building in central London, the ‘Brunswick’. Seeking to critique conventional opinion which regarded the building as a work of abstract modernism, she conducted a number of interviews with its residents to form a phenomenological account of inhabitancy. She draws from Christian Norberg-Schulz’s (1980) ‘phenomenology of architecture’,46 to consider how a building could be re-imagined as a social and political space by viewing architecture as ‘a concretisation of existential space’ (2005:15). Melhuish looks beyond the spatial characteristic of architecture to detail how it becomes inscribed as a lived space. Within the context of her study, this revealed how tensions erupt when public and private spaces of habitation are in close proximity to one another. Melhuish concludes that rethinking buildings within anthropological and phenomenological terms is beneficial, as “…the spatial ordering of the building must… be understood not simply as a condition of its architectural conception and aesthetic, but also an active framework for the social ordering and evolution of the complex in close relation to political and economic circumstances” (2005:27).

Both Hicks’ enquiry into visitor experience of the Powerhouse, and Melhuish’s exploration of the relationship between architecture and phenomenology, demonstrate how a phenomenology which seeks out the most minute and embedded details of visitor behaviour, a ‘microscopic phenomenology’ (Bachelard 1994:xix), can lift perceptions of the spatial experience to form the basis of a broader cultural commentary. Within the terms of my study, this means drawing upon visitors’ perceptions of the Screen Gallery to ask further questions about the relationship between subjectivity, aesthetic experience, museum pedagogy and the conditions of contemporary life. The empirical aspect of my phenomenological study therefore launches the larger political enquiry within what Siegried Kracauer (1975) has termed a ‘critical materialism’, where the ‘lowest layers’ of reality - the fragments of the everyday – are

46Norberg-Schulz’s (1980:4) work responds to Martin Heidegger’s concept of ‘dwelling’ (1971), proposing that “the architect is to create meaningful places, whereby he helps man to dwell.” He therefore defines a ‘phenomenology of architecture’ as “a theory which understands architecture in concrete, existential terms” (1980:5).
interrogated to elicit a broader political understanding.\footnote{Kracauer proposes that greater critical attention needs to be directed toward the concrete everyday, arguing against alternatives which, at the time of his writing in the 1920’s and 1930’s, were placing emphasis on either abstract metaphysics or forms of instrumental rationality. While never aligning himself entirely with phenomenology, Kracauer called for a greater phenomenological awareness of the world, expressing concerns over the way sociology tended to ‘deindividualise’ the ‘experienced’ fact it often faces (Frisby 1985:117). He therefore suggests that a critical materialism enables “the underlying meaning of an epoch and its less obvious pulsations [to] illuminate one another reciprocally” (1975:67).} While my phenomenology is richly materialist in its study of spatial interaction in the Screen Gallery, it is also imbued by an ‘incorporeal materialism’ (Foucault 1976),\footnote{In his notion of incorporeal materialism, Foucault (1976:231) is referring specifically to discourse as an event that has both a material and immaterial dimension: “an event is neither substance, nor accident, nor quality nor process; events are not corporeal. And yet an event is certainly not immaterial; it takes effect, becomes effect, always on the level of materiality. Events have their place; they consist in relation to, coexistence with, dispersion of, the cross-checking accumulation and the selection of material elements; it occurs as an effect of, and in, material dispersion. Let us say that the philosophy of event should advance in the direction, at first sight paradoxical, of an incorporeal materialism”.} as it investigates how visitor agency and a new politics arise from the intersection between museum histories, pedagogies, subjective experiences, and are expressed within material forms of engagement.

However, as I argued in the introduction to this chapter, my analysis cannot be entrenched within phenomenological enquiry alone, as it sets limitations upon the scope of my study which may result in an over-emphasis of subjective experience, and fail to take into account structural influences, such as those outlined in the governmentality thesis. Brian Massumi offers a means of examining structure and agency that avoids the impasse which arises when one notion is preferenceed over the other. From his perspective, they co-constitute one another within a dynamic ‘field of immanence’ (2002).

**The Screen Gallery as a site of immanent potential**

Massumi uses the playing of a soccer match analogically to argue that structure and agency (or in his terms, collectivity and subjectivity), do not exist as already constituted objects unto themselves. He draws from Bruno Latour’s (1993) adaptation of Michel Serres’ ‘quasi-object’ (1982), where Serres rethinks the relationship between subject and object through the analogy of a ball in a soccer game. Massumi attempts to circumvent the common bifurcation of structure and agency by expounding a logic of relation which suggests that structure and agency only become constructs when fashioned by a realisation of their immanence. Invoking the soccer analogy, he argues that structure and agency exist together in a ‘field of immanence’, residing within a potential which is constituted by the relationship between all the elements on the field. Massumi defines this state as a ‘proto-game’ in which the elements of the field precede codification as the ‘event-dimension of potential’. As he details here, the
conditions of potential only become modified through the process of play, as it transforms the interrelationship between all of the elements in the field:

Potential sensed, the player plays her field directly. Potential is the space of play – or would be, were it a space. It is a modification of a space. The space is the literal field, the ground between goals. Any and every movement of a player or the ball in that space modifies the distribution of potential movement over it. Each such modification is an event. The play is the event-dimension doubling the empirical event-space in which the substantial terms in play physically intermix. The dimension of the event is above the ground, between the goals, between the players, and around the ball on all sides. It is that through which the substantial elements interrelate and effect global transformations. It is nothing without them. They are inert and disconnected without it, a collection of mere things, no less isolated from the shards of reflection and language they ferry. It is the event-dimension of potential – not the system of language and the operations of reflection it enables – that is the effective dimension of the interrelating elements, of their belonging to each other (2002:75-76).

A conceptual framework which takes as its starting point a logic of relation within a field of immanence offers both a thematic richness and methodological support to a study of visitation to the Screen Gallery, as it interrogates the language of potential which has influenced the Gallery since its inception. As I argued in the previous chapter, since its opening ACMI has been imbued with a language of ‘newness’, as the state government and ACMI’s progenitors envisaged a potential which could be realised through emerging technologies, pedagogical change and experiential transformation. While Pierre Bourdieu (1984) has also made significant theoretical contributions with his notion of a ‘field’ as an environment in which power relations are negotiated between groups and individuals, it examines already-constituted social relations, and therefore does not register the dynamic of potential in which social relations pre-exist, but rather, offers a view as to the effects of their transformation. Massumi’s account offers an entry point into understanding this potential, or in his terms, the ‘immanent’. By developing a field theory in which all elements are ‘immanent’, potential can be critically examined as an object in itself, rather than as an abstract concept attached to discourses of the ‘new’. My study therefore adapts Massumi’s conceptualisation of ‘immanence’ by considering how the Screen Gallery itself is a site of immanent potential. It is from the interrelationship between all elements in the Gallery that a new politics may arise, and is therefore the task of my study to detail and analyse the Gallery as a site of potential.

For my study, this means that all of its elements, including theoretical positions, the historical trajectories of the museum, and even the binary oppositions of structure and agency, can be placed together as elements within a ‘field’. According to the logic of relation, this can be
done without concern of conflation, or being compelled to discount one position at the expense of another, as they are all bound together by their immanence. This perspective allows a study of museum visitation to progress by freeing the notions of agency and politics from specific historical, theoretical and philosophical tethers, and making possible a new conceptual space – a space of immanence – from which to examine their emergence. For, as Massumi describes, it is the very interrelationship between all of these elements - their ‘belonging’ together in immanence - which constitutes the dynamic of the present:

The field of potential is the effect of the contingent intermixing of elements, but it is logically and ontologically distinct from them. In itself, it is composed not of parts or terms in relation, but of modulations, local modifications of potential that globally reconfigure (affects). The field of potential is exterior to the elements or terms in play, but it is not inside something other than the potential it is. It is immanent. It is the immanence of the substantial elements of the mix to their own continual modulation. The field of immanence is not the elements in mixture. It is their becoming. In becoming is belonging (2002:76).

The dynamic association between all of the elements in the field is therefore an entity unto itself. This not only accounts for how various histories and critical positions coexist with one another for my study, but also how they affect each other through ‘modulations’. These modulations are factors which influence the universal dynamic of the field, or, in other words, universally shape visitation experiences. Processes of change are therefore also a feature within this field theory, and central to understanding the relationship between all of its elements. This conceptualisation of change further benefits my study as it incorporates the dynamism of potential transformation between the elements in my field, and in which a new politics could be located.

**Productive tension and the capacity for change**

These processes of change eventuate as a result of a ‘productive tension’ in the field. Massumi describes how in a game of soccer the presence of goal posts at either end of the field compels play by inducing tension. This intensity mounts as the game proceeds, until, at a point, a goal is kicked, or a foul is called, and the tension is momentarily resolved. The moments in which potential is released are marked by a transductive shift within the ‘metastable’ tension on the field.\(^4\) This tension is therefore productive, as it ebbs and flows to compel phases of emergence, change and transformation.\(^5\) Furthermore, the momentum of ‘play’ never entirely

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\(^4\) ‘Metastability’ is a concept drawn from physics which describes unstable states of equilibrium within physical systems.

\(^5\) Massumi draws these ideas from philosopher Gilbert Simondon, who describes the regenerative capacities of productive tension within terms of individuation, where “the living individual is a system of individuation, an individuating system and also a system that individuates itself” (1992:305). These
dissipates, as a residual tension compels the impending cycles of emergence and change, and ensures that change remains a continuing process. This is the process underlying all manner of change. For my investigation, understanding of this process involves an analysis of the inherently tense relationship between the elements within the Screen Gallery. In ensuing chapters I therefore map moments of tension within visitor experiences. These moments typically arise when visitors are challenged by new forms of spatial encounter or interaction with art in the Gallery. The tension heightens within processes of learning, but begins to find resolution as visitors establish a praxis with which to continue their navigation of the Gallery. This process of resolution also reflects the emergence of a political potential, as it is from these praxes that a politics of movement may find expression beyond the museum.

**Historical trajectories: a qualitative transformation of experiences**

While Massumi’s ‘field of immanence’ is a dynamic and inclusive model for examining the Screen Gallery as a site for political potential, the all-encompassing nature of a logic of relation also generates a number of methodological issues, as the field could potentially include an infinite number of co-existing elements and relations. Massumi accounts for this problem by suggesting that moments of transductive change need to be examined retrospectively, and that the analysis of events be constructed in ways which recognises their qualitative transformation. He describes this concept using Bergson’s account of Zeno’s arrow, explaining how a path of movement (in this case the path taken by an arrow shot to meet a target), is “not composed of positions. It is nondecomposable: a dynamic unity” (2002:6). I incorporate this concept into my study by charting the qualitative transformation of visitor experience in the museum. I do so quite literally by structuring the narrative of my investigation according to visitors’ ‘path of movement’ through the Gallery. This narration commences in the following chapter, where I introduce the visitors who were interviewed for my study, and begin a reconstruction of the journeys they recount. I firstly follow my visitors as they cross the threshold into the Screen Gallery, and in ensuing chapters document their passage through its spaces and interaction with its art, until, in the closing chapter, they depart the Gallery and re-enter the city streets.

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51 Massumi is explicitly critiquing positions which view the past as static: “When we think of space as ‘extensive’, as being measurable, divisible, and composed of points plotting possible positions that objects may occupy, we are stopping the world in thought. We are thinking away its dynamic unity, the continuity of movements. We are looking at only one dimension of reality” (2004:6).
**Investigative reflexivity and rhythmnanalysis**

Before commencing this reconstruction, I must also take into consideration how this study is an element within the field, as the dissertation, and my perspectives as an ethnographic researcher, are ‘positioned truths’ (Ang 1996:48) which affect the logic of relation. Therefore, the investigative choices I make as a researcher, and the manner by which I undertake the study, will influence my account of agency and the emergence of a politics in the Screen Gallery. Massumi describes this effect as the way a system of codification is enforced through processes of analysis:

> Change is emergent relation, the becoming sensible in empirical preconditions of mixture, of a modulation of potential. Post-emergence, there is capture and containment. Rules are codified and applied. The intermixing of bodies, objects, and signs is standardized and regulated. Becoming becomes reviewable and writable: becoming becomes history (2002:77).

I therefore incorporate a self-reflexive dimension into my study, so as to reveal how my positioning as a researcher will affect my analysis and the outcomes of the study. As detailed in the first chapter, while empirical positioning has long been an issue for social researchers and in recent decades spawned vast amounts of literature concerned with qualitative research methods, I specifically address the broader political concerns of my study by observing my empirical position reflexively. I do so by drawing upon Henri Lefebvre’s notion of ‘rhythmnanalysis’, as it encompasses politically-defined phenomenological research by invoking the ‘rhythmnanalyst’ as a self-reflexive empirical researcher.

**Empiricism and the rhythmnanalysis project**

Lefebvre’s and Régulier’s ‘The Rhythmnanalytical Project’ (2004) details a rhythmic interpretation of urban space, showing how the rhythmnanalytical project is an inherently political one by offering a system for better understanding how our cultural, social and political environments influence our daily experiences. Lefebvre employs phenomenological concepts to capture the way that the internal rhythms of subjective experience are mediated through the external rhythms of our environment. He suggests that by becoming better attuned to the sensorial experiences of everyday life, we can understand with more clarity how our behaviour is being conditioned:

> Our sensations and perceptions, in full and continuous appearances, contain repetitive figures, concealing them. Thus, sounds, lights, colours and objects. We contain ourselves by

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52 In this study, the authors attempt to demonstrate how rhythmnanalysis can be deployed to illustrate the differences between Mediterranean and oceanic cities.

53 It is from this perspective that he criticises phenomenologists such as Merleau-Ponty for over-emphasising the centrality of the subject.
concealing the diversity of our rhythms: to ourselves, body and flesh, we are almost objects” (2004:10).

Rhythmnanalysis thereby links subjective experience and agency through the continually active behaviour of the body, as it subjectively unites the “garland of rhythms” generated by biological, physical and social encounters (2004:20). Therefore, the rhythmnanalystical project accounts not only for the many ways that we are affected by physical, sensory and spatial encounter, but also how historical patterns become embodied, and condition our daily experiences. The path towards political change is galvanised by the rhythmic intervention of these patterns. Lefebvre argues that by using rhythmnanalysis to expose how “the visible moving parts hide the machinery of economo-political society” (2004:15), new rhythms can be imprinted upon those which govern cultural and social practices. From the empirical perspective of my study, this implies that analysis should extend beyond the immediate phenomenological experiences of visitors to also consider how histories of visitation and museum pedagogy have influenced individuals’ experiences in the Screen Gallery. This close phenomenological and historical analysis reveals the patterns which condition expressions of visitor agency, and therefore makes possible further investigation into a politics of movement.

**The politics in rhythms**

Lefebvre proposes that the act of listening is central to conducting rhythmnanalysis, as it is the task of the rhythmnanalyst to perceive and interpret these rhythms:

> More aware of times than of spaces, of moods than of images, of the atmosphere than of particular spectacles… [He] adopts… a transdisciplinary approach. He ‘keeps his ear open’, but he does not hear only words, speeches, noises and sounds for he is able to listen to a house, a street, a city, as one listens to a symphony or an opera. Of course, he seeks to find out how this music is composed, who plays it and for whom… Attentive to time (or tempo) and therefore as much to repetitions as to differences in time, he separates by a mental act what gives itself as linked to a whole: namely, rhythms and their associations. He not only observes human activities, but he hears (in the double meaning of the word of noticing and understanding), the temporalities in which these activities take place (1996:229).

The rhythmnanalyst uses awareness of their own bodily rhythms as a means of measuring and analysing the rhythms of the external environment. By taking one’s own body as a reference point, the rhythmnanalyst draws together seemingly disparate or separated entities, such as subject and object, inside and outside, so that methodologically he “will not be obliged to jump

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54 Lefebvre illustrates this argument with discussion of public space, suggesting that contestations emerge within struggle over the appropriation of rhythms: “Thus the public space, space of representation, ‘spontaneously’ becomes the place of promenades, encounters, intrigues, diplomacy, trade and negotiations, theatricalizing itself. Time is hence linked to space and to the rhythms of the people who occupy this space” (1996:237).
from the inside to the outside of observed bodies; he should come to listen to them as a whole and unify them by taking his own rhythms as a reference: by integrating the outside with the inside and vice versa” (2004:20).

Rhythmnanalysis therefore offers a complex phenomenological framework and empirical methodology. I specifically invoke the figure of rhythmnanalyst to make transparent my own subjectivity as an empirical observer of events, while also accounting for the ways my own sensory experience of the empirical environment will influence the analysis I develop. By explicitly acknowledging how I mediate the ‘rhythms’ of the Screen Gallery as a researcher, I add a self-reflexive dimension to my study. This strategy highlights the way that my own subjective experiences will affect the logic of relation. I also use this reflexivity to appraise my framework throughout the investigation, so that it can be used beyond the parameters of my research. While this appraisal acts as a running critique of the more rigidly positioned methodologies and limited studies surveyed at the beginning of this chapter, it also underscores the key aspects of my research which could be employed in further studies.

**Empirical research strategies**

The empirical research was undertaken across two exhibitions in ACMI’s Screen Gallery, *World Without End* (*WWE*), running from April to July of 2005 and curated by Alessio Cavallaro and Alexei Glass, and *White Noise* (*WN*), which ran from August to October 2005 and was curated by Mike Stubbs. Initially, I had planned to conduct research at only one exhibition, however, as *WWE* closed and the process of transcription began, a larger question emerged as to how visitor responses would vary if the empirical process was undertaken around a different set of works and curatorial themes. To contextualise and verify the empirical material gathered at *WWE*, I extended the boundaries of my investigation and conducted further fieldwork at *WN*. However, before long I found that despite appearing a significantly different exhibition to *WWE*, several strong themes and patterns of response were corroborating between the two exhibitions. I therefore ceased the empirical process and commenced my theoretical analysis.

I will now detail the spatial design of each exhibition, explaining the formal parameters in which each work appears. I do so self-reflexively, so as to draw attention to the ways my own experience of these spaces influenced my research as a ‘rhythmnanalyst’, and consequently shaped the direction of the empirical process and theoretical analysis. It must be noted that not all of the works which I describe below have been subject to analysis within the body of this thesis, as this requires a level of investigative detail beyond the scope of my study. Rather, the works which provoked particularly strong visitor responses will be described in greater detail.
as they arise for discussion within forthcoming chapters. It must also be noted, that the following description of WWE and WN illustrates only one of many possible visitor journeys through the Screen Gallery. In reality, individuals may indulge long pauses, weave around the Gallery or skip works altogether. This description aims to give a sense of the geometric space visitors encountered, and the way that the works in each exhibition related to one another.

*World Without End*

Curated by Alessio Cavallaro and Alexi Glass, *WWE* was an evocative exploration of the many environments which shape our subjective experience of the world. Visitors were invited to experience the flux, wonder, stillness and emptiness which co-exist in our contemporary ecologies. Through a surveying of time and place, the works included in the exhibition offered a commentary on globalisation, history and apocalypse. In their catalogue essay, the curators explain how the exhibition attempted to capture these environmental dynamics. They described that it reveals how we perceive the world through cycles of night and day, constantly changing weather patterns, crossings through natural and urban environments, currents of memory, emotion and reflection. It presents works that alter our view of the world, representing it not as we 'know' it to be, but rather as we innately sense it to be, or imagine it. Focusing on various forms of landscape, the exhibition invites us to explore the poetics of time, place, light, movement and sound (Cavallaro and Glass 2005).

In this statement, the curators suggest that *WWE* not only presents art works which explore environmental dynamics, but also offers visitors the possibility of experiencing these dynamics as they journey through the exhibition space [Figure 3.1, Figure 3.2].

The visitor encounters *World Without End* before commencing the descent into the Screen Gallery. The first work, *the Last Clock* (2001) by Ross Cooper and Jussi Ängeslevä, is suspended in the foyer, and beside the stairs which lead down to the Gallery’s entrance. This was a large disc-shaped screen which captured images of visitors standing before the work, a visual archive of movement and rhythm in space. This data was fed live to a similar ‘clock’, to be encountered later in the exhibition below. The theme of surveillance follows the visitor as they move down the stairs and come to the next work, *Netlag* (2004) by Pleix. Suspended above the stairs at head-height, this large, square projection conflated experiences of time and place in the presentation of live, web camera footage from 1600 locations around the world. Moving a little further down the stairs, the visitor encounters the first of a series of three works by Robert Cahen, *Cartes postales vidéo: Melting Pot 1 + 2 + 3* (1984-1986). These ‘postcards’ appeared on waist-high stands dotted throughout the Gallery. The works featured well-known tourist destinations, but playfully defy the way we construct memory of place through
visual puns and slapstick sound effects. Moving past this first postcard, the visitor finally enters into the subterranean darkness of the Gallery.

A number of possibilities for traveling through the space now emerge. If following aural cues, the visitor may attempt to seek out the synthesised midi-renditions of *It’s a Small World* tucked behind the stairs. This belongs to *Enola* (2004), Susan Norrie’s version of a global apocalypse. The work was shot in an architectural theme park in Japan, where hooded figures stand with quiet menace alongside miniaturised monuments of the world. Or, if wishing to enter the Gallery space proper and pursue visual cues, the visitor may proceed straight ahead towards Simon Carrol and Martin Friedel’s *History of a Day* (2004). This work consists of five parallel projections featuring spectacular time-lapsed landscapes of five ‘days’ around the world. Arranged in a pentagon, the visitor can stand outside of the screened enclosure and watch the rapid flicker of back-projections, or alternatively, step inside and become immersed within the thundery exchanges between screens. It is also possible to sit within this work, and take a few moments to track the sun’s rising arc across skies of deserts, cities and forests, then watch it dip in deference to the moon and the star-lit skies of the night.

From this point, the visitor may take a variety of paths to explore the remainder of the exhibition. To the right is Daniel Crooks’ *Train No. 1* (2003). This is a large-scale multi-channel projection of a train snaking in time-lapse segments along Melbourne’s inner-city railway, and across the breadth of the Gallery wall. The partner projection of *The Last Clock* is ahead to the left, another circular screen cataloguing the movement capture being recorded upstairs in ACMI’s foyer. Moving more deeply into this space, the visitor passes the second postcard, and then catches sight of two smaller-scale works near the Gallery’s escalator. These are *Rev* (1997) by Seoungho Cho, which captures the rhythm of revolving doors and the frenetic pace of pedestrian traffic, and Brian Doyle’s *The Light* (2003), an abstract depiction of September 11’s memorial beacons in the United States. The Gallery space now narrows, funneling the visitor along a further corridor. To the immediate left is the entrance to a room. By the doorway is a clear plastic stand in which three white plastic bowls have been set. This is the mysterious introduction to Lynette Wallworth’s *Hold: Vessel I* (2001). Taking a bowl, the visitor enters the pitch depths of the room. In the centre of the floor are three, barely distinguishable outlines of grates, much like sewer entrances on a street. Approaching one of these grates, it becomes apparent that a projection is being cast down from above, a small light shower to be caught in one’s bowl. The projections slide like bright water along the curves of the bowl, revealing the slippery worlds of galaxies, stars and microscopic creatures.
Scale A3 = 1:250

[Figure 3.1] First half of exhibition floorplan for *World Without End*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Artist</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Darren Almonrd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Carles Postales video</td>
<td>Robert Cahen</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Enola</td>
<td>Susan Norrie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>History of a Day</td>
<td>Martin Friedel &amp; Simon Carroll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Hold Vessel #1</td>
<td>Lynette Wallworth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Last Clock</td>
<td>Ross Cooper &amp; Jussi Angesleva</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>The Light</td>
<td>Brian Doyle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Netlag</td>
<td>Pleea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Rev</td>
<td>Seungho Cho</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Luke Jerram</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Too Dark For Night</td>
<td>Clare Langan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Train 1b</td>
<td>Daniel Crooks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>A Viagem</td>
<td>Christian Boustani</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
[Figure 3.2] Second half of exhibition floorplan for World Without End

Scale A3 = 1:250

Artists

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. A Life</td>
<td>Christoph Reiter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. History</td>
<td>Rita Ackermann</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Hot Cell</td>
<td>Martin Kippenberger</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Hot Cell</td>
<td>Robert Gober</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Hot Cell</td>
<td>Brian Clarke</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Hot Cell</td>
<td>Daniel Crooks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Hot Cell</td>
<td>Christian Boudaurer</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Exiting the room and continuing along the corridor, the visitor is confronted by three gleaming, silver, shoulder-height and tripod-like structures, the only non-primarily screen-based work. *Tide* (2002), by Luke Jerram, is an installation which represents the earth’s elements by measuring the real-time gravitational pull of the moon and sun. A faint circular humming is just barely audible, an aural recording of the tripod’s tidal song. Beyond *Tide*, and in the last open space of the Gallery, two works hang opposite - and in contrast to – one another. The first, *A Viagem* (1998) by Christian Boustani, is a richly colourful integration of high-end computer animation, film and video, which depicts the journey and landing of the first Portuguese sailing vessel in Japan in the sixteenth century. The second work, Darren Almond’s *A* (2002), abstracts an Antarctic landscape. Ice and sky are barely perceptible within their slow, translucent exchange, although the sound of breaking icecaps becomes a crashing reminder. The final work is Clare Langan’s *Too Dark for Night* (2001). This piece is housed at the end of long and twisting corridor, a necessary buffer for the 5.1 surround sound which envelops the space. Much like *A*, this work explores barren landscapes, as the visitor follows a lone figure across wind-swept deserts, accompanied only by the sound of blustering sands and howling gales. To leave *WWE*, the visitor must weave back from this room and locate the escalator set in the middle of the Gallery, perhaps pause by the third postcard for a moment, and travel back up to the day-lit foyer on the ground floor.

**White Noise**

*WN* appeared vastly different to the *WWE* in theme, exhibition design and sensory experience. In his curatorial essay, Stubbs described how through an exploration of abstraction and the moving image, *WN* is

an exhibition in real-time. With varying degrees of luminosity, tempo and volume the artworks invite the audience into a space that is both physical and reflective: not to view pictorial representations of something, or document another time or place, but to invite us in to the here and now (Stubbs 2005b:49).

Seeking to represent an abstract relationship between visitor, technology and art, *WN* presented nine works by artists regarded as leaders of recent practices in abstraction of the moving image (Stubbs 2005b).

While visitors to *WN* encountered the first work upon reaching the bottom of the stairs, like *WWE*, they were greeted pre-emptively by the sounds of the exhibition below as they descended the staircase. However, the early aural encounters differed significantly between exhibitions. Where the comical sound of the postcards, Norrie’s looped tune and the occasional crack of thunder from *History of a Day* competed against each other in *WWE*, for
WN Stubbs transmitted white noise across the Gallery to disguise the sound leaking between installations. This marks a significant point of departure between the two exhibition designs. Cavallaro embraced the heterogeneity of the collection of works. He allowed the exhibition’s sounds to blend and blur, suggesting that it may create an immersive environment more conducive towards conversation between visitors (Cavallaro 2005). However Stubbs, whilst also attempting to create a state of immersion, composed a smoother and less rupturous environment. This was also evident in the exhibition layout. Rather than recreating the free exploratory movement of WWE, the WN visitor is guided along one main corridor. Each work is situated in a room or space situated to the right-hand side of the passageway. This isolation created a deep sense of immersion and intimacy with each work. In addition, the re-entry back into the main corridor offered an experiential ‘cleansing’, and thereby created a series of affective vignettes, described by Stubbs as akin to the experience of attending a Japanese bathhouse (Stubbs 2005b:49) [Figure 3.3, Figure 3.4].

The main entrance to the exhibition consisted of a series of neon blue, three-dimensional frames which cascaded backwards before the eye. Moving towards these electrified frames, the visitor passes a large didactic panel. It presents a synopsis of abstract art which locates the curatorial theme and theoretically contextualises the participatory experience. As a further historical introduction and reference point to the exhibition, a series of short, abstract films by László Moholy-Nagy, Len Rye, Viking Eggeling, John Whitney, Walther Ruttman and Hans Richter play quietly underneath the staircase, the same space in which Norrie’s work had been installed for WWE. Moving through the first of the neon arches, the visitor encounters a bank of custom-designed computers which exhibit online projects. These were curated by Lia and Miguel Carvalhais for the exhibition Abstraction Now, Vienna, 2003, and feature web-based works which use Flash, Java and Director Shockwave software. Moving further into the darkness, a black, table-shaped object is made barely discernable within the shadows. This is Jonathon Duckworth’s Black on Black, White on White (2005). When examined closely, the table appears to contain subtly polarised images which, when moving around the installation, emerge at abstracted angles. Within a few metres the passageway widens into a space. Waveform (2005) is projected across the right-hand wall on four large panels, a crimson display of visual rhythm and sonic movement. This is the first of a number of works included in the exhibition by Ulf Langheinrich. Moving further down the corridor and past the electric blue silhouettes of faceless visitors, the visitor turns from the passageway into the hanging

55 The exhibition design for White Noise was a particularly evocative use of the Screen Gallery space. It was nominated by UK Frieze magazine as one of Australia’s best exhibitions for 2005.

56 See Carvalhais, L & Carvalhais, M (2005) for a list of the online projects which were included for this installation.
[Figure 3.3] First half of exhibition floorplan for *White Noise*
[Figure 3.4] Second half of exhibition floorplan for *White Noise*
space of Keiko Kimoto’s *Imaginary Numbers* (2004-2005). This work consists of a series of ten luminescent plates suspended mobile-like, each hip-height panel depicting spidery permutations of a mathematical formula. Returning to the main passageway, the visitor encounters a bank of seats and a row of sock-footed visitors awaiting entry into *spectra 11* (2002) by Ryoji Ikeda. Removing their shoes, the visitor enters alone into a spongy-carpeted, narrow and high-ceilinged corridor. Sonic ultra-frequencies throb in the space, disorienting one’s capacity to navigate the corridor and the ability to move towards the thin strip of red light at the corridor’s end. The process of return is further hampered by the intermittent burst and whine of flash bulbs which unnerve attempts to exit the space.

Departing the corridor and re-donning their shoes, the visitor again enters a space to the right of the main corridor. This installation is the cosily-housed *Aguas Vivas* (2002-2005) by Peter Bosch and Simone Simons. Like a media peep show, the visitor peers through a small, cross-shaped window to see a camera suspended above a vibrating oil drum. The images – marbled, rumbling, and abstracted – are fed live to two screens placed above seating banks in the small space. The next exit from the corridor leads into a large, very dark room where a long thin, white strip runs the length of the wall. This is *data.spectra* (2005), a second work by Ryoji Ikeda. Upon closer inspection this strip becomes a digital stream of numbers, where one’s and zero’s chime past at eye-level. Exiting this room and taking a few steps further down the passageway, the visitor encounters a chamber in which Ernest Edmonds and Mark Fell’s *Absolute 5* (2005) is projected. This is the only work in the exhibition responsive to the physical intervention of visitors. Here, triggered by movement in the space, blocks of colour shift across a large screen, piercing the screen space with clicks and beeps. To the side of this work is the entrance to a long corridor, the same passage which had led into Langan’s *Too Dark for Night* in *WWE*. This time it leads the visitor into *WN’s* penultimate work, *Drift* (2005), by Ulf Langheinrich. A large, theatrette-size screen runs the entire length of the wall, upon which visual rhythms pulsate to a deep, rumbling drone, subsuming the visitor into a cinema-scaled state of immersion. Vibrations of light and sound progressively darken and intensify, until after more than twenty minutes they finally release their captive tension. The screen brightens the room for a few moments before finally fading to black. To depart the Screen Gallery the visitor must once again retrace their steps along the hazy sheen of the blue corridor. One final work will be encountered by the escalator which leads back up to the foyer. This is another work by Ulf Langheinrich, *Light* (2005), a large circular screen projecting spheres of light, a strobing bulls-eye which subsumes the visitor into a hypnotically visual and aural encounter.
Empirical research: Observation and the sensing of rhythms

The empirical research aimed to delineate modes of visitors perception and behaviour by following Lefebvre’s concerns with intimate spaces and listening. I combined two qualitative methods for data gathering: a series of longitudinal participant observations of the Gallery space, and a number of in-depth interviews.

I conducted observational analysis with the aim of detecting the rhythms of visitor behaviour in the Gallery so as to begin locating the sites of ‘tension’ within visitor experience. As I described above, Lefebvre suggests that when observing rhythms, the rhythmnanalyst should firstly take their own body as a reference point, and use this experiential knowledge as a basis from which to understand the external environment. This strategy solves a number of methodological problems when conducting ethnographic research such as participant observation. Rather than trying to separate myself from my environment (a rather impossible task), Lefebvre’s suggestion allowed me to bring my own phenomenological responses to the methodological forefront, and draw from them as a tool for analysis. I therefore decoded visitors’ responses by using my own immersive experiences of the Gallery. I made note of my own reactions to the Gallery and its work, and used this knowledge and material as a basis from which to gauge the reactions of visitors.

Firstly, I would allow myself to become affected by its darkness, slow to its pace, and respond viscerally to shifts within light and sound. By becoming attuned to my own responses in the Gallery, I developed a schema for observing visitors, noting, for example, alignments between a visitor’s response and my own, or a lack of interest in works that I had been powerfully drawn to. This strategy enabled me to begin mapping the Gallery’s environmental rhythms. To gain a clear sense of these patterns I visited the Gallery regularly, attending once per fortnight throughout both exhibitions, and spending one to two hours in the space, depending on the level of activity. The days and hours of observation were also varied in an effort to capture the widest demographic range of visitors possible, so as extend the breadth of material being collected, and establish a more accurate ‘average’ of visitor behaviour.

To maintain this ‘average’ it was important to find a means of studying visitor behaviour as discretely as possible, and cast minimal influence on the activities of individuals in the Gallery. On this count, the darkness of the Gallery offered a convenient camouflage for

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57 For example, while most mornings were generally very quiet and offered little in the way of rich empirical material, on Thursdays a number of discounts are made available to Melbourne’s senior citizens, meaning that this became a time in which it would be possible to observe a particular demographic range of visitor.
observational study. When following visitors through the Gallery I attempted to maintain this presence by matching the ecology of movement in the space. I would become one of many bodies, similarly moving from work to work, or occasionally pausing to sit before a screen. If stopping to make notes with pen and paper I would quietly recede back into the shadows. Within these notes I would record a brief sketching of the Screen Gallery. This included a tabulation of people in attendance, an estimation of ages, and a categorisation of the groups present, such as tourists, students on school excursions, family outings, or individuals attending alone. I would also speak to the ACMI volunteers situated around the Screen Gallery, asking about the reception of the exhibition and enquiring into any unusual observations that they may have made. Drawn together, my notes, discussion with volunteers, my own affective attunement and knowledge of surrounding works gave me an ‘overview’ of the rhythms within the exhibition space, and became the basis from which to detect tensions or shifts within visitors’ own rhythmic behaviour.

For example, if I responded strongly to a particular piece, my own experiences were used as a marker from which to compare the responses of others – not as a judgement, but rather, to differentiate and categorise the range of reactions I was observing. Furthermore, I noted that with more time spent in the Gallery I began to develop a sensitivity towards the subtle minutiae of visitor response. This, coupled with an increasingly intimate knowledge of the works, meant that I could begin to anticipate certain kinds of responses, or note those that exceeded ‘normal’ behaviour. In addition, when observing a visitor who appeared deeply immersed in a work, my knowledge of the aural and visual cues of surrounding works enabled me to watch closely for subtle forms of bodily reaction. A slightly cocked head, flicker of the eyes, or perhaps momentarily shuffling in a seat, indicated moments of distraction, and shifts in concentration. It was valuable to detect these small, bodily reactions, as they are forms of response which visitors themselves are often unaware of, and therefore required my prompting within the interview discussion. These small changes within visitor behaviour came to inform a significant part of my analysis, as will be discussed in Chapters Six and Seven.

To map out the patterns of visitor behaviour, I would oscillate between standing still, watching the Gallery as a whole, standing by a particular work for longer periods, and ‘shadowing’ visitors as they moved through the Gallery. Each of these strategies divulged a particular form of information about visitor behaviour. Observing the Gallery as a whole, I would listen and look for triggers which compelled particular behaviour in the space, whether an aural or visual cue from a work which seemed to draw visitors from one part of the Gallery to another, or the moments of laughter, tension or suspension which caused people to gather into groups. These kinds of observations allowed me to define moments in which the Gallery became a ‘shared’
space, and differentiate these occasions from times in which it became intensely private. Keeping watch of a work for an extended period of time brought to light the many different, or even similar ways in which people interacted with forms of screen-based art. This enabled me to determine, for example, an average time spent with a work, or whether particular works compelled visitors to seek additional information from didactic panels or ACMI’s staff. ‘Shadowing’ allowed me to map out the journeys visitors took through the Gallery, as I could follow the route from beginning to end. I could also gain a sense of pace by noting places favoured for pausing, or sections of the Gallery which drew little attention. By standing within earshot of visitors when they did stop to pause, I noted the comments and discussion arising from their interaction in the space. After undertaking these forms of observation, and tracking a visitor’s journey through to the end of the exhibition, I would make my approach, introduce myself, and ask the visitor if they would mind taking part in a study of visitor behaviour in new museum spaces.

**Interviews and listening**

While the observational process was an excellent method for determining patterns of behaviour and gaining greater insight into visitor responses by using my own experiences as a methodological tool, observation alone could not sufficiently glean the phenomenological detail required for empirical analysis. This was especially apparent during *White Noise*, as visitors often sat very still for extended periods, and appeared deeply immersed within the experiences offered by abstract moving image art. Observation revealed very little detail about visitor experiences in this situation, consequently making the interviewing process an important component of my empirical study, and, I propose, imperative to further phenomenological studies of spatial experiences.

Seven visitors were interviewed as a part of the empirical study conducted at *World Without End*. Alessio Cavallaro, one of the exhibition’s curators, also took me on a guided tour of the exhibition, explaining curatorial themes and strategies, as well as his impression of a number of the works. Visitors were approached on the basis of age and gender, and selected, where possible, according to their reasons for visitation. Tourists, for example, would have a different contextual knowledge of ACMI as compared to a local Melburnian. These qualifications were established so as to capture a wide cross-sample of responses. I found that many visitors who agreed to participate offered to be interviewed right away, at which point we would ascend from the Screen Gallery, exchanging pleasantries en route to a nearby café. There was a double benefit here. Firstly, interviews conducted directly after visitation were richer in detail, as visitor’ impressions of the exhibition were fresh in mind. The second reason relates to a common response I received from visitors upon being asked for an
interview. A number of prospective interviewees suggested that they couldn’t contribute to my study as they knew very little about art, or ACMI. It seemed that the ‘symbolic capital’ Bourdieu (1984) had identified as an issue for researchers (and discussed in Chapter One with reference to reflexive ethnography) was being made visible by identifying myself as doctoral researcher, and was in turn having an alienating effect. I found that the brief ride up the escalator and the journey to a nearby café became an important opportunity to breach formalities, as amicable discussion and the offer of coffee laid the grounds for a conversational space in which interviewees felt comfortable sharing their experiences. Creating a familiar environment therefore became paramount to generating rich phenomenological material and a broad range of visitor response.

The interviews varied from thirty minutes to one hour in length. While commencing with a few qualifying questions about education and the visitor’s familiarity with ACMI and the Screen Gallery, my chief aim as a rhythmmanalyst was to ‘listen’. I observed the thoughts being articulated, the vocal dynamics of visitors’ conversation, as well as the subtle, but is illustrative of changes in bodily behaviour. Interview questions were used as loose prompts for the discussion, and were based around themes such as reasons for visitation, the factors influencing impressions of the Gallery, prior familiarity with museums, opinions about media art and technology, as well as the visitor’s most and least favourable experiences.

Theoretical analysis

I fashioned the analysis of the interview and observational material according to Massumi’s logic of relation, as this enabled me to broadly include all aspects of material for analysis while embracing the fact that the material is ‘lived’ - alive - and a valuable resource for developing a political study concerned with agency and political potential. For example, when taking the words of the visitor as a basis for analysis, problems can arise when considering that individuals contradict themselves, speak in tautologies and describe experiences in conflicting terms. Rather than attempting to impose a theoretical system or forcefully extract a clear, coherent logic which rationalises these mixed-meanings, these contradictions can be embraced and recognised as characteristic of the many discrepancies that each of us embody and project in daily life. With this in mind, each interview was transcribed and then examined in a way which sought to loosely delineate its main themes. This list of themes was then compared with the lists drawn from the other interviews, a cross-referencing process which distinguished the similarities, variations and stark differences between responses. This form of categorisation brought the tensions between responses to the surface, an illumination of immanent change within forms of visitor experience.
The strongest responses related to spatial experiences of the Gallery and specific forms of interaction arising from time-based art. Wanting to contextualise these against a second pool of empirical material, I conducted two further visitor interviews at *White Noise*, which had commenced during the process of transcription and analysis. I also conducted an interview with Mike Stubbs, the exhibition’s curator, to enquire more deeply into some of the themes I had begun to delineate. Despite the changed conditions of participation and a vastly different curatorial theme, the responses in both sets of interviews resonated along surprisingly similar lines, namely the affective dimensions of immersive experience, and how time-based art created new spatial experiences in the museum. Responses which did vary corresponded to the particularities of the artworks. I ceased interviewing at this point, as the strong thematic correlations between the modes of visitor perception and behaviour across both exhibitions had established a solid foundation from which to launch my theoretical analysis, and begin constructing the phenomenology of visitor experience which commences in the following chapter.

**Conclusion**

The aim of this chapter had been to develop a theoretical and methodological framework for my study of visitor experiences. I have argued that a phenomenology of museum visitation links visitor experience with questions of agency, whilst also setting the parameters for a political enquiry. This phenomenology draws upon Brian Massumi’s ‘field of immanence’ as an overarching theoretical framework, as it situates the study within a broadly inclusive theoretical arena. This allows for the development of a complex methodology which, on one hand, compensates for a lack of writing about visitor experience, and on the other, positions phenomenology as an empirical centre of the study. As Massumi writes, the field concept is a constructive and “logical tool for expressing continuity of self-relation and heterogeneity in the same breath” (2002:8) as it incorporates movement as a mechanism which allow passage between - and across – the ‘gaps’ and ‘gridpoints’ of preceding theoretical positions, where “the very notion of movement as qualitative transformation is lacking” (2002:3). By thinking of states which ‘pass’ or ‘emerge’, it becomes possible to overcome theoretical problems such as binarism, and actually regard positionality as an emergent quality of movement. The problem of limiting my scope to phenomenology alone is also overcome, as the logic of relation draws together a number of theoretical, philosophical and empirical methodologies. By positioning my phenomenology study in this way, it becomes possible to not only broaden the material used for discussion, but to set it in dynamic motion.

This is an important strategy for conducting social research within the contemporary conditions described in the previous chapter. As sociologist John Urry has suggested (2000:
contemporary flows and networks have undermined the pedagogical boundaries which social research has traditionally drawn upon. By theoretically ‘mobilising’ this study within a field, my investigation gains a flexibility, as it can rapidly move in and around discussion of the bodily and visceral, and theses such as governmentality and reflexive modernisation. In addition, Massumi’s ‘logic of relation’ locates political potential by drawing attention to the way tension can be viewed as productive, as it signals the potential for change. This framework recognises how a potential is realised through tension and reflexivity, meaning that this conceptual framework is fitting for a study of visitor agency, and an emerging politics.

My own positioning as a researcher is also included in this logic of relation. By drawing from Henri Lefebvre’s rhythmmanalysis, I have argued that I can use this positioning to add a self-reflexive dimension to the investigation, so that it can be used within research applications beyond my study. Rhythmmanalysis was also used as an empirical research strategy for identifying the nuances of visitor experience and expressions of agency. As a rhythmmanalyst, my task has been to detect and document the rhythms of the Screen Gallery, and observe how phenomenological experiences and historical trajectories intersect with patterns of visitor behaviour. By detecting these patterns, or ‘rhythms’, it becomes possible to consider possibilities for political intervention. The theoretical and methodological framework I have developed within this chapter elicits the two processes of translation necessary for understanding the relationship between experience, agency and politics. The first is concerned with the forms of engagement and interaction taking place within the Gallery, and involves the translation of art experiences into modalities of agency. This is the process being explored within the body of this dissertation. The second relates to how these modalities of agency may translate into forms of praxis which find application outside of the museum, and equip visitor with the knowledge and skills appropriate for negotiating a politics of individualisation.

The following chapter draws from the empirical material to elicit the beginnings of the phenomenological analysis. I follow my interviewed visitors as they enter ACMI, tracking their ‘path of movement’ as they proceed towards the Screen Gallery. Allowing the visitors’ words and commentary to guide my analysis, the remaining chapters take on a chronology of the visitor’s passage through the art space. They weave together contextual trajectories and theoretical positionings, so as to explore the themes illuminated by phenomenological study. Lastly, as the visitors depart the museum in the final chapter, the future – this second point of translation - is considered in terms of how emerging trajectories of agency and experience may materialise as a politics of movement beyond the museum.
PEDAGOGY AND AGENCY
CHAPTER FOUR

The Crossing of Thresholds

Precariousness is at the center of a formal universe in which nothing is durable, everything is in movement: the trajectory between two places is favored in relation to the place itself, and encounters are more important than the individuals who compose them (Bourriaud 2000:43).


Chapter Four
The Crossing of Thresholds

Introduction

Ross Gibson: You’re talking about a dynamic place, a mutative environment where objects can be examined from several vantages, known in several ways, with several valences and intensities.

Gary Warner: One of the problems in the museum world is the imperative to settle upon one aspect of a specimen, and that becomes the aspect that must be inculcated in The Visitor… Admittedly, it’s a very difficult thing to create an environment where you engage people’s curiosity, leave enough room for visitors to negotiate a range of ideas, not leading them by the nose.

Ross Gibson: So what you end up with… is not a finished file of information but a …


As I have described earlier, when entering the Screen Gallery at ACMI, one departs the cemented, screen-lit reception area and descends a heavy-set staircase, somewhat discreetly situated to the side of the foyer’s automated doors. Stepping from staircase to carpet the visitor is confronted and enveloped by the Screen Gallery’s dimmed entrance, where light, sound and movement flicker and swell in the space ahead [Figure 4.1].

[Figure 4.1] Descent into ACMI’s Screen Gallery

This entrance establishes a threshold between stable and malleable spaces. The cement castings of wall and stair - much like the hard outer shell of Federation Square - remain constant in purpose and form as compared to the misty lights of the screen projections below. The Screen Gallery is the pliable inner space of ACMI, a cavern of shadows and shimmering
projections marked by a distinctive spatial signature; an ambiguity and suspense which confronts visitors as they take their first few steps into the Gallery’s darkness.

In this chapter I enquire into these characteristics of the Screen Gallery, asking how visitor behaviour becomes influenced by its distinctive, dark spaces, and in turn signals a shift in the pedagogical relations between visitor and institution. I structure this enquiry by pursuing the theme of thresholds. At first, I cross a thematic threshold in a telling of the visitor’s journey to ACMI, their entrance into the Screen Gallery, and their first stages of encounter in a new exhibition environment. The construction of this narrative also requires a crossing of methodological thresholds, as my phenomenological approach will interpret the act of visitor movement as a culmination of lived experience, architectural design and institutional mandate. I launch my phenomenology of museum visitation by drawing upon visitors’ thoughts and recollections to reconstruct their path of movement towards ACMI and into the Gallery.

This idea of tracking visitor activity at the level of movement is relatively new in museum studies, although is well-developed in research of shopping centres and theme parks. Architects too, have only recently begun to take heed of post-occupancy and visitor behaviour studies, so as to conceive of their design as ‘occupied’ or interactive spaces. Just as museum and media reception studies had for a long time neglected to integrate the complex process of cultural reception as a part of their analysis, architectural design has in a similar manner failed to engage with theory from user-end studies. For example, C. Thomas Mitchell (1993) describes a number of empirical methods such as ‘environment behaviour studies’ which assessed the issue of space usability, but were largely ignored by architects who instead privileged the aesthetic quality of the building as the dominant consideration of structural design. In this chapter I therefore explicate how a visitor’s passage of route through the museum, when interpreted phenomenologically, can reveal how the act of movement is an expression of lived experience, architectural design and institutional mandate. I therefore cross a new scholarly threshold by using an integration of observational and interview material to guide my enquiry into the relationship between museum and visitor.

The first part of this chapter surveys visitors’ reasons for attending ACMI. This discussion responds to the themes elucidated in the first chapter, where I showed that ACMI had been

Environment behaviour studies are conducted by social scientists (psychologists, sociologists and anthropologists, rather than practicing designers) to analyse the quality of the built environment (Mitchell 1993:35). Driving these studies is a premise of better educating designers about the usage of public space. However this form of research frequently encounters an ‘applicability’ gap, as designers fail to use the studies, both within the stages of planning and post-occupancy. This means that researchers have difficulty predicting how buildings may be used (Mitchell 1993:36).
positioned as a pedagogical and touristic site for new encounters with the moving image. In this chapter I ask how visitors’ expectations of the Screen Gallery measure against the aspirations set by ACMI’s progenitors and members of government. I then follow my visitors from ACMI’s foyer through to the entrance of the Gallery, where, for the first time, they are confronted by its expansive depths. Interviewees’ recollections of this moment show how the spatial experience of the Screen Gallery challenges visitors’ perceptions of the museum.

I continue to follow visitors in the second part of this chapter as they cross the threshold into ACMI’s Screen Gallery. I show how their attempts to navigate the dimly-lit space reconfigures visitor perceptions of, and interaction within, the museum. Darkness creates conditions of ambiguity in the Gallery, as it obscures the traditional conventions of participation. Visitors therefore engage in a highly self-determined journey through the Gallery by developing their own rules for procedure. I argue that by deformingalising museum traditions in the Screen Gallery, ACMI has in part sanctioned the ambiguity it embodies as a product of reflexive modernisation. As a result of this ambiguity, a new culture of visitor participation emerges, as knowledge becomes mediated through phenomenological experience and spatial navigation. Darkness therefore becomes an atmospheric predicate for self-determined forms of visitor participation and a new, interactive pedagogical relationship between museum and visitor.

In final discussion I draw together the first and second parts of this chapter to theorise this relationship, and how it specifically manifests within the spatial conditions of the Screen Gallery. I draw upon ideas of space, architecture, music and interactivity to develop a formal definition of the Gallery as an ‘ambient space’. This term describes how the interactive exchange between individual and institution takes form within the immersive parameters of visitor encounter, and reflects an experiential ecology in which the pedagogy of museums past has begun to ebb. As this relaxation of pedagogical boundaries also compelled self-determined visitor participation in the Gallery, ‘ambient space’ also refers to a site in which an individual’s sense of agency can be heightened. I therefore argue that ‘ambient space’ describes a place of potential, or, in Massumi’s terms, ‘immanence’, and flag its use throughout the remainder of this dissertation as a theoretical tool for examining how new forms of agency may seek expression within darkened interiors and quiet spaces.

1: EXPECTATIONS AND AMBIGUITY

Seeking art spaces

The conditions by which visitors chose to visit – or found themselves in – the Gallery, shows how each individual bears a frame of reference which informed their decision to spend a few
moments, an hour or even an entire afternoon in a space devoted to screen-based art. This framing conditioned visitors’ perceptions of the Gallery and their relationship with the institution as they cross its threshold and begin to interact in its spaces. A phenomenology of museum visitation therefore commences with a mapping of each interviewee’s decision to attend ACMI.

A number of visitors described how their decision to attend ACMI had included a trip to Federation Square and the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) where *The Dutch Masters* was being exhibited, a travelling collection of seventeenth-century artworks from the Rijksmuseum. The earlier visit to the NGV became an important point of contrast for visitors, for, as I will show in later discussion, comparisons were often drawn between the experience of attending the NGV and the Screen Gallery. As described by Trevor, a manager at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), a visit to ACMI constitutes a form of cultural sampling:

Well, I had some friends from Adelaide, so we went to the National Gallery, and then Federation Square, and then to ACMI. I know it exists. I’ve only been there once before, and so I just thought I’d show them around… Because it doesn’t exist anywhere in Adelaide or Australia, and I think it’s interesting, so I wanted to show them what was available, and they’re interested in art, they travel a lot so they go to a lot of galleries.

Trevor had been playing local host to a group of friends and decided to take them to ACMI as part of a cultural excursion. His comment shows how a site for cultural tourism can also become an important space for social interaction between friends.

Intimate social experiences also formed the basis of Fleur’s decision to visit ACMI. Fleur is a tertiary teacher and Masters student in fine arts, and visited *World Without End* with her partner and two children, a four-year old son and one-year old daughter. While the visit was an opportunity to spend time with family: “what we were doing was having a family outing and it involved doing something like that and going and having a coffee”, as a practicing artist and parent, Fleur also envisioned the visit to ACMI as a part of a broader educational experience for her children: “I know a few families who’ll go to ACMI. They’ll come to Fed. Square specifically to go to ACMI, with their children… It’s a combination of being able to entertain the kids, but also get something culturally themselves, and get that balance from it”. For others, social contact emerged from encounters between strangers, rather than friends or family. Colleen, for example, perceived the Screen Gallery as a site which breeds a unique culture of participation between its visitors. Not long after ACMI opened, this interest

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59 In Chapter Five visitors draw comparisons between traditional forms of art and the moving image art in the Screen Gallery.
compelled her to draw from professional skills as a cross-cultural trainer and enlist as an ACMI volunteer, “greeting people in the Gallery, answering questions, guiding people around [and] showing them how to use the equipment”. While no longer having time to work in this position, when in the Screen Gallery she still discusses and shares her experiences with other visitors.

It was precisely due to volunteers such as Colleen that Sean, an architect working in the city, found himself at ACMI on a lunchbreak:

A group of us had decided to go and get lunch, and somebody had mentioned that there was something on at Fed. Square, so we went for a wander. We looked at the tin-sheds out in the open area, out in the plaza, and we were wandering through looking at other exhibits and one of the ACMI staff suggested that we go downstairs and have a look at the Screen Gallery.

Sean shows how ACMI’s proximity to a well-traversed public space draws visitors through incidental encounter. Trevor, too, despite having planned a cultural excursion to ACMI, hadn’t been aware of the Screen Gallery concealed beneath ACMI’s foyer: “…we walked around and saw the actual box-office, and I saw these stairs and thought – where do they go? So I went down there. So, that’s how we found out about it.” This highlights a ‘flânerie-inspired’ tourism, which Paul, a 24 year-old musician and creative-writing student, also attributes to its location: “because it’s at Fed. Square it’s such a public space and people just tend to walk in and check out what it’s all about, you know, which… is a real strength. It’s like a box of chocolates, sort of thing… a bit of a sampler”.61

Seeking refuge from Melbourne’s unpredictable spring weather, Paul had also made an impromptu visit to the Screen Gallery: “it was raining heaps, and I just wanted to get some cover from the rain. And you know, had some time to kill…usually when I go to these things it’s because I’m at a loose end and I’m just waiting around”. Katrina, a lab technician at RMIT, attended the Gallery under similarly unplanned circumstances: “my car’s out of action at the moment… and I live out at Northcote, so I came through the city and thought – I sometimes come here in the afternoon, ‘cos most of it’s for free and I can sit back and have a look at different artworks.” Matthew’s visit to ACMI was also incidental, featuring at the bottom of his daily ‘to-do’ list on a day off from work as an apprentice hairdresser: “I’ve got a list of things I was going to do today. One of them was to go to a costume store, one was to

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60 Sean is referring here to an open-air sustainable living exhibition which was taking place in Federation Square at the time of his visit to ACMI.
61 It must be noted that while these visitors encountered the Screen Gallery by accident, the obscured entrance has been a cause of concern for ACMI, and has been subject to redevelopment since the time these interviews were undertaken. These redevelopments are discussed in detail in Chapter Eight to appraise the issue of ACMI’s institutional durability.
Matthew, Paul and Katrina’s comments highlight a perception that the Screen Gallery doesn’t require formal terms of engagement or a specific time-commitment, but rather, can be visited on a casual and fleeting basis.

The powers of recommendation also compelled a number of interstate visitors to attend ACMI. Steven, an academic in theatre studies from Sydney, made use of his short time in Melbourne to attend ACMI on the basis of a friend’s local knowledge, his interest piqued by ACMI’s growing reputation: “I have a friend that works at ACMI, and he kind of tells me what’s on. And, I’m only in Melbourne for 3 months, and he’d told me that the current exhibition was closing that day, so I thought I’d duck in and catch it before it closes”. Heidi, a student of biomedical sciences in Brisbane, was also persuaded by a friend to visit ACMI, eager to explore Melbourne as a part of her semester holiday from university:

Heidi: Actually, I came here yesterday, this is my second time.
Natalia: So why did you come back then?
Heidi: It’s such a nice space, I think…Not too busy, and…
Natalia: Is that compared to the Dutch Masters?
Heidi: Yeah, I suppose it’s a space you’re allowed to think in, almost… Allowed to think differently. It’s a bit of a dreamy kind of space. You get a bit lost. A bit carried away. It’s nice.

While tourism, social interaction, education and recommendations all drew visitors to ACMI, Heidi has described how it was the impression left by a previous encounter in the Screen Gallery which drew her down its steps a second time, and into its distinctive experiential folds. Katrina too, when stating “I tend to come on my own. In the afternoons”, had suggested that she returned to the Gallery looking for quiet respite on weekends. Fleur also described her memory of the Gallery in warm terms, using words such as ‘quiet’ and ‘private’, despite having attended the Gallery with her family on a busy day. These comments indicate that the immersive qualities of the Gallery can cast an indelible impression on its visitors, and offer a distinctive break from ‘everyday’ experiences. This allows, as described by Heidi, possibilities for reflection which one might not ordinarily have - or set aside – time for: “it’s a bit surreal… and I think maybe that’s what it is, it’s a contemplative space and I don’t think there’s anywhere else like that really. Everything else is so busy, and, I suppose you could go to the art gallery”. Impressions such as these show that as a place devoted to aesthetic interaction, the Gallery attracts visitors by creating an environment which is quiet and more serene than the comparative bustle of daily life.
In one sense, all of these responses reflect the range of intentions supporting visitors’ decisions to attend the Gallery. For some it was a pre-mediated touristic or cultural excursion to Federation Square, and an opportunity for social or educational encounter. For others, visits were incidental, unstructured, or a consequence of an empty – or even rainy – afternoon. The diversity of reasons for attending ACMI also shows how the contemporary relationship between the museum and its visitors has evolved substantially beyond nineteenth century paternalism. The museum must now accommodate a range of visitor expectations in the development of its practices, including consideration of how viewing media art may be an attractive option for whiling away a lazy afternoon, while also competing with a range of cultural institutions to fulfil its requirements as a touristic, social and educational destination. This raises questions as to how varying degrees of anticipation, commitment and familiarity might impact upon a visitor’s experience of the Gallery, and further, how its institutional practices can respond to these varying levels of expectation. Visitors’ accounts of their first few moments in the Gallery, upon having crossed its threshold, reveal how the Gallery negotiates these requirements, as its strategies become almost immediately apparent upon entering the spatial environment.

Making entrances
When visitors detailed the process of entering the Gallery, they described how the most vivid aspect of this experience had been the sensation of entering a darkened space. They portrayed these memories within expressions of sensory and sentient response, explaining how, upon reaching the bottom of the staircase, the blackened Gallery loomed ahead as a clear visceral departure from the bustle of the city, and the clean brightness of ACMI’s foyer. Fleur described the passage of entry into the Gallery as a sense of going “deep underground”, where the affective power of darkness overwhelmed other details of the space: “I can’t picture it in my mind – sort of where the Gallery finishes… And it’s perfect, it’s dark, and it’s… quiet-ish”. Many visitors, with the exception of a nine year-old accompanying Trevor, who “got a bit scared downstairs in a couple of areas”, found that an entrance softened by shadows added a trace of suspense to their journey into the Gallery. While visitors had earlier suggested that this atmospheric quality created conditions of immersion and quietness, recollections of entry reveal that it also generates a sense of ambiguity.

For example, Heidi described how, “because it’s dark and you can’t actually see the people walking about,” meaning that the passage of descent became a feature in itself: “it’s kind of cool, probably because it’s a little bit more mysterious. I think it’s great the way that it’s dark and you just go down – and it is down the stairs”. Fleur similarly remarked that “you’re not
quite sure what you’re going to meet when you go around. And there’s a certain anticipation”. Steven found that the ambiguity surrounding the conventions of procedure through Gallery was “quite interesting, that experience of being a little bit unsure of where you’re going or not being able to see”. He attributed feelings of disorientation to the way the deep shadows of the Gallery routinely obscured measurement of time: “it’s that darkness that makes it a place where it’s like a time sync, like, you could spend hours in there… you sort of lose track of time, it’s hard to know. So I think the darkness kind of contributes to that”. These comments illustrate how a darkening of the art museum reflects a significant breaking with the tradition of museums past, as the usual conventions for procedure have become obscured by the passage into time-stretched darkness.

Confronted with a dark and unfamiliar museum setting, visitors began to orientate themselves by drawing comparisons between the Screen Gallery and similar places of experiential encounter. These comments revealed how spatial impressions were strongly influencing visitors’ perception of the Screen Gallery. For example, on the day she first visited ACMI, Heidi had also been to the NGV to see the Dutch Masters exhibition. With these impressions still fresh in her mind, she described how the Screen Gallery was remarkably unlike any other art setting she had previously attended:

> With moving images and everything is altered and set up a little bit and changed, so it makes you think a lot more than just going to a Gallery, and paintings… and still images… I think that’s what that space is – compared to an art Gallery, it’s a space that takes you somewhere else…actually it is really unique, I’ve never been anywhere like that before.

Like Heidi, Paul noted how the Gallery appeared to deviate from traditional art settings, although he also drew spatial comparisons between the Screen Gallery and a cinema theatre:

> If you’re in a very well-lit gallery… with white walls and lots of lighting, I dunno, you’re a bit more conscious of the people around you when you’re looking at the art as well… Yeah, if it’s brightly lit… But if you go in that place, you just go and sit and you watch. It’s like, people sort of use it like a bit of a cinema, I guess. It’s quite a sort of private thing.

Alternatively, where Paul located similarities within the sharing of intimate moments - such as standing shoulder-to-shoulder with strangers in the dark - others such as Sean associated the Gallery with experiences of moving in dark, vast places. He suggested that that while it “wasn’t as loud as a nightclub”, when “walking around… you’re conscious of the fact that there’s quite a volume in there, you know, there’s the height of the ceiling, it’s a big space. So I guess it’s a bit like walking around an old warehouse or a shed at night, or something like a wool-shed or something like that”. Heidi offered a broad overview of all of these impressions when stating emphatically that “it is so different, it’s why I came back again… I don’t think it
is like anything else”. These comments suggest that the Gallery, while reminiscent of comparable experiential spaces such as cinemas, nightclubs and sheds, is also distinctly dissimilar from them. Furthermore, these multiple and varying responses to the Gallery demonstrate how ACMI’s institutional hybridity also influences visitors’ spatial impressions. Visitors have therefore drawn associations between the Gallery and a diverse range of places. These included public and private spaces, places for walking and places for being seated, locations which were loud and others which were quiet, and even, as Heidi proposed, places existing simply within imagination, “just dream states… nowhere else – real, I suppose.”

Navigating pedagogy

The ambiguous conditions of the Screen Gallery also challenged the ways visitors were accustomed to moving through art spaces. For example, Sean described how the Gallery’s darkness and minimal use of signage generated multiple possibilities for passage: “you kind of need to wander through and guide yourself. It’s fairly dark as well and there aren’t any signs saying ‘Come this way’, and it was only by sort of accident we found some of the spaces down the very back. Because, it’s very dark… We could very well have missed that”. Katrina similarly explained how she thought to develop a participatory journey through movement, describing how “when you first walk in, it just feels like empty space, and not exactly sure what’s going on and what to look at… and you think nothing is going on, so you have to kind of walk around and get a feel for it.” For Steven participatory movement became a means of navigating the Screen Gallery and its art. He remarked that there’s a kind of basic ‘what’s next?’, or… in that recent exhibition, when you got down you could see maybe about four works immediately, or, just sort of have a sense of them. There’s a kind of choice about ‘this is the one I’ll pay attention to first’, or ‘look, there’s this other one over there – that looks interesting, I might go and come back to this’. So, there’s a kind of charting of the trip through the exhibition.

These comments show how visitors attempt to construct their own aesthetic narrative through spatial interaction, which suggests that the Gallery’s obfuscation of navigational paths has compelled new forms active participation from its visitors. While museums have historically expressed their pedagogy by choreographing the movement of its visitors, these visitor experiences indicate a shift within this trajectory.

A history of passage through the museum

Following the nineteenth century, the museum asserted its hegemonic pedagogy by tightly governing visitors’ parameters of spatial interaction. Museum practitioners enforced boundaries by prescribing visitors’ routes architecturally, by presenting museum objects within
firm knowledge categories, and by separating visitors from objects with glass cabinets. The advent of high modernism in the mid-twentieth century therefore enforced positivist doctrines through a firm direction of visitor movement, exemplified by Le Corbusier’s Musée à Croissance Illimitée (1939) and Frank Lloyd Wright’s Guggenheim Museum in New York (1959) (Davey 2000:36) [Figure 4.2]. In more recent stages of modernity architecture has attempted to reconcile the singular authority imposed by a building’s design. Robert Venturi (1966), a key theorist of post-modern architecture, argued that the museum’s pedagogical failure to achieve social and political reforms was due to the purist and universalist values expressed within modern architecture. He proposed that post-modern architecture could challenge aesthetic modernism with a playful hybridity which emphasises symbolism and sculptural forms in architecture, and expresses a more diverse set of pluralist ideologies. Examples might include Hans Hollein’s Abteiberg Museum (1972-1982), or the National Museum of Australia in Canberra (2001) [Figure 4.3]. More recent attempts to design museum spaces reflect the aspirations of the ‘new museum’, as described in the second chapter. These museums similarly address a pluralist agenda, but offer increasingly individualised forms of participation by multiplying the possible forms of visitor interaction with highly interactive interfaces and new digital technologies.

[Figure 4.2] Frank Lloyd Wright’s Guggenheim Museum (1959), New York

[Figure 4.3] National Museum of Australia (2001), Canberra

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62 Complexity and Contradiction (1966) and Learning from Las Vegas (1977) are Venturi’s canonical texts which explore these issues. It is also worth noting that while Venturi attempted to reconceptualise the purpose of architectural design beyond Modernist values, he considers architectural design only to the extent that it may incorporate the symbolic value of popular taste, rather than conceiving of a building as an occupied space (Mitchell 1993:17).
The Screen Gallery embodies the contradictory and ambiguous characteristic of the ‘new museum’, as it is highly affective and dedicated entirely to technology-based art. Visitors have shown how darkness especially enhances this state of ambiguity, as it obscures the rules for procedure. However as a result, darkness prompted more active form of engagement as compared to interaction within museums of the past, as self-guided and exploratory interaction characterises visitors’ journey through the Screen Gallery. I propose that the Screen Gallery’s darkness represents a shift in the genealogy of museum route, as the Gallery expresses its pedagogy by creating ambiguous rules for procedure. On one hand, it is a pedagogy in which sensory perception and spatial intervention stand as principles of encounter, while on the other, ambiguity and mystery continue to shroud the rules of procedure which have traditionally been defined by the museum.

**Challenges to new pedagogy**

This pedagogical agenda reinforces the conditions of individualisation outlined in the first chapter, where I showed that contemporary forms of knowledge circulate within processes of reflexive self-determination, and gather meaning within domains of subjective experience. The forms of spatial interaction which visitors engage with in the Screen Gallery therefore share a correlation with experiences outside of the museum. However, a pedagogy which invites mystery and ambiguity can also complicate visitors’ expressions of agency in the Gallery. Fleur, for example, notes how crossing the threshold into a space without clear conventions for procedure may prove a challenge for some visitors: “you have to commit yourself to go into a space like that, and I think the first time, when you’re not sure what’s down there… I think people going there for the first time would probably… find it difficult.”

This observation suggests that the invitation to freely navigate the Gallery may impede some visitors’ ability to actively participate in the space. Trevor found this to be the case, objecting that “the part that doesn’t work, is that it doesn’t work as a space that’s easy to get around.”

These comments suggest that an ‘unintended consequence’ of relaxing museum conventions to encourage greater visitor autonomy, is the contrary effect of making navigation more difficult. Visitors who struggle to negotiate these conditions may find themselves subject to what Daniel Palmer terms the ‘paradox of user control’ (2003), where contemporary forms of choice are at times illusory, as they can inhibit an individual’s freedom to interact through ‘soft’ forms of domination. The ambiguity created by the Gallery’s darkness therefore brings

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63 As was discussed in Chapter Two, ‘unintended consequences’ are the product of conditions of reflexive modernisation, where modern processes of categorisation and rationalisation create previously unforeseen outcomes.

64 Palmer argues that “the paradox of user control, in fact, becomes that of the illusion of choice within which the user is offered up for a form of soft domination. Thus not only discourses of consumer empowerment embedded in a neo-liberal political agenda – embodied by its pillars of individualism,
two disparate - if not contradictory - tendencies together, as concluded by Fleur: “The darkness is – it’s both an advantage and a disadvantage. I think that after a while it becomes – well… you can’t sort of see each other as well, but there’s also a bit of freedom in that as well. In that it sort of goes both ways…” As Peter Davey argues, these contradictory tendencies within contemporary architecture make “a strong case for a return to conventionality, subverted and made complex by manipulation of route and space” (2003:37).

A museum pedagogy articulated through darkness is therefore fraught with tension. On one hand, it mediates new forms of agency by inviting highly self-determined modes of behaviour. Yet on the other, the easing of tradition and unravelling of rules for participation generates a new range of pedagogical issues. The extent to which visitor agency finds expression through this ‘freedom’ of passage remains questionable, as it is a condition imposed upon visitors - just as tightly regulated forms of movement were imposed upon visitors within earlier typologies of museum. As a consequence, pedagogy premised upon darkness and ambiguity may undermine the fulfilment of the Gallery’s remit, as visitors struggle with the demands of a new, experiential form of museum.

However, the Screen Gallery has developed a number of strategies which attempt to ameliorate the disorienting experiences of navigation, and create new possibilities for meaningful interaction. Some of these conventions reflect earlier pedagogical traditions, such as the mounting of didactic panels alongside works and at the entrance of the exhibition. Other strategies reflect a more innovative use of existing museum resources, seen, for example in the placement of staff members to guide visitors through the Gallery. The architectural and interior design of the Screen Gallery is perhaps the newest and most influential convention, as it compels a significant transformation of relationship between museum and visitor. My discussion therefore follows visitors as they journey more deeply into the Gallery’s spaces, and continue to negotiate paths of navigation through these conditions of ambiguity and contradiction.

2: NAVIGATING ART IN THE DARK

Mediating text-based information

One of the more traditional conventions retained by the Screen Gallery has been the placement of didactic panels alongside each artwork. These inform visitors as to the name of the artist, freedom and self-expression – the ‘performative subject’ produced by most existing forms of participatory real time media is arguably the ideal flexible subject position enabled by contemporary capitalism” (2003:167).
title of work, and the year and means of its production. Larger text-based panels which introduce the exhibition themes were also placed at the entrances of both *World Without End* and *White Noise*, while ACMI staff at the top and bottom of the Screen Gallery staircase supplement this information with exhibition pamphlets. However, over the many hours spent observing visitors in the Gallery, it appeared that the public seldom stopped to read text-based information, perhaps pausing only to skim a larger panel at the entrance of the exhibition, or casting a rudimentary glance over a smaller panel when faced with a work concealed within a room.

I asked visitors how they utilised text-based information, so as to ascertain the pedagogical success of the Gallery’s didactic panels. Heidi explained that she would read text-based information when an artwork had engaged her interest, but appeared conceptually obtuse, such as Crooks’ *Train No. 1* in which she “read the blurb beforehand, just because it was a bit – it was less self-explanatory”. Similarly, she would seek further information if a work was difficult to comprehend materially because it was obscured from view, as was the case with Langan’s *Too Dark for Night*: “And then the one about Africa, I read the blurb beforehand as you go into the room.” However, Heidi further iterated that despite the minimal attention she paid to these panels, an important aspect of their presentation had been that “they didn’t actually give too much away as to what they were trying to do - still leaves a bit of it up to you to decipher, to get from it what you want”. Some visitors even expressed resentment towards the tight integration of text-based information with exhibition design:

Matthew: I find going to the NGV - a lot of the stuff I see the re— I actually have to read.
Natalia: Okay. Does that bother you?
Matthew: Yeah, yeah, it bothers me. I have to read to actually get anything out of a lot of the stuff. Like that Edward Munch exhibition. I thought it was, I don’t know – pathetic. But it was enjoyable just reading about his life. I did go and see the Caravaggio exhibition… There were a couple there that I loved that I didn’t have to read about. But I find, yeah, with the NGV, as opposed to ACMI… I do find that you are kind of – because it’s that constant setting of having to read about these things, or having that information just available to you, it’s almost like a crux for the art. Whereas this, you either hate it or you love it.

Matthew’s comparison suggests that when textual information exceeds supplementary use and is required to decipher works or the exhibition theme, it illuminates the heightened literacy, or, as Bourdieu would suggest, the ‘symbolic capital’ (1984) required to engage with the Gallery. Fleur and Steven, the most art-literate within the group of interviewees, were the only visitors
to have noted the broader themes of the exhibition. This suggests that a pre-existing literacy - rather than textual prompts – compel visitors to engage with the Gallery at a more complex intellectual level. For the most part, however, visitors cultivated a self-determined journey through the Gallery by disregarding formal sources of information, and exercising their own means of interpretation.

A consequence of eschewing these textual sources of information has been a narrowing of critical engagement with the exhibition’s themes, as Heidi demonstrates: “I didn’t see any thematic linkage, I suppose because I didn’t read any of the things on the walls or anything like that, so I wasn’t really informed about that”. Nonetheless, this was of little concern as the experiential pleasure of viewing the work took precedence over intellectual engagement: “I was watching the African one just then, I don’t think I really understood what she was doing, but, it doesn’t matter… I suppose the space, more than anything else, is nice”. Didactic panels therefore face a limited appreciation in light of opportunities for the more active, self-directed means of learning which are mediated by the rich experiential qualities of the Gallery. Colleen specifically noted how textual information could impede the Gallery’s immersive continuity, as it demanded a type of concentration which could disrupt the spontaneity of aesthetic experience:

I actually really enjoyed the fact that there wasn’t a panel on the wall that told me ‘this or this’ about the work and everything, it kept it to the small, little screens. That really was kind of refreshing, because you want to go in there, you want to see something. You don’t necessarily want to go in and read something. If you wanted to read something you could go and pick up the leaflet or go purchase the book, but moving image, yeah, I think it kind of takes something away. Because people automatically go in that normal safe-mode, and have a look at the panel first, and then would go in.

These comments show how visitors without specialised knowledge of moving image art preferred to surrender themselves to sensory experiences, and allow aesthetic encounters to govern their interaction within the Gallery. As a result, by exercising the forms of self-determined participation which the Gallery has invited, visitors are contributing to a further erosion of the remaining traditional museum conventions.

**Staff, trust and respect**

The Screen Gallery also attempts to disseminate information to visitors in the Gallery by placing visitor guides throughout the ACMI building. They are situated on the ground level foyer to greet patrons and direct them into the Gallery, at the bottom of the entrance staircase, and are dispersed throughout the Gallery to guide visitors’ movement through the space and offer assistance with interactive works. While this strategy appears an attempt to create a
culture of participation through a subtle redrawing of pedagogical relations, when observing
the manner of interaction between employees and visitors, it seemed that the public rarely
approached staff with questions. Instead, the guides often had to play an interventionary role
to circumvent potentially disorienting experiences, as Sean illustrates:

It is quite an interesting aspect of ACMI, that interaction between the staff and the patrons, that
seems to go beyond – that seems quite different from the art gallery or museum… I mean
they’re not really guides, but I suppose they are – they’re not conducting tours…it’s a little
disorienting – or it can be. I think they can be really useful, in that they provide a bit of
direction… if you’re looking lost… I don’t think they’d be doing what they’re doing if the
need for it wasn’t there, yeah? I think it would be very difficult for them to do that job, to talk
to people, to interact with the patrons in the way they do, if the patrons didn’t need to do that.

When staff did intervene visitors were often highly amenable towards words of advice and
conversational exchange, even expressing gratitude at having their experiences enriched by a
brief dialogue. These casual encounters mediate a new pedagogical relationship with visitors,
where, rather than drawing from more traditional sources of information such as text, their
visits became imbued with a meaning derived from conversation and informal encounter.

This progressive possibility within architectural planning has been termed ‘contextual design’,
described by John Chris Jones as an attempt to incorporate variable aims which explicitly
address user perception and orchestrate “a change from the specifying of geometry, physical
form, to the making of a context, a situation” (in Mitchell 1993:87). Therefore, by creating
possibilities for interpersonal exchange, the Gallery has designed a new social context by
making its staff an institutional face to a less formal mode of pedagogy. Strategies such as
these not only change the way information is mediated in the Gallery, but, as Sean describes,
have also begun to define visitors’ relationships with the institution as a matter of respect:

Oh, I think they treat their visitor with a lot of respect, and there’s a lot of information, there’s
touch screens, lots of things to interact with. Plenty of signage, the staff are very helpful and
respectful. I think they have the right approach, and I think that’s sort of the whole idea – it is
to make art accessible to the public, it’s the impression you get.

Sean’s comment therefore shows how new pedagogical strategies which allow visitors to
physically interact with art can render the museum an accessible space for aesthetic
engagement. A further and related example of the Gallery’s use of contextual design appears
within visitors’ observations that the Gallery lacked security measures, such as laser sensors
and ropes. Sean interpreted this change as an expression of institutional trust,
a lovely approach, rather than the more traditional thing which might be: keep people behind
barriers, don’t let them touch anything, herd them along painted lines on the floor. You know,
hang out and don’t touch anything, and there are security guards and all that sort of stuff.

Which is the impression you get of some galleries.

Paul was similarly enthusiastic about the permission visitors were granted to interact freely in the Gallery, especially surprised by the liberty with which he could explore Lynette Wallworth’s Hold: Vessel 1: “I really liked that one...just the interactivity of it. And the fact that the Gallery trusted people with these fragile bowls.... I found it pretty amazing that there’s these glass things sitting there and that you’re welcome to touch them. It’s not something that you get in an art space – that you’re actually allowed to interact with the work. So it was really fun”. Both Paul and Sean show how trust-based relations compel new forms of interactivity within the museum’s ‘relational architecture’, where permission to move freely and explore new ways of seeing, moving, and making meaning gives visitors an impression that interaction with art need only be limited by one’s inclination, or imagination. Both ‘trust’ and ‘respect’ can therefore be understood as co-constitutive dynamics which arise from the Gallery’s contextual design. Drawn together, they manifest as a perception that the museum is attempting to reduce the hierarchy between itself and the public, as Sean describes:

You can imagine – yeah, it’s whether you assume people – assume the worst of people or the best of people, I suppose. Often – we find this in architecture, too – if you treat people with respect, they’ll respect the building or the design. I used to work in a university, and there was a certain mentality with maintenance to make everything hard and out of concrete, so we can hose it down and no matter what the vandals do, they can do their worst and they won’t break it. And the other school of thought was, if we make it a bit more like home, people might respect it. Then they might not want to carve their initials into the desks or the walls, because they wouldn’t do it at home. So it depends how you treat people, I suppose. The message you portray.

By providing gentle and unobtrusive pedagogical support through measures such as contextual design, the ambiguity created by darkness and difficulties associated with self-navigation become less inhibitive. Rather than simply diversifying the means of visitor participation through a multiplication of route, the Screen Gallery buffers the uncertainty of procedure with the subtle, mediatory presence of staff. This recasts the role of staff as ‘guards’ of art to

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65 Relational Architecture’ is the title of an ongoing project by artist Raffaele Lozano-Hemmer, in which he reclaims public space as a site for discourse by seaming networked technologies with architectural interfaces to create highly visible sites of convergence between media, spectacle and mass public assembly. Timothy Druckery describes how architectural space designed by Lozano-Hemmer is an evocation of the kind of social space in which “active participation is not a by-product, but the driving force in the creation of a dynamic agora in which every position is established in an open system that ruptures hierarchies and dismantles the notion that the public is an undifferentiated mass, the media not a harbinger of a utopian global village, interactivity not the opiate of the shoppers” (2004:3).
'guides' for interaction with art. To some extent this averts the ‘crisis’ of route which Davey had attributed to post-modern architecture, as navigation in the Screen Gallery is jointly constituted by the institution and visitor, and stabilised through pedagogical relations based upon ‘trust’ and ‘respect’. These dynamics alleviate the formal parameters of pedagogy, and bind a new institutional partnership through informal and communicative exchange. This deformed pedagogy is further reinforced through contemporary architectural conventions which offer visitors a navigational route through the darkness of the Gallery.

Spatial design
While the didactic panels and ACMI’s staff assisted visitor navigation with textual and advice-based information, visitors were drawn most powerfully to the Screen Gallery’s affective conventions. These include the shadings of light and sound which mediate a form of dérive (Debord 1958) as visitors roam the Gallery. Sean commented on these features extensively, perhaps a testament to his interests as an architect. He noted how small beacons of light at foot level became prominent features of the Gallery, as they illuminated the entrances to rooms and corridors: “That’s your overwhelming impression, because it’s dark, and there’s just these feature spotlights…and they’re an interesting device, because they sort of lead your eye through the space as well, and say ‘oh that’s where the next event is, there’s a spotlight over there’”. The luminescence of artworks served a similar purpose, for within “the darkness, the boundaries are less visible, and I think you’re drawn to the light, you know, you’re drawn to those screens”. Sound was also directed to a comparable effect: “I think it’s a very deadened space, because I was aware of the fact that things were quiet until you approached the right spot and obviously it’s where the sound was focussed”. Sound and light were therefore important spatial devices as they helped visitors to navigate their journey and map a participatory route in and among the artworks. These features encourage a mode of participation shaped by states of perception, where visitor interaction is directed through affective and spatial suggestion.

However, much like text-based information ‘ruptured’ the immersive continuity of the art environment, the Gallery’s lighting was also subject to harsh judgement when it appeared to stifle the full affective resonance of the Screen Gallery. For example, asked why he preferred to stand against the back wall of Langheinrich’s Drift, rather than take a seat on the chairs

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66 Arguably, however, the guarding role has shifted from protection of artworks, to protection of the technology used to activate artworks.

67 The Situationist International used the term ‘dérive’ or ‘drift’ as a political act of subversion in which individuals could reclaim urban spaces by walking, or ‘drifting’ in ways which challenged conventional patterns or urban behaviour.
provided, Matthew protested that “the spotlight was on those frigging couches, who wants to sit there? That would’ve been horrible,” indicating that the bright lighting characteristic of the ‘white cube’ can become a disruptive glare in spaces of immersive darkness. Moreover, as Colleen illustrates in her description of the exhibition layout to White Noise, experiential continuity is important as it enhances visitors’ navigation of the Gallery:

I think that the way that they’ve got the rooms really works for me. I like the fact that they’ve got that alignment of the one corridor that people walk through, and the fact that each room has their own little, I guess, stand-up didactic panel and the little doorway lights. I like that repetition, it kind of makes it all come together. And I’m sure that some of those pieces, that if in a different place or in a different setting, if it was in another museum where they couldn’t construct a whole room around it, that it might not go together. But I think that the construction of the Gallery around it really ties it in really nicely.

These comments indicate a preference for the ‘soft design’ used by the Screen Gallery to temper the spatial severity of museums past through the creation of a dark and sensuous environment. Like Colleen, Paul described how this aspect of the Gallery had a pleasurable effect, where the “atmosphere of the space” created “a very nice place to be… Lots of low lighting”. Fleur similarly recalled how somatic impressions influenced her perception of the Gallery: “I guess you could say it’s a bit like a cave, I suppose. But it’s not something I think about so much when I’m there… the atmosphere is so different… it’s warm, I find it quite a relaxing place to be, I find it quite calm…Yeah, it has that feeling of private space, to it”. Soft design therefore uses light and sound to texture a visceral ‘feeling’ of space, and creates a spatial continuity within the Gallery. It is by this manner that interaction with art becomes, as Steven enthused, “an exhibition experience” where “it’s as much (for me) the experience of moving between works as attending to the work itself… That seems really prominent in the experience, that it’s not these kind of isolated, individual works, they’re in relation to each other”. Self-determined navigation loosely guided by soft and contextual design, while heightening the affective conditions of immersion, also enhance visitors’ abilities to self-navigate the Gallery by creating an ‘exhibition experience’.

Having surveyed the use of didactic panels, staff, and the effects of contextual and soft design, we can now see that visitors are clearly expressing a preference towards a form of spatial interaction in which pedagogical conventions heighten, rather than detract from, the immersive qualities of the museum environment. Visitors have shown how the feelings of ambiguity and

68 ‘Soft Design’, also termed design primario or primary design, is a term attributed to Trini Castelli who attempted to address the “…subjective and sensual qualities of space, as often buildings are designed according to its object, two-dimensional, drafted measures” (Glibb in Mitchell 1993:87-88).
suspense which absorbed them in the Gallery’s entrance gradually began to dissipate. In their place, a preference arose for conventions which maintain the Gallery’s immersive continuity, and spatial dynamics which redefine the terms of exchange between museum and visitor. These practices create an ambience which is particular to the Screen Gallery, and unlike the experiential ecologies of preceding forms of museum. The specific conventions which constitute an affective ‘ambience’ determine how the Gallery elicits new forms of agency through its participatory, spatially-expressed pedagogy.

3: ‘AMBIENT SPACE’

The concept of ‘ambience’ was first adopted as a musical term by sound artists such as John Cage and Brian Eno to describe compositions in which subtle changes of aural tone, colour and harmony create a spatial relationship between listener and composer. Eno’s 1978 manifesto, quoted here at length, details how Ambient Music defines a space of aesthetic participation much like the forms of encounter visitors have attributed to the Screen Gallery:

An ambience is defined as an atmosphere, or a surrounding influence: a tint. My intention is to produce original pieces ostensibly (but not exclusively) for particular times and situations with a view to building up a small but versatile catalogue of environmental music suited to a wide variety of moods and atmospheres.

Whereas the extant canned music companies proceed from the basis of regularizing environments by blanketing their acoustic and atmospheric idiosyncrasies, Ambient Music is intended to enhance these. Whereas conventional background music is produced by stripping away all sense of doubt and uncertainty (and thus all genuine interest) from the music, Ambient Music retains these qualities. And whereas their intention is to ‘brighten’ the environment by adding stimulus to it (thus supposedly alleviating the tedium of routine tasks and levelling out the natural ups and downs of the body rhythms) Ambient Music is intended to induce calm and a space to think.

Ambient Music must be able to accommodate many levels of listening attention without enforcing one in particular; it must be as ignorable as it is interesting (Eno 1996b).

This account shows how ambience manifests as an exploration of the intimate relationship between bodily, subjective experience, and the influence of the external environment one occupies. Eno’s definition points towards a number of issues which will be addressed in coming chapters, such as the way ambience shapes specific states of attention within aesthetic encounter. However, of primary interest here is the implication that the Screen Gallery, as a

70 Chapter Six examines states of play, while Chapter Seven explores the focused concentration which takes form in immersive stillness.
‘composer’ of immersive space, similarly creates an intimate environment for ‘active’ aesthetic experience.

Eno’s account illustrates how the Screen Gallery has become a distinctive pedagogical site in the way it mediates the early stirrings of visitor agency. He suggests that even in relative stillness, there exists a capacity for active forms of listening which create a ‘space to think’, and generate a ‘quiet interest’. In addition, and perhaps most importantly, these active forms of listening are augmented by the ‘atmospheric idiosyncrasies’ which are derived from conditions of doubt and uncertainty. As I have argued above, the Screen Gallery’s ambience – its darkness – create conditions of ambiguity and idiosyncrasy by obscuring the rules for visitor participation. Like ambient music, ambiguity in the Gallery compels active forms of participation, although rather than listening, visitor agency arises from self-determined behaviour in the Gallery.

The affective intensity that so compellingly defined the Gallery as ‘ambiguous’ in the opening passages of this chapter - the undulation of noise and silence, light and shade becoming momentarily absorbed by darkness, the enduring atmospheric transience - can therefore be understood as the specific conditions which make ambient space a fertile site for new exchanges of pedagogy and visitor agency in the museum. Arjun Mulder defines this kind of dynamism in architectural space as a form of systemic interactivity, the “default state of any living system”, in the way that any system can be considered interactive if it links into, and affects change upon another (Mulder 2004:332). This definition of interactivity can be extended to propose that the Gallery, when filled with the subtle tonal shifts of screen-based art, is a specifically complex and interactive environment. This systemic complexity defines the way ambience becomes a predicate for interactive exchanges between the individual and art space, as Eno illustrates: “So complexity, I’m saying, has to be present, but present in the whole system – music and listener – as a system. If it’s just in the music (whatever complexity would mean in a purely objective sense like this) it makes no difference to anyone” (1994:42).

The transformation of the Gallery into an ‘ambient space’ reflects a transition within museum practice and visitor experience. While museums have historically been spaces for interaction, they have not always been interactive spaces in the sense described by Mulder, where visitor participation and processes of exchange are heightened by conditions of ambience. Ambient space specifically relaxes traditional conventions by making the museum a more supple place for experiential encounter, as the affective measures of soft and contextual design invite practices of self-navigation and recast the relationship between public and institution. These exchanges are also expressed within the impressions of ‘trust’ and ‘respect’ which visitors
described above. It therefore seems that through ambient space, the museum has begun to slowly relinquish its hegemony by situating itself as a partner in a process of mutual exchange with the visitor. ‘Ambient space’ therefore also becomes a rubric for the interactive environment co-constituted by institution and visitor in the Screen Gallery.

In my investigation, I use ‘ambient space’ as a formal theoretical term, as it encompasses a number of concepts central to this phenomenology of museum visitation that haven’t yet been captured within existing museum or visitation studies. Firstly, ambient space describes the way ambiguity can generate a productive tension, but also mediate the resolution of this tension by creating an environment conducive towards a new interactive exchange between visitor and museum. It therefore refers to a pedagogical space in which traditional museum conventions have been ‘relaxed’ through affective devices. Ambient space also describes a site where visitors realise a new potential through processes of navigation and interaction, and express highly self-determined modalities of agency. In short, ambient space is a space of potential, or, as Massumi would describe, of ‘immanence’. As a space for potential, it offers conditions in which a politics of movement can be realised.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has shown how the paradigmatic shift to a highly affective museum space has compelled significant changes in the relationship between museum and visitor. Having crossed a threshold into a new aesthetic, analytical and historical space, it can now be understood that institution and public interact by way of a complex, interactive system which takes form within ‘ambient space’. This system has grown out of a number of conditions. The charting of a trip through darkness, seeking out of footlights and passing in and among screens shows how traditional museum conventions have not only shifted to encourage active participation, but also heighten these experiences by inviting visitors to self-navigate a continuously immersive environment. This deformalisation of institutional practices reflects an acquiescence of the politics which have traditionally characterised museums, and indicates that the museum’s pedagogy is no longer state-centred, enshrined solely within the art object or built upon ideological narratives. Rather, it is mediated through the subjective experiences and spatial interactions of visitors, and enables a translation of experience into agency through the supportive structure of ‘ambient space’. The emerging relationship between museum and visitor is therefore premised upon an interactivity which extends beyond the heightened participation characteristic of the ‘new’ museum. Visitor agency is now expressed within the substantive interactive exchanges between institution and individual which resonate within affective and atmospheric ambience.
In light of the genealogy presented in the second chapter, pedagogical distances have evidently begun to yield as visitors negotiate and self-navigate the Gallery’s dark, ambient space. As Colleen describes, active participation within a richly experiential ecology differentiates the Screen Gallery from other forms of art museum.

Natalia: …That’s interesting then to think of, if to say that one of the pieces was taken out and put into the NGV, it wouldn’t quite be the same thing at all.

Colleen: No, it wouldn’t be the same atmosphere, it wouldn’t be the same feeling. I guess it wouldn’t be very special, perhaps.

Natalia: What is that feeling?

Colleen: I guess it’s a feeling that when you go to see art, and you go to see a collection, you want to have a continual atmosphere, you don’t want to go and see something, then see something completely different and then another thing, because it’s chop-and-change. And you don’t really get a feeling behind it. And for me, going to any kind of museum, you want to get a feeling about it, just to feel like it’s a complete experience. I don’t know if I can explain that.

Natalia: It’s kind of about creating a whole space -

Colleen: Yeah

Natalia: - to participate in?

Colleen: Yeah, exactly. That would be something – something that feels right together. I think that especially when you’ve got something that’s non-traditional or not painting or sculpture, that when you do see it in a museum, it’s kind of like – like its own little spot. But when you see them all together in one spot you think ‘oh, that’s fantastic, this is really what new media can do’. It’s not just one person doing something, there’s heaps of people doing lots of good, fantastic art. And it’s nice to see it.

The potential here is for a fluid, harmonious exchange between visitor and institution, where the unfettering of conventional museological practices alleviates the weight of institutional history and pedagogical demand, and potentially becomes a foundation for a new politics. This new politics has begun to find definition within the acts of self-determined navigation and forms of mobility arising through experiential agency and interactive exchange. However, while the museum conventions detailed in this chapter lay user interactivity at their foundation, this form of participation cannot simply be engineered as part of a building façade, or facilitated by blueprints alone. The exchange between public and institution is also mediated by the Gallery’s art. Corporeal and cognitive relationships with the screen, such as the light on one’s skin, the momentary acceleration of heartbeat or the evocation of a distant memory, will also affect visitors’ behaviour and subjective expression. The following chapter therefore
examines visitors’ interaction with screen-based art, documenting the ways bodily and cognitive responses may fashion new modalities of agency, and influence an emerging politics within the museum.
I think that technology nowadays has just become an adjunct to your life. So, you don’t walk around with a paintbrush in your hand, but people walk around with technology. Everyone has a go at it. It’s just become a normal part of your life

(Trevor, visitor to the Screen Gallery).
Chapter Five
Moving Image Art

Introduction
Before having descended the stairs into ACMI’s dark, ambient Screen Gallery, a number of interviewees had spent time above ground in the comparatively bright exhibition space at the Ian Potter Centre at Federation Square, where the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) was exhibiting the Dutch Masters. In the course of their interviews, visitors readily drew comparisons between the experiences of interacting with art in the Screen Gallery and NGV:

Well, I think for some types of art you don’t want to interact with it, like if you go to the Dutch Masters, you don’t want to interact with it, you just want to look at it and enjoy it. But other things – you want to play with it.

Trevor’s comment alludes to the way that different genres of art can influence the course and evolution of visitor behaviour in the museum. As described in the second chapter, exhibition of art became institutionalised in the nineteenth century, when the public display of private collections and cultural artifacts entrenched a governmental remit of civic reform within the museum. In recent decades museum practices have become increasingly pluralistic, contextualising their objects within collection groupings, and varying the possible paths of visitor engagement by offering multiple avenues for interpretation. In the previous chapter I examined this task of navigation, arguing that the ambiguity created by the Gallery’s darkness reflected a significant pedagogical shift within the traditions of museum practice. Visitors’ negotiation of ‘ambient space’ was shown to elicit new forms of agency through self-determined, but also pedagogically interactive forms of participation in the Gallery. However, Trevor’s observation underscores a further paradigmatic shift within this genealogy of the museum. He appears to suggest that the Screen Gallery’s collection elicits a set of practices which invite forms of interaction that differ from more traditional art settings. In this chapter I therefore investigate how moving image art in the Screen Gallery transforms visitor experiences within the museum.

Where in the previous chapter I detailed the spatial conventions which are transforming the pedagogical relationship between the museum and its visitors, in this chapter I examine the specific dimensions of screen-based art which are defining new modalities of visitor agency and institutional pedagogy. This materialist ethnography distinguishes between three key characteristics of the Gallery’s art. I firstly examine how art is constituted as a digital object, and extend my phenomenological analysis to argue that the digital image elicits an ‘affective’
form of agency. The art object is then examined as a screen-based medium. I detail how the spatial context of the screen provokes a ‘way of seeing’ shaped by familiar modes of media literacy and readership. This points towards a new modality of agency which arises within acts of reflexive perception. Finally, I examine the way the Gallery’s art mediates technology-based knowledge, as the recontextualisation of familiar technologies in an art setting aroused self-determined enquiries into the use and construction of art as a form of technology. Visitors’ processes of enquiry reflect the emergence of a subjective ‘cognitive agency’ which generates new possibilities for the circulation of knowledge within, and beyond, the museum.

1: DIGITAL ART AND AFFECT

In the shift from simple to reflexive modernity the digitalisation of technology has made information a prevalent feature in almost all spaces, public and private, such that our employment and utilisation of it has paved the way for an entire system of communication, new economies, and an “era of a global information culture” (Lash 2002:26). Our experience of the world becomes, as Anna Everett has suggested, ‘digitextual’ (2003), where digital technologies profoundly influence the ways in which we understand and interact with the world.71 When an art object is created digitally with binary code, it also becomes reconstituted as a reproducible, malleable and networkable artefact. The digital image is also a participant within these systems of communication, experience and cultural practice. This means that its representational meaning can circulate within a wider system of technologies constructed by way of a digital architecture (Flew 2002). As Trevor illustrates, these characteristics allow interaction with art to fall within a familiar terrain of experience, as they normalise forms of interaction which are both ubiquitous and individualistic:

I think that technology nowadays has just become an adjunct to your life. So, you don’t walk around with a paintbrush in your hand, but people walk around with technology. Everyone has a go at it. It’s just become a normal part of your life.

However, when defining an artwork as a digital object, a question emerges as to how a visitor’s interaction with a replicable object can be meaningful, given that museums have historically attributed value to their objects according to the distinctive forms of knowledge and experience they mediate. In the Screen Gallery, a duplication of one’s and zero’s could rapidly and infinitely reproduce its moving image art, relocate it in other contexts, or even allow visitors to construct and transform it themselves. This implies, as Trevor has further observed, that the contemporary museum is a place of non-originales, housing only image copies: “most of the stuff from ACMI could be on the web. But you could easily just

71 Everett reinterprets Kristeva’s notion of intertextuality to uses this term as a heuristic for recognising the impact of digital technology on nearly all aspects of our daily lives.
videostream the whole thing, all the different galleries could all be on the web”. In short, a shift to the exhibition of digital art has political implications, as it destabilises the way visitors have historically experienced agency by interacting with art.

The tension between the image, experience and the technological effects of modernisation lies at the heart of Walter Benjamin’s seminal essay, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1977). Writing in the 1930’s, Benjamin examines how industrial progress has affected the production, reception and meaning of the analogue image by tracing its transformation across various stages of technological change. He suggests that one of the most dramatic consequences of mechanical reproduction is the threat to an image’s ‘aura’, “its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be” (1977:220). The capacity to reproduce an image marks a capacity to diminish an image’s aura through the recontextualisation of mechanically-reproduced copies. When considered a symptom of the process of modernisation, this signals a broader de-auratisation of uniqueness and authenticity in culture as a whole. These ideas develop an even deeper resonance within an era of digital reproduction, as there is often no clearly-definable ‘original’ image. This suggests that within Benjamin’s terms, the very last vestiges of aura would be swept away by the tide of a global information culture.

However, Benjamin also proposes that the unique value of an object of art relates to the spatio-temporal context in which it appears, and further, that the political implications of reproduction emerge according to how this context affects its reception. A digital work can therefore exceed its material definition if conceptualised from the vantage of the distinctive forms of experience it can elicit. When a digital image is placed within a space which privileges its reception, it may, even as a copy, become imbued with a new value and meaning, as Colleen illustrates in her recollection of Ulf Langheimrich’s *Drift*: “I really liked it; I thought it was really quite relaxing… there wasn’t any other emotion or feeling behind it other than feeling relieved, and comfortable, and relaxed. It was almost meditative”.

Colleen’s recollection of a meditative encounter in the Screen Gallery shows how one’s interaction with digital art is distinctive in the way it registers as an affective experience, as its placement within a softened ambient space enhances the experiential relations of encounter.

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72 For example, Benjamin argues that while the film-making process destroys the illusory unity of the art object, the context of film reception within a public theatre reclaims an authenticity of experience through the collective political behaviour of the film audience (1977).

73 An extended version of Colleen’s comment about *Drift* will be discussed in the seventh chapter, where her account of feeling relaxed and meditative will be examined with reference to the notion of stillness.
between body and art. Arjun Mulder defines this type of affective, interactive experience with
an art work as a form of ‘virtual behaviour’, where one’s perception of art need not evoke a
cogniscent or rational response, but instead inspire an expansive sense of self,
the feeling that interactive art evokes and makes accessible to reflection is the feeling that you
do not end where your skin ends, that you are more than just a body with senses and a brain.
That life means continual expansion outside yourself. That your body is always open and you
are living outward-bound. That the outside world for a large part is what you yourself are and
that in this outside world you are overlapping with other people, other systems – both living

Virtual behaviour therefore describes the way affective responses evoked by digital art
uniquely draw continuities between one’s body and space, where, for example, RGB data may
register haptically on one’s skin as a projected warmth or coolness. A digital artwork’s
authentic value has therefore shifted to the realm of subjective experience as an embodied
‘event’. The significance of interaction with art now resides in the domain of distinctively
subjective encounter, rather than diminishing relative to the speed of reproduction. While any
encounter with art could be considered an experiential ‘event’, what makes an encounter with
the digital object idiosyncratic are the affective conditions of its reception. These are the
fertile grounds in which a new form of visitor agency is enacted - registering at this bodily
level of affective response.

**Defining affective agency**

Mike Hansen explores the relationship between agency and affect by investigating how the
body interacts with the digital image. He draws from Bergson’s theory of perception, where
the body is described as a ‘centre of indetermination’ as it expresses a creative capacity to
filter images from the universal world of images, and selects that which it regards as relevant
to its own interests. Extending Bergson’s argument to develop a theory of interaction with
the digital image, he argues that the image “can no longer be restricted to the level of surface
appearance, but must be extended to encompass the entire process by which information is
made perceivable through embodied experience” (2004:10). Hansen therefore proposes that
the experiential encounter with a digital object is unique as opposed to other forms of
experiential art, as agency registers at the level of affective response. This agency arises when

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74 Hansen develops this critique in response to Deleuze’s discussion of cinema, where he proposed that
framing in cinema was analogous to Bergson’s ‘image-movement’ account of the world of image.
Hansen suggests that Deleuze has actually subsumed affection as a component of perception, meaning
that the body becomes defined as an assemblage of images. In his revisitation of Bergson, Hansen
separates affection from perception, thus re-emphasising embodiment by highlighting the two as
separate modalities, and effectively re-ascribing agency to the body (2004).
the body behaves as an active ‘framer’ of digital information when engaging in these processes of perception:

If the digital image foregrounds the processual framing of data by the body, what it ultimately yields is less a framed object than an embodied, subjective experience that can only be felt. When the body acts to enframe digital information – or, as I put it, to forge the digital image – what it frames is in effect itself: its own affectively experienced sensation of coming into contact with the digital. In this way, the act of enframing information can be said to ‘give body’ to digital data – to transform something that is unframed, disembodied, and formless into concrete embodied information intrinsically imbued with (human) meaning (2004:13).

Colleen’s sense of being “relieved” and “comfortable” and “relaxed” can therefore be interpreted as evidence of this process of enframing, a cohesive drawing of her body’s affective response to the digital image. Embodied experiences - such as Colleen’s - therefore signal an active, bodily processing of data, an ‘affective agency’.

Hansen’s discussion can be extended within the context of the Screen Gallery, as digital information circulates simultaneously across multiple screens. In addition, ambient space is strongly affective, meaning that agency has many opportunities to register at an experiential level. Visitors participate in a process of enframing when interacting with both screens and screen spaces, whether stepping from the lit space of a work and into the enveloping darkness of the Gallery passageway, or even when absorbed into the space between screens. The ambience of the Gallery therefore acts as a matrix for a sophisticated system of autonomous visitor activity as affective agency operates at the level of the sub-intimate and densely private.

Detailing the site-specific context of screen reception can illuminate the relations which influence visitor behaviour and perception, and therefore show how screen-based viewership can manifest as a form of agency. For example, Anna McCarthy’s (2001) study examined the presence of television in public spaces to explore how public behaviour could reorganise the politics of television.75 Demonstrating that domestic technologies in public spaces provoke an interlaying of institutional power, consumer practices and spectatorship politics, McCarthy argues that a politics of viewership is contingent upon the context in which the medium is perceived. The questions of agency in the Screen Gallery can be similarly addressed by detailing the relations which emerge from the screen’s appearance within the ambient and navigable context of the Screen Gallery.

75 McCarthy’s study specifically investigated the television within taverns, department stores, and as networked programming.
2: SCREEN-BASED ART AND REFLEXIVE PERCEPTION

Every time I walk past that massive screen, it’s always got pictures of whoever’s walking so everyone looks for themselves and waves, you know. That’s actually a twentieth century fantasy – being on TV, seeing yourself on the big-screen. Everyone loves it … Even when you walk past a video store and there’s one of those cameras pointing out – and people just stand there, gawking at themselves and waving (Paul).

[Figure 5.1] Fedcam in Federation Square

The screen is a space of exchange, its images mediating forms of viewership and interaction as a site for spatial performativity, as illustrated by Paul in his description of Federation Square’s public screen, ‘Fedcam’ [Figure 5.1].

However, when exiting the space of the public screen at Federation Square and descending into the Screen Gallery, the screen comes to occupy a liminal space of participation. Just as the descent into the Gallery marked a crossing of thresholds in the previous chapter, upon entering the viewing space of moving image art the visitor is again confronted by a borderland, where the recontextualisation of the screen into a space for art forces new modalities of interaction. When a digital screen is used for an artwork, the visitor is compelled to negotiate and even hybridise various forms of perception, behaviour and meaning production, as Paul further describes:

Prime-time television for me is just a sequence of disconnected experiences… you know, which is interesting, but I mean suppose I look at it differently because I see it as fine art and you read that in a different way than you would if you flick when there’s ads, or you flick when you get bored, or whatever. But with art, you’ve gotta kind of extend your attention span and give everything a shot and look at it with a critical eye…Yeah you put on your art glasses.

Paul’s comparison between interaction with art and watching television shows how image-based technologies become an interface for different forms of perception, where, even in the

76 Fedcam is a fast-updating webcam which streams a live-feed to Federation Square’s public screen. It is situated so that visitors can watch themselves standing before the public screen.
new context of a museum, the screen continues to resonate with traces of encounter from other environments. Peter Weibel attributes these blurred modes of viewership to the way image-based technologies play a central representational function in framing our relationship with the world, as they can mediate a number of relations:

Many realms of reality are not available to our natural senses. The natural human eye cannot see them, only through specially created instruments. Thus we do not see the world, but rather, images of a world that the instruments create for our eyes. If the image is the only reality that signifies the sensually experienced reality, and if the reality is no longer available to our natural senses, then it becomes a matter of correctly interpreting the image. There are, namely, instruments that penetrate deeper and further into reality than the human eye (2000:209).

Image-based art which mediates the visual through screen technologies not only allows one to see an image, but is also responsible for facilitating a system of relations for understanding - and responding to - what has been seen. Perception can therefore be understood as an active process in which visitors negotiate systems of relations. John Berger describes this active and reflexive process as a ‘way of seeing’, for it is through the objects which capture our gaze, and the manners by which we choose to see, that we construct a system of relations within our environment:

We only see what we look at. To look is an act of choice. As a result of this act, what we see is brought within our reach – though not necessarily arm’s reach… We never look at just one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves. Our vision is continually active, continually moving, continually holding things in a circle around itself, constructing what is present to us as we are (Berger 1987:9).

Interviewees exercised this active form of perception by drawing a number of different ‘ways of seeing’ to resolve the tension between the artwork’s presence within the institutional context of the museum, and the spatial relations it conducts as a screen-based technology. For example, Heidi described how “it’s very different from going to a gallery and looking at the paintings. You either like it or don’t like it, but it doesn’t really do anything for you.” Katrina similarly commented on the evocative power of image-based art, comparing her perceptions of still and moving images: “it’s quite a bit different from looking at a photograph – a photograph is just one person’s image or one moment, whereas this is a whole different ballgame... Maybe not as… I don’t want to say ‘not as personal’, but it’s more something that a person can relate to, especially if it’s a film in their area in particular.” Associations with film were also

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77 In this quotation Weibel is referring specifically to surveillance technologies. He describes how the visible is a field of symbolic order which is as much determined by what can’t be seen, as by what we can see naturally through our senses. Therefore, this order is also determined by the way we interpret images which are only made available to us through photographic instruments (2000:209).
common, where visitors’ experiences of fragmentary perception were compared with the linear experience of attending movies. Heidi noted how with moving-image art “you can watch everything around, over and over and over again”, differentiating between the Gallery and cinema in the way that “it’s not like going to the movies where you watch it once”. Paul attributed this difference to the ways that conventions of narrative have historically shaped interaction with moving images:

Your Western audience is sort of trained up on having a narrative – when looking at the moving image, and having audio which relates to what you’re seeing. But it’s not – it’s not like that all. You kind of sit there and get presented with images that are chosen, like, for different reasons, I guess. Or for aesthetic appeal, or for whatever it is. So yeah, it’s a completely different experience than most people, I suppose, are used to when they go to a cinema or watch telly or whatever it is.

Historical precedents
These comments reflect a number of historical precedents for the various ‘ways of seeing’ which influence visitors’ modes of reception in the Screen Gallery. For example, Berger has also noted how the distinctive conventions of oil painting represent the visible in a way which elicits a specific form of perception, as “the term oil painting refers to more than a technique. It defines an art form” (1987:87). Susan Sontag writes in a similar manner about photography, drawing correlations between performativity and perception when describing what could be termed a ‘photographic seeing’. She describes how the advent of photography offered both a new way for people to see and a new activity to be performed, as the act of looking at photographs offered a passage into an intimate, image-based system of communication (2002:89). Film also offers a ‘way of seeing’ relevant to perception in the Screen Gallery, as the flicker of twenty-four images per second creates a form of visual

Berger draws these associations because he relates the system of perspective to the economic system of private property:

The special qualities of oil painting lent themselves to a special system of conventions for representing the visible. The sum total of these conventions is the way of seeing invented by oil painting. It is usually said that the oil painting in its frame is like an imaginary window open on to the world. This is roughly the tradition’s own image of itself – even allowing for all the stylistic changes (Mannerist, Baroque, Neo-Classic, Realist, etc.) which took place over four centuries. We are arguing that if one studies the culture of the European oil painting as a whole, and if one leaves aside its own claims for itself, its model is not so much a framed window open on to the world as a safe let into the wall, a safe in which the visible has been deposited (1987:109).

As detailed in the second chapter, Celia Lury (1998) also offers an account of photographic seeing in her study of prosthetic culture, arguing that the photographic image acts as a perceptual prosthesis which artificially extends one’s capability and self-identity. However, while notions of reflexivity underpin both Lury’s account and the argument I develop, Lury details the contemporary construction of subjectivity and identity, whereas here I wish to emphasise how forms of perception and affective behaviour have changed in relation to the transformation of the art object, and in a museum context.
representation beset by the subjectivity of an authored gaze. This way of seeing is structured according to a syntax of film conventions, such as reverse shots, non-linear narrative, soundtrack and special effects. ‘Cinematic seeing’ therefore also elicits an active mode of perception, both in the literacy it cultivates, but also, as Tom Gunning details in his ‘cinema of attractions’ (1986:65), in the pleasures which arise from viewing film as a visceral and embodied spectator experience.  

Defining reflexive perception

By drawing associations between painting, photography and cinema and their perception of screens in the Gallery, visitors have shown how image-based art shares common conventions of perspective. However, despite these similarities, these forms of art also differ significantly from one another, as the modes of artistic production employed to create them elicit varying degrees of active interaction from audiences. Painting is a handcraft and offers only a singular point of view. A painting also bears the physical inflections of the painter, and therefore carries a strong mark of authorship. While photography is produced by an apparatus and allows for a mobility of capture, the outcome is nonetheless a static image. Cinema consists of moving images and offers shifting points of view, however the viewer remains physically static in the cinema theatre. In short, these forms of image-based art allow only a static framing of the visual, and thereby limit interaction with the image to the specific parameters of its capture and the space of its reception.

By deformalising the conventions of the museum space and exhibiting time-based art across multiple, navigable screens, the Screen Gallery has rendered static ways of seeing inadequate for interaction with image-based art. Instead, it requires a mobile form of viewership, a ‘reflexive perception’. This form of agency, rather than activated by a bodily enframing of information, is reflexive and immediate, as visitors draw quick relations and associations based upon their perception of media-based literacies of time and space. When each work flickers according to its own time code, it feeds a continuous loop of framed images in a manner which prevents the visitor from being able to see each loop in its entirety. The act of even briefly turning one’s head to gaze upon a different artwork dispels spatial and temporal continuity. From the perspective of viewership, it is this ‘looping’ nature of time-based art which differentiates it from painting, photography and film.

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80 Gunning critiques accounts of early cinema which suggest that film audiences were passively immersed within the spectacle of non-actualities, and instead proposes that audiences indulged a ‘scopic pleasure’ as active, discerning viewers (1989:36-37). The ‘cinema of attractions’ thesis also overcomes the historical split between actualities and non-actualities as genres of film, often substantiated as a differentiation between the work of Lumiére and Méliès. Gunning develops a linear historical account of the contemporary documentary and blockbuster to argue that styles of viewership were consistent across both genres.
The possibilities created by a mobile, reflexive perception are reflected within recent modes of image production and consumption which individuals experience in daily life. Lev Manovich describes this as a shift from the production of a mass audience by a mass media, to the individualised circulation of images characteristic of contemporary modes of industrialisation:

If the logic of old media corresponded to the logic of industrial mass society, the logic of new media fits the logic of the post-industrial society, which values individuality over conformity. In industrial mass society everybody was supposed to enjoy the same goods – and to share the same beliefs. This was also the logic of media technology. A media object was assembled in a media factory (such as a Hollywood studio). Millions of identical copies were produced from a master and distributed to all the citizens. Broadcasting, cinema, print media all followed this logic (2000:41–42).

In a post-industrial society individuals are able to capture, collate, manipulate and distribute their images with increasing ease and rapidity. In particular, the proliferation of digital cameras and web 2.0 social-networking sites have accelerated this highly subjective production and consumption of images. This implies that when the historical conventions of screen perception become unfettered, the visitor, no longer confined to a theatre seat or a singular framing of the visual, engages in forms of reflexive perception which correspond with the individualised production and consumption of images in daily life.

For example, Paul explained how the placement of multiple time-based artworks in a navigable space stretched his process of engagement across multiple temporalities:

You come in half-way through and then you get the last half first and the first half last. It makes it a completely different experience to watching it, say, if you had them on video, and you’re watching them on TV, you’d watch them from start to finish then go onto the next one – and go onto the next one… And I suppose that, yeah, it complicates your uncoding of them, I guess. Decoding of them… I think it’s a trope of – I think it’s kind of central to what it’s doing.

Similarly, Katrina commented on the spatial literacies she employed by drawing comparisons with familiar spaces of media consumption when viewing art in the Gallery:

We all watch television, and we’re used to interacting with it in our own way, and you don’t have to be educated in the various types of art to maybe understand it… Some art forms, you think, ‘well, I think I’ve seen this before and I think this is what I’m looking for’, where with something that’s moving in front of you, you don’t have to do that… You don’t feel that pressure of standing there and going – ‘Yeah, I’ll stand back and [makes pensive gesture]’. You feel like you have to be an artist to understand the art, whereas a format you’re familiar with, like TV… you’re more at home with it. More natural.
These comments detail how interaction with moving image art allows meaning production to extend over multiple temporalities and spatialities as a part of an open and potentially fluid process, and varies between the subjectivities of visitors, places, times, and contexts. Reflexive perception in the Screen Gallery therefore takes form in the way that visitors aggregate a system of relations with similar image-based media, as well as forms of art. Nicolas Bourriaud describes this reflexive practice of interaction with art as indicative of a culture of ‘post-production’, in which, “from the same material (the everyday), we can produce different versions of reality” (2000:66). He proposes that art perpetuates a culture of montage, as it “presents itself as an alternative editing table that shakes up social forms, reorganizes them in order to reprogram, suggesting that there are other possible uses for the techniques and tools at our disposal” (2000:66). When forms of perception are derived from a variety of contexts, the screen becomes a mediatory cultural space for already established systems of knowledge and interaction. Moreover, the technologies housed within the Screen Gallery individualise forms of visitor behaviour, as the modalities of agency and meaning production pertaining to a digital, screen-based art reflect the kinds of literacy that visitors exercise outside of the museum. The reflexive perception visitors exercise in the Screen Gallery therefore mediates forms of agency which arise within the politics of individualisation which conditions everyday life.

**Tension: the hierarchy within reflexive perception**

Outside of interaction with art, this practice is indicative of a ‘sampling’ culture in which individuals subjectively draw upon a ‘remix archive’ (Miller 2004) of vernacular knowledge and media literacy as a condition of everyday life. Manovich suggests that we negotiate these flows of visual information as ‘comforted users’, where the pleasure of engaging with the static and stable forms of image-based art are now replaced by a pleasure in manipulating data (Manovich 2000: 274-5). This description is certainly true of the Gallery’s younger visitors. As Fleur has observed, youth often demonstrate a high level of technological aptitude when interacting with art: “It’s… my students – who are 18 year olds, you know, everything is mediated through the screen now, they think about something, they go ‘that’s like in the movie Labyrinth’, and I think it’s so normal for them”. This observation suggests that within the parameters set by the museum, visitors are offered a new, self-determined form of engagement with the artwork, where, by interacting with screen-based technology, they practice the

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81 Manovich describes this pleasure as follows: “If the subject of modern society looked for refuge from the chaos of the real world in the stability and balance of the static composition of a painting, and later in the cinematic image, the subject of the information society finds peace in the knowledge that she can slide over endless fields of data, locating any morsel of information with the click of a button, zooming through file systems and networks. She is comforted not by an equilibrium of shapes and colors, but by the variety of data manipulation operations at her control” (2000:274-275).
‘reflexive perception’ common within contemporary culture. Trevor proposed that museums have a specific role in providing an empowered form of learning for younger generations by making this possibility an explicit aim of its practices: “...technology now – if you’re looking at sort of kids in their teens and that sort of stuff, and early twenties, they’re really into technology, and so they want to know more about it. So, it’s a good opportunity to make this part of the exhibit”.

These comments point towards a way that the Gallery can incorporate very contemporary forms of moving image literacy into its pedagogical agenda. As articulated by Fleur and Trevor, youth are often highly skilled in negotiating new technological environments, as they are often adept at developing innovative forms of spatial and temporal literacy. For example, John Urry describes how younger people tend to adroitly negotiate contemporary manifestations of time through video-gaming practices:

The fifth generation of computer-youth are apparently able to see on video screens several programmes at the same time and to grasp the simultaneous narrative structures. They are able to develop their own games combining various media, speed and simultaneity. The development of such post-literate ‘multi-media’ skills will be centrally important in the future. It suggests that humans may develop multi-sensuous sets of skills combined with emerging new objects (2000:73).

The ways that youth generate new cognitive and interpretive functions can contribute to the development of new forms of literacy with the moving image. These forms of interaction are a template for the very contemporary forms of literacy the museum could incorporate into its pedagogical agenda, so as to enhance the kinds of agency visitors experience in the museum. As Darren Tofts observes, institutions need to develop practices which draw from terrain already familiar to its visitors, arguing that “if media art is to transcend its label as an emerging set of practices, interaction needs to be as familiar and automatic as the experience of watching a film or reading a book” (Tofts 2005:132).

However, while visitors who already perceive the Gallery reflexively can draw upon an expanded cache of media literacy with dexterity, reflexive perception also creates a hierarchy of participation between visitors, as Fleur observed within further discussion of her students: “I can’t keep up with them, I don’t know all that – I don’t see those movies, but I think for our children – for that generation, it just becomes very normal. Yeah, they’re watching TV from a young age.” For those less technologically literate, interaction with art may register as a demand, rather than enhance one’s sense of agency, as Fleur further intimated: “Computers –

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82 Within my observational analysis I observed a number of situations in which children would explain works to the adults who were accompanying them, and lead the navigational path through the Gallery.
all that sort of – understanding, being able to understand how to move through a website… older people find that really difficult to understand, and maybe there’s some of that mirrored in - I can understand why some people would find ACMI a bit difficult.”

Interaction with art in the Screen Gallery, while reflecting new forms of literacy and skill outside of the museum, also reveals the challenges of interacting with new forms of technology. While some visitors engage readily with art as ‘comforted users’, many others struggle within these conditions. For Scott Lash this struggle is typical of the ‘combinard’ who is subject to regimes of rapid decision-making in reflexive modernity, who “puts together networks, constructs alliances, makes deals. He must live, is forced to live in an atmosphere of risk in which knowledge and life-changes are precarious” (2003.ix). By moving into and between different screen spaces as combinards, visitors become increasingly responsible for their interaction with exhibits, developing a system of relations through the redrawing, rejection and rearrangement of perception, where customary cultural practices with technology serve as a reference guide for the production of meaning. In some ways, the combinard could be considered a post-industrial version of Walter Benjamin’s flâneur - a figure who similarly negotiates an environment characterised by change and technological progress. However, the combinard experiences these changes reflexively, moves within information networks rather than arcades, and therefore negotiates people, information and images well beyond the speeds of pedestrian encounter. Instead of crowded streets, new sensory experiences and forms of knowledge emerge within reformulations of space and time. In short, while the Screen Gallery creates new avenues for meaning production by challenging the traditional conventions for interpretation of art, visitors not adept with the pace of ‘reflexive’ forms of agency may struggle to participate.

This heightened state of self-determination creates a foreseeable tension when the museum’s pedagogy stakes a high value on visitors’ self-determination, as it creates a precarious balance between what can be considered ‘agency’, and what registers as an unachievable ‘demand’. If participation does play out as a demand, the Gallery may be exercising a form of pedagogy no less hegemonic than previous forms of the museum. In addition, reflexive perception is a form of agency which facilitates a ‘way of seeing’, rather than a ‘way of understanding’. The ability to interact rapidly with a number of interfaces does not equate to a capacity for understanding how a technological interface works, or having the ability to interpret a work. These are issues pertaining to the forms of agency required to engage with moving image artworks as objects of technological knowledge.
The recontextualisation of screen technologies into an art setting not only extends forms of visitor perception in the Screen Gallery, but also transforms the way that knowledge circulates in the museum. Visitors found that while this recontextualisation challenged traditional conventions for interacting with art, it also estranged familiar ways of interacting with technology. For example, Katrina commented that

The stronger pieces would be… what kind of catches the eye, really… and things that are unusual that aren’t around in any other place. Maybe things you see everyday, taken for granted, and then it’s pointed out to you – that kind of art form, and that fact that it’s a different kind of moving within the art form itself…It’s got another dimension … and more of your own input, in a way.

This statement illustrates how this estrangement of relations can draw visitors’ attention to the use and construction of art as a form of technology, and that the blurring of participatory modes of interaction inscribe the art object with new forms of technological knowledge. As Katrina further suggests, this is “because it is interactive and it is a gallery about here and now instead of old paintings or something like that, or about the past.”

**Defining cognitive agency**

When art is viewed as object of technological knowledge it becomes an actant in processes of self-determined enquiry, and elicits a form of agency at the level of cognition. For example, many visitors expressed an interest in deepening their comprehension of the way the Gallery’s art had been made. Daniel Crooks’ *Train No. 1* [Figure 5.2] was a work which often provoked this type of response, as Trevor illustrates: “I thought the things that stuck out were some of the ones – you know, the train one. It was very clever, I’m not quite sure how they did that.” Sean was also struck by the work’s technological innovation, describing how he “spent a lot of time at the train montage, just trying to work out how that was done.” Fleur similarly commented on Crooks’ video-splicing technology, explaining how it was “a really interesting work… The way that it was made structurally.” These are only a small sample of a swathe of similar comments made by visitors throughout interviews and observations, all of which articulated a desire to better understand how the Gallery’s art has been constructed.
This type of agency differs from that of the ‘reflexive combinard’ I detailed earlier. Instead, the visitor is, thoughtful, inquisitive, a ‘reflective combinard’ who draws relations from and between sensation and perception to extend their knowledge of art as a form of technology. A ‘cognitive agency’ therefore perpetuates the autonomous and individualised forms of participation characteristic of visitor behaviour in the Screen Gallery. Indeed, visitors’ processes of questioning and interrogation not only show how technology-based art compels self-determined behaviour in the museum, but also the way that a new domain of knowledge is taking root within its spaces. This is a form of knowledge which is constituted by visitors themselves, and takes shape according to the ways they examine their relationship with technology, and their interpretation of art.

Visitors’ interaction with technology-based art enables knowledge to circulate through cognitive processes of self-enquiry, as visitors set their own boundaries for interpretation according to the parameters of their perception. In doing so they create a new interrogatory space which challenges the traditional circulation of knowledge in the museum. Writing about this shift towards individualised forms of knowledge, Ulrich Beck notes how the dissolution of modernity’s structures has transformed the way knowledge circulates. He argues that “what happens now is not non-knowledge or anti-reason. Indeed the reflexive-modern individual is better educated, more knowledgeable than ever. Instead the type of knowledge at stake changes” (in Lash 2003:x). The circulation of knowledge in the Gallery therefore reflects a contemporary politics of individualisation, as it exceeds pedagogical parameters to move intimately and subjectively along the technological and aesthetic relations drawn by visitors.

83 The genealogy of the museum presented in the second chapter had described how the art object has historically been cast as a repository for cultural knowledge, as museums have traditionally displayed art within narratives which reflected contemporaneous circulations of power. In the nineteenth century, art was exhibited to convey state power, while in recent decades the contextualisation of art and diversification of its genres has highlighted the way ideological agendas have fragmented into a politics of pluralism.
The Screen Gallery therefore straddles a number of roles by featuring objects of technology as works of art. On one hand, it maintains the institutional traditions of archiving and collection, while on the other, pushes exploratory and experimental boundaries. Steven suggests that as a dedicated physical site for exhibition of these technologies, the combination of both traditional and contemporary practice make it an increasingly valuable place for mediating technological forms of knowledge:

I haven’t read their mission statement, but I think what they should be doing is engaging the public with the culture of the moving image, and that has a number of dimensions. And I think that does have an artistic dimension, as a kind of historical and social dimension. I think there’s an educational function which is about facilitating interaction with moving image technology, and kind of…. Keeping kind of up-to-date with what people are doing with moving image technology. There’s a lot of technologies that have been introduced in the last decade or so, we’re still finding out what are people doing with videophones, for instance… Artists do that a bit, because they experiment. At the end of the day, museums have a role, too…‘look at this’, ‘what do you think about this?’, ‘let’s have a go at doing this’.

This comment also highlights how museums have a facilitatory capacity which encourages visitors to examine consumer objects in a new light, and consider alternate and meaningful ways to interact with technology. This raises questions as to how the museum’s pedagogical role transforms to mediate a self-determined agency, when knowledge becomes untethered from its traditional base, and begins to circulate within the parameters set by visitors.

**Technological literacy as a site for tension**

On one hand, by dedicating its gallery space to new technologies, ACMI has generated an expectation that it will keep pace with the forms of technological innovation which visitors encounter in everyday life. As Trevor describes, the break with convention represented by the inclusion of new technologies in the Screen Gallery subsequently generates a new set of visitor demands, as they seek to understand how the art have been made, whilst also interacting with the works at the level of aesthetic interpretation:

The strongest response was probably the technology that was behind it. Because, even though there was a lot of art there, it’s also related to – there must have been technology behind the art, it’s not like you’re sitting around doing a painting… I don’t think they explain the technology. There’s always a piece there that tells you what the artist was thinking about, what they were trying to do, but I guess if you’re going to try and make it an art and technology conjunction, then there should be something else that would say: this is how the technology works behind it. So it’s an educational process, as well as an arts process.
Steven suggested that exhibitions could be better contextualised and the technology made transparent by placing the Gallery’s art within a historical framing which show the progress of technological innovation: “it might be interesting to say, have an exhibition on the changing history of the moving image technology, for instance – alongside the kinds of moving images those technologies can produce – that would be interesting”.

However, a supplementation of the Gallery’s art with additional information and contextual displays undermines the conditions of ambiguity which have been central to its phenomenological agenda. Some visitors felt that there was a risk associated with museum practices which encompass popular forms of knowledge, as they make forms of interaction with art too transparent. These visitors were concerned that their interaction with art could be over-simplified, and that the self-determinative processes which arise from conditions of ambiguity, would face constraints. For example, Sean described how he would prefer that some aspect of knowledge would remain within the interpretative control of the visitor:

> You know like in American films, they ram the message down your throat because they design it for the lowest common denominator, so if you haven’t got the story in the first five minutes, you’re a complete idiot – because they’re designed for the lowest common denominator. But with French or German or European films, they give the viewer a bit more respect and they give you a chance to discover the story at your own pace, and give you the benefit of the doubt. So I appreciate it when artists and curators do the same.

Fleur similarly noted that while the museum had a responsibility to educate, the preservation of spaces for independent learning should also constitute a part of its remit: “I think care has to be taken to not sort of water things down. To not dilute them by trying to make them – this sort of comes from my perspective of being an artist – but not to make them ineffectual by making them approachable.” These difficulties create irreconcilable issues within the Gallery’s pedagogy. On one hand, it must promote learning by maintaining the conditions of ambiguity that I have shown to compel processes of self-enquiry. Yet on the other, it must make conditions transparent for visitors wishing to further cognitive forms of enquiry. A tension therefore emerges when a work in the Gallery is simultaneously perceived as an object of art, as well as an object of media technology. The Gallery is caught between making the familiar strange, and the strange familiar, and must therefore facilitate the circulation of knowledge on a number of levels. The museum must document the rapidly cast histories of new technologies, but do so while remaining reflexive, flexible and forward-looking. It must maintain the inquisitive space of self-education that visitors had created, and also attempt to extend the space in which this knowledge circulates by reaching beyond art settings to sites of popular and vernacular knowledge.
**New pedagogical possibilities**

However, visitors envisioned a number of different ways that this tension could be productively resolved through a blurring and renegotiation of boundaries between art and technology, and create a potential for expression of cognitive agency beyond the museum. For example, Paul described how familiar technologies could make contemporary art more broadly accessible to the general public:

> I’m a bit of a populist. That’s my kind of philosophy. I like the sort of mass market stuff, I guess, I find it very interesting. But I also really enjoy challenging stuff that’s a bit more academic as well. But it is a kind of question of whether or not contemporary art properly engages with the mass audience, or whether its choice not to is a valid one…. there is that ‘dumbing-down’ argument and it is an important one, I guess. But, you look at something like *The Simpsons*, and it’s a very intelligent thing. But it’s also a very popular thing, and it draws from things a mass market can relate to, you know, aspects of our society, or aspects of culture, of mass global culture. It is very intelligent, the way it uses that, and I think even really arty people, even your very highly educated audiences still get something from that. But it’s obviously a very different thing from going and seeing like a high-art exhibition… I just think there’s a lot of growing space in that borderland, which maybe hasn’t been explored as much as it could be. I mean, I wouldn’t know because I don’t do it all day looking at galleries, but I would think that there is a lot of room to play with there, in between mass culture and high culture.

In his differentiation between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture Paul alluded to an unexplored ‘borderland’, a space, it seems, where the boundaries of traditional and popular knowledge intersect. For theorist Andreas Huyssen (1986), it is specifically in this blurring of the ‘Great Divide’ which has historically differentiated high art from mass culture, that new opportunities for understanding and interacting with art can be generated. A number of interviewees expressed a similar sentiment, suggesting that the Gallery could expand its educational remit by developing practices which exploited this crossover.

Trevor believes that knowledge of technological art could circulate at the same vernacular level of sports culture in Melbourne. He proposed that the Gallery could cast a wider pedagogical net by capitalising upon the broad appeal of technological knowledge, and extend its remit by engaging the public in spaces beyond the Gallery’s walls:

> I don’t know if they go out to schools, but that’s what they should be doing. Because, I mean, the AFL goes out to schools to teach people how to play football. Why shouldn’t artists go out to schools and teach them about technology and art? So it could become part of an educational program – I don’t know if an educational program exists or not. The only way that

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[^84]: AFL is the acronym for Australian Football League.
people get used to different art forms that are around is to actually be exposed to it. A lot of people just never get exposed to it.

This suggestion shows how the museum could straddle both traditional and contemporary roles at one level, by asserting its presence as an arbiter of cultural knowledge, while at another, upholding its remit by furthering public education about technology-based art. Steven similarly described how the Gallery’s institutional role could be expanded beyond presentation of art to educate the public about new forms of technology:

I would be really interested in an exhibition that worked at movement-capture, with movement-capture technology. Or even say a Playstation, iToy – that sort of thing, I think would be fun to do. I don’t think that movement-capture technology has arrived at the domestic level yet... there’s a kind of role in mediating technology that is beyond the domestic realm, kind of introducing people to it. I’d like to think that there’s something more to them than art…

This comment also suggests that an expanded educational role would encompass other forms of cultural knowledge relating to technology, including the way it manifests in popular entertainment genres such as video-gaming.

Technology-based art therefore creates new passages for knowledge which could extend visitors’ expressions of agency beyond the museum. By facilitating cognitive forms of agency the Screen Gallery has cultivated a pedagogy which expands its traditional remit of civic education, and now includes the modes of consumption and knowledge relevant to ‘everyday’ interaction with new technologies. By recognising visitors as consumers of technology, as well as viewers of art, the Gallery educates visitors beyond what Bourriaud terms the “ecstatic consumer” of the 1980’s, to a “potentially subversive consumer: the user of forms” (2000:33). Agency arising from knowledge of recent modes of cultural consumption is therefore more likely to involve an intelligent engagement with the possibilities and uses that technology has to offer.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have argued that when the digital screen is placed in an institutionalised art space it facilitates modalities of agency which both extend the museum’s pedagogical role and challenge the ways that visitors have traditionally expressed agency in the museum. The art object was firstly examined as a digital image, where its form as coded information was shown to cultivate a new domain of digital experience. This digital experience can be understood as uniquely sensory and affective. The visitor’s body, responding to the ambience of space and object, acts as a ‘centre of determination’ by enframing the digital image. This process elicits a form of agency which is enacted at a corporeal, affective level.
A second modality of agency takes shape within the interactive space of the Gallery’s screens. This form of agency is rapid and reflexive, as visitors develop ‘ways of seeing’ according to dimensions of mobility and the system of relations they construct as they proceed through the Gallery, and navigate its time-based works. ‘Reflexive perception’ requires visitors to draw from existing forms of media literacy, technical knowledge, and their own capacity to perform within regimes of choice in day-to-day living. However, the invitation for visitors to draw from vernacular forms of media readership creates tiers of accessibility between different age and literacy groups. This indicates that the emergent way of seeing I have identified in the Gallery is, in fact, conditional. While the governmental museum defined the agency of its visitors by hegemonically setting specific parameters of participation, the opposite effect is also possible. When institutional parameters are set too loosely or obtusely, the multiple possibilities for movement, navigation and meaning production may create too high a demand on visitors’ abilities to interact in a self-deterministic manner. Visitors have shown how a consequence can be a loss of mobility, and a reduced capacity to exercise agency. The paradox of user control described in the previous chapter with reference to spatial experience can therefore also arise as a result of interaction with the Gallery’s artworks.

When the art object is perceived as an object of technological knowledge, a third modality of agency begins to take form. This modality relates to the manner that ‘ways of seeing’ and a visitor’s affective experience influence the ‘cognitive agency’ which emerges when moving image art is regarded as an object of technological knowledge. The previous chapter described how the Gallery creates a question of procedure by relaxing the traditional conventions of engagement in the museum, and heightening visitors’ sense of autonomous participation. An agency of cognition suggests that interaction with the Gallery’s art has evolved in a similar manner, as the conventions of interpretation allow meaning to become open-ended. The retrenchment of quotidian technologies into a formalised art setting created new avenues for the circulation of knowledge, and in turn, these processes of self-determined enquiry have recast the Gallery’s institutional boundaries, and created new avenues for pedagogical exploration.

Together, these modalities of agency relating to affect, perception and cognition enable the visitor to develop a new system of relations within the screen environment. These modalities do not operate in isolation from one another, but rather, interrelate, and play out according to the subjectivity of the visitor, the type of exhibit and the context of its exhibition. I will examine this inter-playing of modalities in the following chapters, and investigate how they are expressed by visitors within two key forms of interaction, namely, a playful form of
participation, and a concentrated, focused attention. The following chapters also explore both of these states by describing how they elicit specific praxes which contribute to a politics of movement, for, as John Berger suggests, interaction with the world of images can generate a powerful politics:

If the new language of images were used differently, it would, through its use, confer a new kind of power. Within it we could begin to define our experiences more precisely in areas where words are inadequate. (Seeing comes before words.) Not only personal experience, but also the essential historical experience of our relation to the past: that is to say the experience of seeking to give meaning to our lives, of trying to understand the history of which we can become the active agents (1987:33).
CHAPTER SIX

Play

It is the pattern of a game that gives it relevance to our inner lives, and not who is playing nor the outcome of the game, so it is with information movement. The selection of our human senses employed makes all the difference say between photo and telegraph. In the arts the particular mix of our senses in the medium is all-important

Chapter Six
Play

I want to focus on work that brings together technological advances and ancient understandings, new media and old practices, electronics and the electricity of human touch

Lynette Wallworth (Australia Council for the Arts).

[Figure 6.1] Lynette Wallworth, Hold: Vessel 1, 2001 #1

Introduction

The visitor’s encounter with Lynette Wallworth’s Hold: Vessel 1 commences with the act of taking a white, plastic bowl from a stand and entering a darkened room [Figure 6.1]. Projected from the ceiling, in a row, are three columns of light. As the bowl is passed under one of these streams of light, the dish catches parts of the projection and reveals small, life-like, intimate worlds. Some are the microscopic worlds of plankton and microbiological organisms, others are far and distant worlds, like galaxies and stars. By moving their dish back and forth, up and down, the visitor can explore their world by playing with moments of capture and containment, a similar effect to holding a dish of bright, mercury-like liquid, or slick, glowing water - images spill and slop over its sides, over one’s hands and skin [Figure 6.2]. Despite the beauty of the images and one’s own private experience with the bowl, the most distinctive dimensions of this work emerge in moments of communal experience, where people move from projection to projection and peer into each other’s bowls to compare worlds. Expressions on silhouetted faces take form in the bright columns as strangers are

85 This three channel, multimedia installation is the product of Wallworth’s exploration of lens-based imaging, investigating the relationship between human perception and scientific discovery. She worked with cinematographers who used medical imaging technologies to capture ocean footage, as well as scientists who scanned microscopy and astronomical images (Australia Council for the Arts). It was commissioned in 2002 for ACMI, first appearing in Deep Space: Sensation and Immersion (2002) and then World Without End (2004).
brought together, shoulder-to-shoulder, by these plays of light. A moment of pleasant, ritual-like communion also arises as departing visitors pass their bowls to those entering the room.

![Figure 6.2] Lynette Walworth, *Hold; Vessel 1*, 2001, #2

You hold the bowls to these projections, and explore the image, which is really fun. I think that’s got a lot of potential, it’s like a little arty micro-fish... I really liked that one... Just the interactivity of it. And the fact that the gallery trusted people with these fragile bowls... I found it pretty amazing that there’s these glass things sitting there and that you’re welcome to touch them. It’s not something that you get in an art space - that you’re actually allowed to interact with the work (Paul).

It had been a pleasure sharing the space of *Hold* and observing the way people interacted with the work. As Paul has described, for many visitors it became an unselfconscious opportunity to play. I saw a father entertaining his children by breaking into a small dance with a bowl perched atop his head. One afternoon a toddler reached for the bowl his mother had been showing him, and, with an innocent curiosity, attempted to lick the projections from its surface. Another time two women became deeply engrossed in conversation whilst peering into their bowls, intent on identifying the organisms they had ‘captured’. The following chapter surveys these forms of interaction with moving-image art, asking how playful engagement may mediate new and significant forms of cultural experience. While a heightening of visitor interactivity in itself is not a new concept within museum practice,86 playful participation in ACMI is made unique by a pedagogy which is defined within ambient space, and the way that the modalities of affect, reflexive perception and cognition affect visitors’ interaction with moving image art.

86 Many science and historical museums, taking heed of research undertaken in areas of cognitive development and education create interactive learning spaces where, through the incorporation of new technologies, exhibits have become increasingly game-like. This shift in museum practice was described within the historical context of a genealogy of the museum in Chapter Two.
This chapter begins its investigation of play in the Screen Gallery by theorising how it constitutes a serious cultural activity. I firstly draw from childhood development theories to explain that play is a learning mechanism for the exploration of rules and conventions. Playing therefore determines how individuals experience self-empowerment and control. I argue that when considering these theories within the context of the Screen Gallery, interaction with time-based art in ambient space compels a distinctive form of creative play. The second part of this chapter investigates the interrelationship between the modalities of affect, perception and cognition when playing, and argues that a new form of praxis is being mediated by a reflexive and aestheticised knowledge, which is akin to the forms of knowledge visitors may experience in everyday life. The final part of this chapter develops the political possibilities of this praxis. Returning to discussion of Wallsworth’s work, I describe how an aestheticised, reflexive knowledge is fashioned by the sharing of playful experiences between visitors. I argue that this praxis generates a new public intimacy which can facilitate significant modes of learning and communal behaviour which may find application beyond the museum.

1: PLAY

Playing in an ambient space

As illustrated in the genealogy of the museum presented in the second chapter of this study, museums have traditionally mediated their pedagogy through object-based exhibitions. However, as Katrina describes, when the museum’s objects are playful they reflect different kinds of interactive environments:

It’s kind of like you’ve got abstract things there that are then turned to technology. You walk up to something and it might activate something, or put you on the screen, or it’s those things that kind of pop out... I feel like you’re in a fair ground, with big mirrors…Yeah, like when you wave an arm and something will move or things like that. Makes it a bit more ‘arcade’.

This comment reflects a pedagogical shift in the contemporary art museum, where art and technology mediate a 'lusory' attitude' (Salen and Zimmerman 2003:99) by encouraging modalities of play.87 Heidi’s description of the Gallery’s ‘arcade-like’ characteristics reflects an ‘archaeology of interactivity’ (Huhtamo 1999:99) in which interactive media and the moving image have historically mediated forms of play.88 This trajectory emerged most clearly at the advent of the industrial revolution in the mid-eighteenth century, where a

87 Salen and Zimmerman propose that a ‘lusory attitude’ is the state of mind a player requires to enter into a game (2003:97).
88 Huhtamo defines an ‘archaeology of interactivity’ as “an effort to map contemporary interactive media by relating them to other manifestations of the human machine encounter and by tracing some of the paths along which their principles have formed” (1999:99).
playfulness came to characterise interaction between human and machine. At one level, this playfulness was informed by a desire to alleviate the mundane aspects of the existing relationship between humans and machines in work environments, however they also held a great ‘attraction value’ as examples of the dawn of a new, technological era. By the nineteenth century, instruments such as zoetropes and praxinoscopes became available for domestic consumption as ‘philosophical toys’ which mediated playful forms of interaction with image-technology. Similarly, mutoscope-like peep viewers and arcade games became the moving-image contemporaries of vending machines and strength testers in public entertainment environments (Huhtamo 2005). While ‘discovery centres’, such as science, historical and children’s museums have featured objects of technology and even used these objects to mediate interactive learning, the Screen Gallery differs as a museum of contemporary art. Despite also dedicating its spaces to objects of technology, the Gallery facilitates aesthetic learning through technology-mediated play. As the work of Johan Huizinga shows, play is a serious cultural activity, meaning also that the Gallery expands its pedagogical potential by drawing together spaces of education and devices of entertainment.

In his classic study, *Homo-Ludens: a Study of the Play Element in Culture* (1938), Huizinga (1970:21) argues that play is connected to ritual and primordial instincts, and therefore central to the generation of culture. He delineates a number of characteristics which can be attributed to the playing of games. He proposes, firstly, that it occur as a voluntary activity, that it takes place in a specially bracketed time and space, and finally, that it occur in a ‘disinterested’ manner (1970:26-28). While Huizinga’s work has been used extensively within games studies, it is also widely referenced within video gaming theory to evaluate how gamers actively participate in computer-mediated play. Central to these positions is the notion that rules are fundamental to play, as they traditionally structure the games we interact with. As Marshall McLuhan describes, it is our interaction with the rules of a game which help pattern forms of social and cultural learning:

> For individualist Western man, much of his ‘adjustment’ to society has the character of a personal surrender to the collective demands. Our games help both to teach us this kind of adjustment and also to provide a release from it. The uncertainty of the outcomes of our contests makes a rational excuse for the mechanical rigor of the rules and procedures of the game (1987:238).

Games and art share a likeness as they both have a capacity to reframe the habitual aspects of life so that they may be experienced anew, and perhaps resonate with greater profundity. McLuhan also suggests that “art, like games, is a translator of experience. What we have

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89 See, for example, the work of Roger Callois (1962) and Brian Sutton-Smith (1971, 1979, 1997).
already felt or seen in one situation we are suddenly given in a new kind of material. Games, likewise, shift familiar experience into new forms, giving the bleak and the blear side of things sudden luminosity” (1987: 242-243). This observation suggests that when art is engaged with through play, it elicits processes of reflexivity (or ‘illumination’ as McLuhan terms it), which makes possible new modes of learning in the museum.

Comments from my interviewees point towards the different kinds of ways that technology and art can intertwine to provoke play-based learning. For example, Steven described how the Gallery’s art inspired a sense of learning in the way that it aroused his curiosity through acts of play: “the fun thing about that is that it’s a kind of puzzle. It’s a kind of ‘oh, here’s a bit of equipment, what do I do with this?’… I think ways of interacting with the moving image, ways of becoming part of the moving image – that’s fun.” While this comment illuminates how play mediates interactive learning in the style purported by Huizinga, it also underscores the ways that this play in the Gallery is influenced by ambient space. When Steven described ‘ways of interacting with the moving image’, he also made reference to the affective experience of ‘becoming part of the moving image’. This comment reflects how play is augmented by the heightened affective conditions of ambient space, as the boundaries between visitor and artwork appear to dissolve in the spray of light over one’s skin. Trevor made a similar remark in reference to Hold, where playful ‘fun’ was as much implicated within affective immersion, as physical intervention:

The one with the bowls? I thought that was good… I think it was fun because you could actually do something interactive. You could actually – you know, get in there. I was putting it on my head!... Yeah, so we were just playing around with it, putting it on people’s clothes, standing in front of it. Isabelle, the kid, lay on the floor, and sort of had all the things – the colours – going all over her, thought it was good fun. So yeah, I think that’s fun.

Therefore, while play can be understood as a serious cultural activity, when it takes places in an art environment it also becomes conditioned by the spatial ecology of interaction. This raises questions as to how new spatial – and especially affective experiences - influence modes of visitor learning.

The Screen Gallery as an active learning environment
Philosopher and democrat John Dewey recognised that successful education is strongly linked to environmental conditions of learning (1916). He proposed that thought and action were not separated from one another in the process of education, as a subject seeks stimulation from their object, as well as their environment. This perspective contested the behaviourist

90 Affective interaction was detailed in the fourth chapter as a process of bodily ‘enframing’.
paradigm of education in which philosophers of education believed children where empty vessels to be ‘filled’ with knowledge. Dewey, and later theorists such as Paulo Freire (1973), argued that learning should be understood as a mediated activity, and occur in an environment congruent with the learner. These theorists argued that for experiences to become educational, they require the active participation of the learner, both in a cognitive and embodied sense, and further, that the learning space must be organised and structured for the activity. This means that knowledge, rather than an object that is necessarily taught or imposed, is actually accumulated as an ‘experience’. Therefore, where in the previous chapter I showed how visitors perceived the Gallery’s art as an object of technological knowledge, it can now also be understood that knowledge is mediated through the experience of playing with an artwork, as one’s own subjective experiences constitute a legitimate form of knowledge in the museum. Experiential learning, as mediated by art, therefore becomes what philosopher Jacques Rancière (2007) describes as an ‘emancipatory activity’, as it releases individuals from the hegemonic rigours of institutionalised learning.

In his 1987 essay, The Ignorant Schoolmaster, Rancière proposes a form of pedagogy where both teacher and students are capable of teaching and learning. He draws from the work of Jacques Jocotot, a little-known nineteenth century educational philosopher, to argue that traditional pedagogical hierarchies reinforce an unproductive inequality between teacher and student through a ‘transmitted’ style of learning. He proposes that this pedagogical ‘cause and effect’ can be dissociated through an ‘equality of intelligences’, which accepts the gap between what one knows and does not know. Emancipation therefore entails an acceptance that distance is not an evil that should be abolished. It is the normal condition of communication. The distance that the ‘ignorant’ person has to cover is not the gap between his ignorance and the knowledge of his master; it is the distance between what he already knows and what he still doesn’t know but can learn by the same process. To help his pupil cover that distance, the ‘ignorant master’ need not be ignorant. He need only dissociate his knowledge from his

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91 Key proponents of this position were B.F. Skinner and Ivan Pavlov. These positions have largely been refuted on the basis that they deny the learner agency, and also separate individuals from their learning environment.

92 As Ream and Ream have noted, Dewey framed his hypothesis according to an assumption that subjects actively engaged with a ‘passive’ environment, meaning that an effective place of learning could only be judged according to its instrumental efficiency (2005:588). While Dewey’s argument is therefore limited as it creates a separation between the active nature of the subject and the passivity of the learning environment, his discussion does highlight how agency will develop in accordance with the way visitors negotiate modalities of play in the Gallery’s ambient space.

93 The notion of equality which Rancière refers to is informed by eighteenth century aesthetics, where philosophers such as Kant, Schiller and Hegel described a form of judgement freed from the hierarchies of knowledge and social life.
mastery. He does not *teach* his knowledge to the students. He commands them to venture forth in the forest, report what they see, what they think of what they have seen, to verify it, and so on. What he ignores is the gap between two intelligences. It is the linkage between the knowledge of the knowledgeable and the ignorance of the ignorant (Rancière 2007:275).

Rancière develops these concepts to describe an aesthetic regime of art which promotes equality and the destruction of hierarchies. He makes a contribution to art discourse by insisting that art and politics are two forms of ‘the distribution of the sensible’ (Carnevale and Kelsey 2007:259), where the sensible is an unstructured matter that precedes all else. Both art and politics become forms of intervention by acting on the sensible through processes of structuring, framing, and contextualising. Rancière therefore argues that art has the potential to disrupt the ‘consensus’ which has come to define contemporary forms of democracy. This consensus is concealed within the hierarchical inequalities we are subject to, and is reinforced by human organisation. He states that

> The main enemy of artistic creativity as well as of political creativity is consensus – that is, inscription within given roles, possibilities and competences… the world is divided between those who can and those who cannot afford the luxury of playing with words and images. Subversion begins when this division is contested…” (Carnevale and Kelsey 2007:263).

The Screen Gallery’s invitation to play with moving art is a means of subverting the traditional pedagogical hierarchy of the museum, as it facilitates an ‘equality of intelligences’ by making experiential interaction the basis of learning. The Gallery mediates a pedagogical space by encouraging forms of subjective participation in which visitors spatially inscribe themselves into spaces for play. Writing about videogames, Bernadette Flynn observes that individuals can be rendered active participants in technology-mediated play environments in the way that “games are not only watched but also moved in, between and around. If space is not only aesthetics, but also trajectories of navigation, then by definition the player is implicated as an agent in the structure of the game” (Flynn 2004:55). Visitors to the Screen Gallery therefore become ‘active agents’ through play-like participation, as they are both embedded within but also navigate the space of immersion. By engaging in these forms of participation, visitors also begin to transform the pedagogical hierarchy which has traditionally defined the museum.

In addition, and following Rancière’s discussion of the aesthetic regime of art, this form of participation generates a political potential. As Paul explains, playful and experiential interaction enhances visitors’ sense of autonomy and control over their environment:

> I’m really interested in software and things like that. …Like on the Playstation there’s this music production game and they give you a set of different sounds and you string them all together and make music …And I think people love it because you’re no longer playing a game
I mean it is still a game, it’s not like serious music software – but it’s like you’re actually making something of value, instead of just shooting aliens. So yeah, I think people really go for that kind of thing… I do think that there’s an emerging market of people that really value that interactivity, and when they use a piece of software they want to actually make something, they don’t want the game to do all the work, I guess… It’s that people want a degree of autonomy, over their environment, or something…

Therefore, when self-determined behaviour is linked with play, both the environment and actions of the visitor become active forces in creating conditions of learning. This form of play reflects the self-determined aspects of spatial navigation detailed in the fourth chapter, where I argued that the conditions of ambient space prompt highly active forms of behaviour and an interactive pedagogical exchange between museum and visitor. Furthermore, as ambient space is also characterised by a withdrawal of traditional museum conventions, the ‘rules of play’ in the Gallery are not steadfast or apparent, but open for negotiation. The Gallery therefore invites a ‘creative’ form of play fashioned by the active participation and self-determined behaviour which underscores interaction in ambient space. This form of play also creates a new mode of learning in the Gallery by transforming the way knowledge has traditionally circulated in the museum.

2: THE AESTHETICISATION OF REFLEXIVE KNOWLEDGE

Playful interaction with art mediates a specific manner of appropriating knowledge, as well as a specific form of knowledge. This is exemplified by the way play transgresses the conventional parameters of space and time within the museum:

Well, I think if anything the stuff I’ve seen previously has prepared me to not expect a start, middle and finish and an easy answer, and it all makes sense, and ‘oh, this films all about injustice and jails’ and I’ve summed it up and I can move on. I know with these things you can sometimes sit there and pick up different meanings to the next person, and perhaps at different points in the loop pick up different meanings and it’ll be different again the next time. …These things play around in your head later on, and maybe they mean something then (Sean).

When describing how a previous familiarity with time-based art had prepared him “to not expect a start, middle and finish and an easy answer”, Sean illustrated how reflexive perception ruptures the linear acquisition knowledge. Time-based art fragments the circulation of knowledge in the museum so that only brief moments and discontinuous experiences can be pieced together to create meaning. This ‘partiality’ of knowledge is reinforced by the way, as Sean had described, a work will “play around in your head later on”. Playfulness with the conventions and linearity of art therefore diversifies processes of learning, as pedagogical parameters no longer solely mediate knowledge in the museum. Instead, knowledge becomes
diffused as visitors spread meaning across multiple spatialities and temporalities, as Sean further iterated:

If the artist is setting out to tell a story, then they want people to be there at the start, middle and end. And if they’re looped compositions and it’s – I think there’s something beautiful about that you don’t always capture it in the first instance, and maybe the next time you come back you get something different. I mean, I think that’s terrific… I think that some compositions – like these looped compositions – they’re not about having a start, middle and end, there’s a transition. You know, if you don’t get the whole story, maybe that doesn’t matter. Maybe it’s not about that, that obvious sort of story.

In the previous chapter I had argued that art, when viewed as an object of technological knowledge, enables knowledge to circulate in a highly subjective manner through cognitive forms of agency. Playful interaction perpetuates this individualised circulation of knowledge, but specifically does so by inculcating knowledge with a partiality. This partiality is contingent upon the way that the modalities of affect, reflexive perception and cognition together influence the style, space and time of each individual’s play. I term this an *aestheticisation of reflexive knowledge*, where, in a playful and time based-based art environment, meaning becomes bound up within an individual’s ability to negotiate the simultaneity of both experiential and cognitive responses as valid sources of knowledge.

The aesthetic experience of play therefore resonates concurrently at the levels of affect and reflexive perception, while also generating new forms of literacy and meaning production. For example, Steven illustrates how he ‘calculated’ his commitment to the artwork by objectifying his aesthetic experience through rationalisation:

I can remember doing sort of calculations about ‘is this what it’s going to be, or is it interesting, or is something else going to happen in this piece, or is it just going to be long?’. Like, for instance, the one that’s the desert-scape one. Now, I don’t know how long I would have spent looking at that, not a really long time because I got to a point where I thought ‘I won’t see all of this but I’ll stay long enough to know what it’s doing, just kind of layering images of the desert’.

When the decision to remain with a work requires a visitor to “stay long enough to know what it’s doing”, a knowledge-based, cognitive mode of learning also appears to determine interaction. Sean had similarly described how, while his interaction with art resonated at a sensory level, the length of engagement was decided by a reflexive determination:

With those sort of works, there’s just a sense that you reach a kind of saturation point with it, and after… it stops delivering something new after a while, and that’s when I might move on… ‘I know what’s going on here’ or ‘I’ve got the pleasure that’s to be got out of this work’.
An aestheticisation of reflexive knowledge which arises from play therefore determines how experiential learning and embodied cognition become the dominant means with which visitors construct meaningful experiences.

**A tension in the aestheticisation of reflexive knowledge**

An aestheticised and reflexive knowledge also reflects the way visitors negotiate ‘boundaries’ and ‘rules’ – such as space and time – in environments beyond the museum. Visitors’ descriptions of play-like behaviour in the Gallery were indicative of the way they integrated reflexive perception, affective attunement and a critical engagement within their own lives. For example, Matthew was non-plussed by experiences of fracture: “You turn on the radio, you’re going to catch a song mid-song”, which for Sean, was a reflection of the spontaneous capacities of art:

> I’ve kind of wondered whether it might be disappointing to sit there for two hours and know that you’ve seen everything, and then that would be it. I think I kind of like the idea of going and seeing a bit and leaving and coming back, seeing some more, knowing that it would be different. You know how, like, you go and see a band and you can hear the same song over and over from a band and you enjoy it. But if you see a comedian and they tell the same joke, and you’ve already heard the joke once before, it’s not funny. I hate that. I wonder whether there’s anything in that.

However, for Trevor these very same qualities impeded his own interaction with art in the Gallery. The temporal and spatial rupture which allows knowledge to circulate partially and reflexively had made the paradigm for participation complex and difficult to contend with:

> Now, one of the things which the folks I was with and I talked about was – you know when you go to a tram-stop now, it actually tells you when the next tram’s coming, and it would be good to know when the loop’s finishing. So it would say ‘this thing’s got five minutes to go’ or ‘ten minutes to go’. It’d be easy to do. But then you come back and say – I’ll be back in five minutes, and I’ll pick up the beginning of it. So, that was one thing we thought of….Well, at what point have you started? Are you half-way through, or has it just started, just finished, or has it got a minute to go, or ten minutes to go? Because with a painting, you know that there’s no time on it, whereas with some of the movies, you didn’t know when the thing was going to finish.

This comment locates a tension in the aestheticisation of reflexive knowledge. On one hand, visitors are lured by the affective pull of ambient space, but may then struggle to negotiate the way that the reflexive perception and the cognition which condition play may stretch temporal boundaries. Therefore, while aesthetic experiences may resonate at a bodily level, the reflexive partiality of knowledge can interfere with the expression of agency at a level of cognition.
Reflexive knowledge beyond the museum

Playful interaction with time-based art in the Screen Gallery is exemplative of the way we experience the broken narratives in day-to-day life, described by Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim as “the processing of contradictory information, dialogue, negotiation, compromise – [which] is almost synonymous with living one’s own life” (2003:26). In the shift from modernisation to reflexive modernisation the ability to fluidly - or ‘playfully’ - negotiate various modalities of agency is a condition common to the circulation of knowledge in contemporary life, where individuals are becoming increasingly responsible for exercising their expertise in what Anthony Giddens has termed, ‘abstract systems’.\(^94\) The successful reflexive application of knowledge may become filtered according to states of differential power, meaning that some individuals or groups are more readily able to appropriate specialised knowledge than others (1990:54).\(^95\) This dynamic actually destabilises the spatial and temporal continuities in daily life, meaning that, as Giddens contends, “…living in the modern world is more like being aboard a careering juggernaut… rather than being in a carefully controlled and well-driven motor car” (Giddens 1990:53).

Play also exposes a dualism in the circulation of contemporary knowledge, where pursuing the desire to ‘know’ actually reveals the extent to which subjectively acquired knowledge can only ever be unstable and partial. This subjective manner of appropriating knowledge therefore perpetuates highly contingent forms of knowledge, and in doing so marks a shift from the formalised, categorical pedagogy imparted by museums of the past. While the problem of knowledge being absolute has long been a concern for philosophers of technology,\(^96\) what has shifted in recent times is the legitimation of knowledge circulating along partial and subjective channels, and further, the institutional demand that individuals develop the expertise to negotiate this dynamic reflexively. This exposes an inherent paradox within the new mediatary role that the Gallery plays in the transfer of knowledge to its visitors.

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\(^94\) Giddens writes that “abstract systems have provided a great deal of security in day-to-day life which was absent in pre-modern orders” (1990:112). He argues that we increasingly place our trust in abstract systems, as opposed to drawing upon vernacular knowledge, as was the case in pre-modern times.

\(^95\) Giddens argues that the reflexive appropriation of knowledge, along with separation of time and space and the development of disembedding mechanisms, are three key sources of dynamism in modernity and characterise modern institutions, such as pedagogical institutions like the museum (1990:54).

\(^96\) Perhaps most noteworthy is Heidegger’s (1977) ontology of technology which frames technology as a ‘tool’ which simultaneously reveals as it conceals.
On one hand, the Gallery continues to adhere to its remit by creating possibilities for learning and knowledge acquisition. However, as Trevor has illustrated, in doing so it perpetuates forms of knowledge which are partial and unstable, and actually serve to illuminate that which can’t be known. As a result, some visitors will struggle with the transition to a pedagogy which demands a high degree of self-responsibility characteristic of playful learning. This suggests that the play which teaches visitors to be ‘mobile’ in the Gallery reflects the skills required to switch easily between various modalities of agency, if to make meaning from aesthetic, experiential, but also rational and highly cognitive experiences. However, as I will now show by returning to discussion of Lynette Wallworth's *Hold: Vessel 1*, this tension finds resolution when playful interaction with art mediates ritual and generates new forms of public intimacy. This resolution takes shape in the form of a politics arising within the potential for communal behaviour.

3: NEW POLITICS AND PUBLIC INTIMACIES

**Ritualistic play**

Already *Hold* is a ‘new media classic’. But unlike many examples of the genre, it features no obvious battery of high-tech machinery. And participation with it requires zero technical expertise. Its interface is not much more than curiosity hinged to compassion for our floating world and for everyone adrift in its delicate biosphere. It’s a communal work about fellow-feelings, about unexpected edits and alliances. Many fans of *Hold* tell how they love the way you can hang back from grabbing a bowl so that you can observe the kindness of strangers as they offer the specimen worlds to each other and chat about how best to garner full wonder (Gibson 2004:126-128).

Ross Gibson lucidly conveys how *Hold*, within only a few brief moments, can simultaneously evoke several powerfully resonant characteristics of play. At the opening of this chapter *Hold* was classified a ‘playful’ work in the way visitors ‘tested’ the rules and boundaries of interaction with art by exploring the bowls and their contents. However, a modality of play arises within interactions other than those taking place between the visitor and art object. It also emerges within moments of communal exchange between visitors, where bowls are shared between strangers, or passed onto those entering the room, as Steven illustrates:

The bowl one was interesting. We walked straight past that, we thought it was just a display of three bowls. But coming back, there was an ACMI person standing there, he was talking to a few people and he told them to pick up the bowl and take them into the room next door, so we didn’t realise there was anything in there. But we followed those people in there and saw the projecting images on the bowls. But that was quite clever...I guess you – it really is
interactive. You have to hold the bowl and the image is projected on a bowl and I guess if you move the bowl around you can distort the image and it’s quite a personal thing… There’s only three people at a time, so that was quite fun. And the fact that we could be trusted with a glass bowl.

Here, play mediates knowledge of a cultural and social nature through moments of ritual, where play forms relations of social communication between visitors.

In the development of his discussion about public culture, Richard Sennett argues that adults experience a form of play through ritual, as social relations and aesthetic relations share the common root of play. For Sennett, to play means to be socially mobile and to be able to challenge conventions, or ‘rules’, in an effort to alter one’s social circumstances. Like Huizinga, he develops his position by drawing upon theories of childhood development. He describes how the playful behaviour of children facilitates an understanding of social conventions, as it teaches children to separate interaction with others from the immediate desires of the self. Upon achieving this, a child can “do qualitative work on expression by exploring, changing, and refining the quality of these conventions” (1978:266). Sennett argues that performative play has an important function in a child’s development, as it not only allows for a knowledge of ‘rules’, but, through ‘play-acting’, also enforces a working knowledge of self-empowerment and control:

The work on the quality of the rules of play is pre-aesthetic work. It is focus on the expressive quality of a convention. It teaches a child to believe in these conventions. It prepares the child for a specific aesthetic kind of work, performing, because the child learns to orient himself to the expressive content of a ‘text’. Play teaches a child that, when he suspends his desire for immediate gratification, and replaces this by interest in the content of rules, he achieves a sense of control over and manipulability over what he expresses (1978:321).

The ability to play therefore equips children with a capacity to be reflexive. This takes form as an understanding of the ways that conventions and rules are enacted, and within an individual’s capacity to apply this knowledge within social environments later in life. Sennett uses this understanding of behavioural development to propose that public culture is in decline, as society is becoming too narcissistically intent on ‘expressing’ itself, rather than being expressive, and in doing so is losing its ability to play (1978:266).  

97 Sennett describes the nineteenth century as a time in which people lost their belief in self-expression, and consequently elevated the artist as a figure who could master these expressive powers. He uses the classic tradition of theatrum mundi to develop an account of a society where there is ‘impersonal space to play’, a theatrical society which related “everyday action with acting” (1978:266).
In light of the link Sennett draws between play and the development of a public culture, it appears that the Screen Gallery is realising a new political potential by including works such as *Hold* in its exhibitions. Not only does the work have an especial capacity to elicit playful behaviour as visitors each interact with their own bowl, but it also generates new social relations *between* visitors as they gather together to play with each other’s projections of light. Public culture therefore finds a form of resurrection within the interface offered by moving image art, and a museum which draws together both ritual and play in its ambient spaces.

**The political potential in play**

These new cultural possibilities extend beyond the museum as public screens are proliferating in a number of urban spaces, from ‘Fedcam’ in Federation Square, touch-screen information kiosks throughout city streets, to highly-personalised locative media. Each of these sites for the screen reconfigures public and private space through the social relations they mediate.\(^9^8\) However, the Screen Gallery mediates a distinctive configuration of social relationships due to the way its visitors experience its spaces. On one hand, it is clearly a public place – it is a government-funded institution with unrestricted entry and a historically entrenched remit devoted to civic responsibility. Yet on the other, as Paul illustrates, the ambient darkness and the liminality of screen space evoke feelings of privacy and seclusion:

> Yeah, and it is quite a private experience, like if you’re in a very well-lit gallery… with white walls and lots of lighting, I dunno, you’re a bit more conscious of the people around you when you’re looking at the art as well… But if you go in that place, you just go and sit and you watch. It’s like, people sort of use it like a bit of a cinema, I guess. It’s quite a sort of private thing.

As Paul has described, it is the darkness of the Gallery which blurs the boundary between the domains of public and private. Where in previous chapters I have argued that the affective conditions of ambient space blur the rules for procedure, Paul has also shown how ambience blurs the rules of engagement – or rules of play – between members of the visiting public.

Fleur described how an impression of private encounters in public space affected her interaction with others in the Gallery: "Yeah, it has that feeling of private space, to it. There’s never a lot of people there when I’ve been down there… And because you can’t see people as clearly as in a gallery, a well-lit gallery, there is that element where it crosses into private

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\(^9^8\) A number of authors have recently commented on the social potential of play with screens in public space, noting the importance of ‘locative’ sites in the mediation of new social relationships. For example, cultural theorist and urban planner Miriam Struppek (2006) considers the potential for screens to act as mediation devices in urban space. Scott McQuire (2006) tracks the politicisation of public ‘image space’, proposing that new social relations can be mediated through public screens, and elicit a political potential through the reappropriation of public space.
space. But it’s still very much a public space, you know… I don’t think I’ve spoken to anyone else down there, I don’t think so”. For Matthew retention of this privacy was paramount, suggesting that he preferred to stay within the perimeters of visibility and reside in the Gallery’s shadows. This allowed him to indulge a moment of scopophilic pleasure through playful observation and awareness of others:

I did think about this when I sat down, and went ‘oh, I think I’d prefer to sit at the back… also for my perspective. Not just because the spotlights were on the couch, but because of perspective. And you can also kind of see where everyone else is… You can’t really do that when you’re sitting in the middle.

These comments show how the ambient space of the Gallery renders it a complex public space, as visitors seem to relate to one another as much through a dynamic of separation, as communal behaviour. However, museums have not traditionally been responsible for facilitating opportunities for communal behaviour between visitors. Rather, they have either individualised their visitors as citizens requiring public edification in the governmental museum, or, autonomised them as agents responsible for construction of their own subjective experience within the highly-interactive ‘new’ museum. This raises questions as to how the screen, if mediating an intersection of public and private forms of viewership, may facilitate an expression of agency by facilitating new forms of visitor participation with art.

**A new public intimacy**

The conflation of public and private behaviour in the Gallery signals a liminal space which breeds both a familiarity and strangeness within the visitation experience. It is within this play between familiarity and strangeness that new forms of communal experience are being generated, as Steven describes:

Look, it’s a public space, yeah? But there are degrees of approaching art. I’m always very, very, aware of approaching other people – where they’re standing, where they’re sitting, what they’re doing, where they’re moving around. And that’s an interesting kind of part of the experience… Look, it’s quite different to going to the movies, because I think at the movies we – even if we go to the cinema, we kind of pretend that it’s a private experience, and we get irritated if people intrude on our viewing of the work, or the film. But I think… the kind of interaction with people is quite fun.

Steven’s comment is telling of the way visitors form social relationships when encountering one another in ambient space. At first, he noted how the gradual awareness of others in the Gallery constituted an important part of his visitation experience. He spoke of something intensely private, and intimate, about his perception of the space, despite also being acutely aware of sharing it with others. The kinds of social relations which exist in the Gallery are
unlike the conventional relations which stratify public image space. Clearly, the spatial context of the screen also influences the shaping of interpersonal experiences in a space, whether the seeming privacy of a darkened, cinema theatre, the spectacle of a public screen in a city square, or a blurring of these spaces when communicating via mobile phone or using the internet. As an open-endedly playful place for learning, the Gallery, in its blurring of distinctive public and private space, has created a new public intimacy in which new social relations can be formed.

This public intimacy in the Screen Gallery formed opportunities for communicative exchange between visitors. Katrina, for example, took this opportunity to assist others in their processes of play and learning:

Katrina: But if there’s something cool or whatever, I don’t mind if I’m on my own, I just say ‘Go have a look at this or go have a look at that’ – I’ve done that before.

Natalia: To other people? To point them in the direction?

Katrina: Yeah, I go ‘this is how you use this here’.

Natalia: Oh, okay.

Katrina: ‘and this is a good film to watch’ …It seems a bit weird, but I let them know the things that I think are cool.

The forms of communication between visitors need not be as overtly verbal as Katrina’s. Lev Manovich describes how technology can mediate significant forms of non-verbal interaction with others. He suggests that forms of gesture, as an externalisation of mind processes, can reflect a desire to return to pre-language communication:

Here, as with the earlier technology of film, the fantasy of objectifying and augmenting consciousness, extending the powers of reason, goes hand in hand with the desire to see in technology a return to the primitive age of pre-language, pre-misunderstanding. Locked in virtual reality caves, with language taken away, we will communicate through gestures, body movements, and grimaces, like our primitive ancestors (2000:59).

With a degree of pessimism he argues that this externalisation result from a standardisation of modern mass society, where the private and individual are translated into the public and become regulated so that “what was unique became mass-produced. What was hidden in an individual’s mind became shared” (Manovich 2000:60-61). However, I argue that these same forms of technology-mediated, non-verbal interaction also offer individuals the possibility of communicating with one another through the new forms of public intimacy which arise when playing with art.
For example, many visitors were acutely aware of ‘sharing’ the space with others, and would at times silently acknowledge the entry or presence of others in the room. These non-verbal forms of communication also signalled a sharing of ritualised experience. The public intimacy mediated by works such as *Hold* therefore creates possibilities for communicative learning with other visitors. For instance, while Matthew had expressed a desire to remain on the perimeters of visibility, he discovered a pleasure in sharing the space with others, as described in his encounter with a stranger in *Drift*:

I just went in, sat down and was prepared to give it my two or three minutes of seeing it, whether it took me or not, and I sat down and this girl said to me ‘what’s your name?’ and I just told her my name, and she told me her name, and then we just watched it together. It was kind of enjoyable… kind of feeling like we were experiencing it together… Wondering whether the other person next to me was seeing the same thing, because there was kind of like an understanding.

This comment suggests that the new public intimacy appears to resonate at the level of perception and affect, a ‘feeling like we were experiencing it together’. The shared presence of bodies in space can act as a form of communicative exchange where a subtle acknowledgment of a visitor’s entry into the space of screen perception, and the sense of a body’s warmth and movement close to one’s own, generates an awareness of intimate relations between strangers in public space. As put simply by Matthew, “when there’s two people it’s more of a shared experience”.

Screen Gallery curator Mike Stubbs further describes how interaction with the Gallery’s art can be differently construed according to these intimate relations. He says that “you can observe that through seeing it a number of times around and depending on where you go into the loop of the media, it appears like a different piece of work. And according to who’s in the room, in the way that any viewing experience is a communal activity or a single experience” (2005a). It is therefore within the blurring of boundaries of public and private behaviour that visitors begin to engage in a form of play which determines how they choose to negotiate the rules of interaction with others - whether in ways which reinforce segregation, or in a manner which creates opportunities for communal experience. However, the communal experiences generated by intimacy also create new possibilities for learning in the museum.

**Communal intimacy and learning**

Art education theorist Carol Jeffers believes that the museum can become a dialogical space where processes of meaning production can be enhanced by the dynamics of community. She suggests that this is made possible by the way that communities encompass a diversity of communicative discourses. Drawing from the tradition of development theorists such as
Dewey, Jeffers proposes that a shared communication of ideas can mediate both discursive and non-discursive forms of meaning, so that “socially authored and individually checked, ideas travel and are illuminated in the interactive space between the members of the dialectical community and the art that is the focus of the discourse” (2003:116). While Jeffers focuses her attention towards the ways that these ideas may be applicable within the context of secondary schooling, they can be considered more broadly within the context of the Screen Gallery. For example, mediating knowledge through communality could be seen as a way of overcoming Trevor’s anxiety about the highly subjective and partial status of knowledge in the museum, for, as further emphasised by Jeffers, when communication of ideas become a shared experience, the “group’s aesthetic judgement counts as knowledge and not merely as opinion – but only if the world is understood as being comprised of human relationships, rather than isolated individuals” (2003:117). Andrea Witcomb develops a similar thesis which outlines a new communicative potential in museum practice. She draws from James Clifford’s (1977) concept of ‘contact zones’ in the museum,\(^99\) proposing that a dialogic relationship between communities, curators and policy-makers can be initiated so that communities can pursue their specific interests through an expanded sense of public culture, as “it is possible to create a role for museums which focuses on their ability to translate between different groups without seeing this process as merely one of facilitation” (2003:101).\(^100\)

In sum, when entering into the Gallery’s communal space visitors develop strategies of observation and awareness of social relations which manifest through ritualised play. Ritualised play enables visitors to renegotiate the rules of public and private space through the creation of a new public intimacy. They define their relationships with others in the space through a playing with personal boundaries, whether reasserting one’s privacy or indulging opportunities for conversation with others. These are all modes of communal behaviour which allow a knowledge of social relations to circulate, whether at a cognitive dialogical exchange, or an affective, sensory level when simply sharing the viewing space with others. Through processes of collective, communicative exchange knowledge can exceed its partiality and become shared as a collage of partial knowledges.

\(^99\) The notion of the museum as a contact zone was developed by James Clifford to suggests that museum practices should facilitate a new series of relationships and exchanges between audiences, communities and practitioners, and thereby provide a strategy for managing and developing an expanded sense of public culture (1977).

\(^100\) Witcomb also emphasises the need for an awareness of the ways these relationships are activated and utilised, as “dialogue… cannot occur without some strategies for translation” (2003:93). In doing so she is also arguing for greater critical and practical attentiveness towards the periodic tensions and phases of transformation which have historically shaped the museum.
Jacque Rancière argues that contemporary forms of art play are central role in mediating a new political potential through communal experiences. In his vision of pedagogy, he attributes this possibility to the hybridisation and blurring of knowledge boundaries which are characteristic of contemporary art, proposing that “it should be a matter of linking what one knows with what one does not know, of being at the same time performers who display their competences and spectators who are looking to find what those competences might produce in a new context, among unknown people” (2007:280). As Bettina Funcke explains with reference to Rancière’s position, emancipatory possibilities arise through the joint sharing of these efforts:

The politics begins when we stop balancing profit and loss and worry instead about distributing that which is common, creating communal shares and the bedrock of a sense of community. Art can be a response to the inequality of inherited hierarchies, whether the systems or art history or those of a domineering popular culture; it can break them down and propose new connections, activating previously overlooked capacities” (2007:284).

Within our contemporary society spaces of intersubjective contact, rather than taking place in urban spaces, are increasingly mediated by information-based environments. This means that mediatory spaces which also make possible communal behaviour through face-to-face contact, such as the museum, can play an increasingly significant political role. The Screen Gallery therefore serves an important function in making malleable the conventions of public and private behaviour, as it creates the conditions for a public intimacy in which new possibilities for interpersonal interaction can arise. By playing in this space, visitors negotiate and renegotiate the tensions which arise from historically embedded interpersonal relationships, and allow for a broader circulation of contemporary knowledge. This creates the grounds for a new political potential to be expressed within moments of communal behaviour.

Conclusion
Throughout this dissertation I have detailed how from the nineteenth century to these early stages of the twenty-first, the museum has broadly maintained a responsibility to educate its patrons, where, to varying degrees, themes of citizenship, aesthetic appreciation and the cultivation of cultural codes have each informed its governmental remit. In previous chapters I 101 Rancière write that contemporary forms of spectatorship require “spectators who are active interpreters, who render their own translation, who appropriate the story for themselves, and who ultimately make their own story out of it. An emancipated community is in fact a community of storytellers and translators” (2007:280).

102 For example, Gerard Raiti details how newspapers and televisions in the nineteenth and twentieth century have been significant ‘quasi-mediators’, whereas 21st century mediation is steeped within far more complex forms of interactivity. This is the result of an “eruption in dialogical flow and multi-flow communications rather than the traditional one-way flow of mass media dissemination” in which the mediatory spaces of instant messaging and VoIP are increasingly redefining human interactions (2007).
have argued that the Screen Gallery represents a new typology of museum by relaxing traditional museological conventions through the creation of an ambient space, and elevating the visitor’s responsibility for interaction with art.

This chapter has argued that playful behaviour in the Screen Gallery creates new possibilities for experiences of self-empowerment and control. Richard Sennett and Johan Huizinga theorised play according to the way it enables an exploration of cultural rules. By fostering an awareness of the conventions of daily life, and a practice which develops the skills and expertise necessary to negotiate these conventions, play can infuse public life with greater cultural meaning and enhance an individual’s social mobility by facilitating a sense of empowerment and control over one’s environment.

I also argued that playful interaction in the Screen Gallery mediates a reflexive, aestheticised knowledge which can only ever be partial and subjective. A pedagogy arising from play appears to challenge the way learning and education have traditionally been expressed within the pedagogy of the museum, and in doing so reveals the way contemporary forms of knowledge circulate in an age of fragmented codes. When interaction with art becomes highly experiential and subjective, meaningful interaction resides in a playful negotiation of new literacies. When social relations in the Gallery take shape within a reflexive knowledge, they are similarly characterised by a fleetingness, instability and partiality, as the rules of play conflate the domains of public and private interaction, and generate an increasing number of intimate encounters.

A political potential arises in the way that visitors negotiate this tension through forms of ritualised play. A new public intimacy emerges through ritual, where visitors develop new systems of communication to collate and circulate forms of social knowledge and experience. This public intimacy constitute a praxis for a politics of movement, as it offers visitors a means of negotiating the way public culture is being transformed through technology-mediated experiences, such as an increasing proliferation of screen technologies, both in public and private spaces. The following chapter dovetails with this examination of play to consider how stillness may also be a serious cultural activity which elicits new modes of learning in the museum, and a praxis which can become expressed within a politics of movement.
CHAPTER SEVEN

Stillness

The word ‘breathing’ seems to describe the rhythm much more accurately than pulse.

What could you possibly learn from looking at a piece like *Drift*? There’s no information in it, and there’s no kind of semblance of truth in it, and it doesn’t even tell you a story.

Mike Stubbs, curator of *White Noise* (2005a).

**Introduction**

Reaching the end of the Screen Gallery, visitors face the mouth of a darkened corridor. Following it entails a number of twists and turns. This small journey is one laced with anticipation, enhanced by the vibrations rolling loose from *Drift*’s entrance. This work, by Ulf Langheinrich, was curated as the final work in *White Noise* [Figure 7.1]. Its placement within the context of the exhibition is significant, for, by virtue of Mike Stubbs’ exhibition design, visitors would have experienced the exhibition's immersive potential at its fullest, as they would have by now walked the entire length of the Gallery.

[Figure 7.1] Ulf Langheinrich, *Drift*, 2005

Entering into *Drift* is akin to entering – or becoming ensnared by - a great hum. Projected across one entire wall, the work uses abstract visual forms to draw visitors into its meditational folds, while quadraphonic sound circulates in smooth, heavy pulses, like the steady rumble of a train running over deep-set tracks. The only figurative image of *White Noise* appears in the opening sequences of *Drift*. These are the fatty tentacles of an octopus. They slide together in
an oily mess, spread slick and enormous before the visitor. As this image slowly fades a succession of dark, vibrating lines begin to appear, much like the horizontal static of a poorly-tuned television. Ever so gradually the ambient timbre intensifies, the hum becomes more persistent and atmospheric undulations more frequent, until both room and body seem to expand with intensity. Throbbing vibrations connect ground to feet, roll along skin, and find their way into deep interiors until organs and sinew each become subsumed by Drift’s thick, heart-gripping drone. The installation’s tight, affective grasp only becomes apparent upon the sudden release of this tension; the room lightens and hum eases as the screen whitens with faint patterns, like a window opening outward from a darkened room.

Throughout observational analysis, Drift appeared compellingly immersive. Visitors often tried to create a space of privacy in which to view this work, choosing to slip into the shadows of the back wall and floor, rather than take a seat on the hazily-lit ottomans placed before the projections. Once seated, visitors received the work with complete stillness, many unmoving as if lulled into a deeply focused state of attention by the shiftings of light and sound. As Colleen describes, this concentration arises because Drift resonates internally, and intimately, and is akin to a meditative encounter:

Colleen: Yeah, I was just – I can’t – it wasn’t – there wasn’t any other emotion or feeling behind it other than feeling relieved, and comfortable, and relaxed. It was almost meditative, I think.
Natalia: Right. And were you thinking about anything in particular as you were sitting there?
Colleen: I was actually trying not to think about anything!
Natalia: That’s quite hard sometimes.
Colleen: I didn’t want it to be influenced by the morning’s happenings. I just wanted to go in, and just to be really relaxed, and just focus on nothing, really.
Natalia: And it was successful in doing that?
Colleen: Yeah. And I think that that was really quite good. I don’t know if that’s what the artist intended, or that if he was trying to make me think of something special, but that’s what I got out of it.
Natalia: What made it meditative?
Colleen: I think it was just the relaxing pattern. I mean, I don’t know the technology behind it, but the idea of whatever was moving – first it looked like water, then it looked like clouds, and I just thought ‘this is relaxing’.

The following chapter investigates how the materialisation of stillness in the Screen Gallery relates to the modalities of movement and agency explored thus far, thereby seeking a further exploration of the way visitors experience the spatial ambience of ACMI’s Screen Gallery. In
the previous chapter I argued that housing time-based art in a gallery with ‘relaxed’ museum conventions has infused visitor engagement with creative forms of play. I proposed that this form of play manifests as a significant cultural activity within the museum, as it allows a new modality of agency expression in the form of an aestheticised, reflexive knowledge, and generates a political potential through a new, public intimacy. By way of comparison, in this chapter I ask why at times visitors appear to concentrate more deeply and slow their movements, or withdraw from the active playing discussed in the previous chapter. In short, I ask how agency and a new political potential find expression within states of stillness.

The first part of the discussion details the ways that stillness is created through specific characteristics of the Gallery’s art, then draws from Brian Massumi’s notion of ‘potential movement’ (2004) to propose that stillness mediates a distinctive form of agency. This agency is enacted when visitors are seated, or remaining still, and therefore suggests that stillness can be regarded a productive state of visitor behaviour. Rather than regarding stillness a symptom of visitor passivity, inertia or stability, it becomes laden with a potential for visitor agency. The second part of this chapter details how the modalities of affect, perception and cognition interrelate within a visitor’s experience of stillness. I describe how stillness is characterised by a focused state of visitor attention, and draw upon Henri Lefebvre’s description of ‘eurrhythmic’ congruence (2004) to detail how this focus heightens visitors’ affective awareness of their spatial environment. This awareness was described by visitors in relation to impressions of beauty, peace and calm – strong, emotional responses which indicate how a ‘rhythmic’ congruence can be felt within one’s environment. Feelings of congruence therefore reflect a capacity for a highly subjective, self-determined form of agency, as it wells from deeply internal recesses when visitors take the opportunity to reflect, and develop a complex awareness of self. The final part of this chapter returns to discussion of Ulf Langheinrich’s Drift, where I argue that this awareness elicits a new form of visitor praxis. I draw upon visitors’ accounts of daydreaming to argue that when self-awareness ‘resonates’ with the immensity of one’s encounter with art, the opportunity to reflect in the Gallery illuminates the ways that visitors can challenge conventional ways of living by drawing upon their own creativity, productivity and inspiration. This signifies the ‘reverberation’ of a new political potential.

1: STILLNESS

While moving image art in the Screen Gallery elicits modalities of play, it can also temper the Gallery’s ambience by privileging a slower pace of visitor engagement, or even cease a visitor’s path of movement altogether. For example, Matthew described how he felt obligated to pause and take a few extra moments to sit with a work, and become still to see it from the
beginning: “they all kind of followed that same - not all of them - but they followed that same looping technique, where just coincidentally I seemed to walk in on it at exactly the right time, and nothing was happening with most of them…. So, I actually had to sit and wait.” Matthew has also highlighted how it is the temporal, or ‘looped’ nature of moving image art which compels stillness. As Jonathon details, this is because it offers viewers little indication in the way of ‘entry’ or ‘exit’ points for participation:

I think it’s a lot to do with the work itself… That, there’s a kind of genre of moving image artwork that works really well in that space, and that’s the one that’s kind of like… repetitive, that it doesn’t really have a narrative, that it just kind of rolls over – it might be a two minute loop, or it might be a twelve minute loop, or it might be, you know, a three hour loop – but it’s still a kind of loop.

Visitors also described how the task of negotiating multiple time-based screens in a singular gallery space affected both their perception and experience of time. Katrina, for example, observed that “if you came in at the wrong time you had to stay for the whole time to get the whole story”. Steven indicated that time-based art even appeared to loosen the temporal boundaries of the Screen Gallery, which in turn distinguished the spatial experience of the Gallery from more traditional art settings:

Steven: The other thing that really stood out was this kind of time factor, or time quality the space has, that – when I go to an art gallery that’s still image works or sculpture, I tend to whiz through, I tend to take things in and move fairly quickly. But, at ACMI, there’s this kind of invitation to spend more time, to settle in with the work for, you know, a while. I think there was a piece that was like a five hour piece, you could spend a whole day in there… So that had that kind of, sort of duration.

Natalia: Is that just because it is exhibiting screen art and they’re on long loops, or is it something else about the space which makes you think you can linger?

Steven: No, I think it’s just that the works are time-based, and there’s… I mean, you often don’t know, like, I often don’t know how long a work is until I encounter it… If a work is being exhibited and there’s standing space and there’s sitting space, and you might stand and watch for a while and think ‘oh, this is interesting’ and sit down, and then, there’s always the question of how long do I spend with this?

These comments indicate that by dedicating its exhibition space to moving image art, the Screen Gallery has cultivated a new temporal paradigm for visitor participation. This paradigm is characterised by decelerating and still modes of engagement. However, this raises questions as to how slower, or ‘still’, forms of participation in the Gallery can elicit forms of agency and a praxis which contribute to a politics of movement. The modalities of agency I have detailed in previous chapters have all emerged from performative forms of interaction,
such as the navigation of dimly-lit passageways, the reflexive negotiation of multiple time-based screens, and playing with art and other visitors. I argued that these forms of participation offered a praxis for negotiating the conditions of everyday life, as they reflected the way individuals, as ‘combinards’, must manage the quick-paced environment of reflexive modernity. Stillness clearly lacks the performative participation of play, meaning that it cannot elicit agency or a praxis in the form of aestheticised, reflexive knowledge. However, if viewing stillness as a state which exists as an inverse of movement, rather than a state lacking in movement, it becomes possible to locate agency within a process of maintaining stillness, and as a result, engender what Brian Massumi (2004) calls a potential for movement.

Stillness: a state of potential movement

In his account of the philosophy and praxis underlying Lars Spuybroek’s wetGRID design, Massumi describes how Spuybroek was attempting to draw together the experience of viewing images with the spatial experience of moving through buildings, a “meta-architectural exploration of the interconnection between perception and construction” (2004:322). Spuybroek drew from the premise that while movement can be understood as “the actual content of architecture” (2004:322), it is more difficult to draw correlations between the properties of movement and perception of still images. He developed the idea of ‘potential movement’ to breach a commonality between the two, paraphrased here by Massumi:

> Potential movement is ‘abstracted into’ the architecture, he [Spuybroek] says, ‘and that abstract movement loops back and relates again to people’s movement’. Potentials for movement are extracted from actual movement, then fed back into it via architecture. We normally think of abstraction as a distancing from the actual, but here potentials are being ‘abstracted into it’. This means that elements are built into the design that trigger the movement actually under way into a state of overlap with changes in its register, with possible continuations, or with alternatives to itself (2004:323).

What Spuybroek has attempted to inscribe into his work is the idea of ‘tendency’, an ‘affordance’ which manifests as “a possibility of convergence that unconsciously exerts a pull, drawing the body forward into a movement the body already feels itself performing before it actually stirs” (Gibson in Massumi 2004:324). This idea suggests that the act of sitting – and viewing an image - can be reconceived as a state laden with a potential for movement, as Massumi further details:

> Sitting still is the performance of a tendency towards movement. The tendency is already a movement, without the actual movement. And it is already a sign of the fulfilment of the conventional function, without the actual fulfilment. It is the pre-performance, in potential, of

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103 This project was exhibited at the Musée des Beaux-Arts 1999-2000.
the movement and its function. In potential, the movement is already in the world without yet having extended itself along its actual path. It is in intensity (2004:324).

Sitting can therefore be regarded an 'active' state, where 'tendency' - indeed intensity - charges stillness with a potential for movement. Conventions which invite still forms of participation in an interactive museum are therefore an opportunity to express one’s agency, as one cannot feel the full momentum of tendency, if not having had first remained still.

Sitting is therefore dynamic with a potential for actualisation and change. At one level, the process of sitting and waiting for a work to begin or end generates a potential for movement, as visitors must actively decide at which point they will move towards another work. For example, when comparing Clare Langan’s *Too Dark for Night* and Carrol and Friedel’s *History of a Day*, Heidi described how she actively drew upon her perception of narrative to make this decision:

I think I sat in that one [TDFN] for about ten minutes, and I thought that was great – that you can see it all, and come half-way through, stay fifteen minutes and get it all. And so that one’s really good because there’s a start and a story –whatever it is, whatever the story is, I don’t know if I got it. But then with the first one [HoaD] it’s good because it doesn’t have a start or an end… It’s not so much a story, and I like it that you don’t know where the start or end is and you can just sit there for as long as you want to.

However, conditions of stillness in the Screen Gallery also generate a less performative form of movement. This potential for agency is articulated within the ‘internal’ shift which arises within stillness, when visitors eschew reflexive forms of interaction, and instead maintain a focused state of attention.

2: AFFECTIVE AWARENESS

The focusing of attention in stillness

Visitors’ interaction with Friedel and Carrol's *History of a Day* demonstrated how a focused attention arises within a potential for movement. This work comprises five screens arranged in a pentagonal shape. Visitors could engage with this work whilst moving or still, either seating themselves on an ottoman set within the pentagon, or viewing the work while walking around its outside perimeter. *World Without End*’s curator, Alessio Cavallaro, commented that *History of a Day* was strategically placed at the front of the exhibition to allow visitors a few moments to sit, contemplate, and become familiarised with - as well as immersed by - the exhibition environment. As a result, the work came to mediate a number of different types of still and playful encounter, as described by Steven:
Sean: I was aware that there was other stuff going on around the gallery, because there was a huge, big – that train montage-thing further on. So I knew that was there, I could see that out the corner of your eye because there’s spaces in-between screens, but at the same time I wasn’t hurried, I was happy to stay in that first display and sit there and look at it. And I was actually trying to work out if it was the same image on every screen with a time delay, or –

Natalia: But you were missing because you were turning your head?

Sean: Yeah, exactly. So that was interesting. And Luke who was with me, he sat down and watched one particular screen, whereas I sort of moved around. When I got the edge I could see two or three screens at once, so I was just trying to work out what the story was.

On one hand, the ‘gaps’ between these screens could fragment visitors’ attention, and mediate forms of reflexive perception. Sean described how he “moved around”, as he was drawn to these ‘gaps’, and switched between states of distraction and concentration as he exchanged peripheries and centres of focus. By reflexively viewing segments of the Gallery he caught glimpses of works set more deeply within the exhibition space. However, the close arrangement of the five screens also created a veiled, intimate space which confined visitors’ attention within the spatial parameters of the work. Unlike Sean, Luke remained seated. His experience was conditioned by stillness. He sat observing a single screen and maintained a focused state of attention, as compared to reflexive perception.

**Affective awareness**

Sean’s comment about Luke’s engagement with *History of a Day* shows how within strongly affective experiences of art, peripheral distractions and the tangential sounds of neighbouring exhibits can be made to recede when one focuses their attention. Returning to the example of viewing *History of a Day*, it can be seen that this manner of attention enables visitors to become more receptive towards the affective experience of viewing art.

*History of a Day* flutters with time-lapse images, a soothing rhythm of night turning to day, turning to night again. Cycles of nature, life and environment flicker steadily, and continuously. On one hand, each screen has been allocated its own narrative, a temporal illustration of a day’s passing within natural and human-made landscapes. A fairground, for example, was shot at night-time and showed crowds arriving, swarming, alighting rides and departing again, with what seemed to be a frenetic urgency. However, if to allow the work’s narrative to become overwhelmed by affect and yield to the projection’s visual and aural rhythm, it is also possible to abstract the figurative logic of each scene. Cognitive interpretation recedes as the senses become flooded, and in turn slows the pace of reflexive...
perception. Without the imposition of a linear narrative, for example, the work’s images begin to unfold with a new slowness, an almost organic grace. The main ride depicted, akin to a Christmas-lit Hills Hoist,\(^{104}\) comes to resemble the slowly beating wings of a moth in lamplight [Figure 7.2]. Its arms lift, rotate, and drop, repeated over and again in the fairground floodlights. People, rides and the dark sky gradually blend into a meditation on colour, rhythm and sound, a palette comprising the many moments which emerge and pass at a night-time carnival.

![Figure 7.2](image)

[Figure 7.2] Simon Carrol and Martin Friedel, *History of a Day*, 2004

A potential for agency arises within this concentration of attention, for, as Brian Eno describes with reference to *It’s Gonna Rain* by Steve Reich,\(^ {105}\) it generates a greater awareness of the subtle points of one’s experiential environment:

> The piece is very, very interesting because it’s tremendously simple. It’s a piece that anybody could of made. But the results, sonically, are very complex. What happens when you listen to that piece is that your listening brain becomes habituated in the same way that your eye does if you stare at something for a long time. If you stare at something for a very long time your eye very quickly cancels the common information, stops seeing it, and only notices the differences. This is what happens with that piece of music (1996a).

Within the context of the Screen Gallery, a style of focused observation elicits an expression of agency in the form of a complex, affective awareness. Affective awareness emerges when the compulsion to cognitively interpret a work lessens, and reflexive perception slows as one’s attention begins to focus. Brian Eno’s account of the role of silence in ambient music provides a close analogy as to how experiences of stillness in the Screen Gallery become dynamic with an enhanced affective awareness. He describes how silences - a ‘stillness’ in sound - actually draw attention to the aural experience which has preceded, as the ‘‘rests’ are invariably filled

\(^{104}\) A Hills-hoist is a form of rotary washing-line common in Australia.

\(^{105}\) For this work Reich used two tape-recorders to capture the sounds of San Francisco’s Union Square in 1965. As he played back the two tracks they slipped out of unison as one player was moving at a faster speed. The resulting effect was an echoing of the words “it’s gonna… it’s gonna… rain… rain…”, which reflected Reich’s disillusionment with the politics of the time (Reich 2000).
in by ‘echoes’ of previously heard fragments” (in Tamm 1989:134). In other words, while an aural environment comprises both sound and silence, the experience of listening is heightened by silences, for they create a space of reflection which resonates with the impressions of sound which have passed. The Gallery is an ambient chamber which echoes with affective forms of experiential encounter, rather than echoes of sound. Echoes of visitor encounter are also intensified by stillness. Stillness focuses attention, so that visitors garner an affective awareness of their spatial environment. This awareness constitutes a distinctive form of agency within the museum, for it enables visitors to locate what Henri Lefebvre describes as a ‘rhythmic’ congruence between their subjective experience and the conditions of their external environment.

**Rhythmic congruence**

In his theory of rhythmnanalysis, Henri Lefebvre (2004:16) describes how an awareness of ‘rhythmic’ congruity and incongruity can be used to inform a politics in daily life, for “the everyday reveals itself to be a polyrhythmia from the first listening”. He argues that practices of self-observation and spatial awareness can reveal the rhythmic landscape of which our internal and environmental rhythms are a part, and be used as a political means for affecting change. Lefebvre (2004:20) delineates between ‘eurhythmia’ and ‘arrhythmia’ as the forms of rhythmic logic which describe states of congruity:

> What is certain is that harmony sometimes (often) exists: eurhythmia. The eu-rhythmic body, composed of diverse rhythms – each organ, each function, having its own – keeps them in a metastable equilibrium, which is always understood and often recovered, with the exception of disturbances (arrhythmia) that sooner of later becomes illness (the pathological state). But the surroundings of bodies, be they in nature or a social setting, are also bundles, bouquets, garlands of rhythms, to which it is necessary to listen in order to grasp the natural or produced ensembles.

The stillness which Luke occupied therefore reflects a state of eurhythmic harmony where “rhythms unite with one another in the state of health, in normal… everydayness” (Lefebvre 2004:16). While Lefebvre uses these definitions to develop a Marxist critique of modernity, what can be extracted for the purposes of this phenomenological investigation is how within the flexible temporal boundaries of stillness, visitors can express a new form of agency by using their heightened affective awareness to locate eurhythmic and arrhythmic experiences.

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106 John Cage’s 4’33” (1952) is a notable example of the way music utilises silence, as the score instructs that no instrument is to be played for the duration of the piece. The performance therefore draws attention to the ambient sounds of the recital space, which for Cage, was a form of music in itself (Medien Kunst Netz).
As Lefebvre shows, this awareness becomes a praxis for the everyday, as it draws one’s attention to the ways that different kinds of time can influence our daily experiences.

In the development of his critique of modernity, Lefebvre suggests eurhythmia or arrhythmia eventuate according to the way regimes of ‘cyclical’ and ‘linear’ time shape our everyday experiences. Cyclical time occurs in the ‘natural’ world, and patterns the weather, dawn, sunset, tides, the rhythms of the body. Linear time is socially constructed, as it is “made up of chance and encounters” (1996:222) and therefore eventuates through a cultural impetus. He argues that a tension exists between these framings of time, where, for example, one’s internal rhythms are suited towards cycles of sleep and wakefulness befitting of night and day, yet these can be at odds with the temporal regimes enforced by the rhythms of industrialisation. These two forms of repetition interfere with one another frequently and share an inherently tense inter-relationship, as “time and space, the cyclical and linear, exert a reciprocal action: they measure themselves against one another; each one makes itself and is made a measuring-measure; everything is cyclical repetition through linear repetitions” (Lefebvre 2004:8).

Lefebvre had intended that a praxis of rhythmic observation would reveal how our subjective experiences are structured by external influences, and thereby become a literacy for understanding how “alliance supposes harmony between different rhythms; conflict supposes arrhythmia: a divergence in time, in space, in the use of energies” (2004:68). By becoming aware of the way we are conditioned by rhythms, we can begin to imprint new rhythms upon the patterns which govern cultural and social practices. Within the context of the Screen Gallery, this rhythmic observation manifests as an attentiveness towards the temporal relationship between internal sensation and external environment. Visitors’ comments about a deceleration of time in the Gallery, or suggestions that stillness and play elicit different forms of encounter, indicate that they are developing an awareness of the Gallery’s rhythms.

Feelings of congruence
Congruence between internal and external rhythms was often described by visitors as a feeling of relaxation, or even meditation. For example, Sean drew comparisons between still encounters with time-based art and his impression of quiet environments: “It’s like having background music while you’re falling asleep, or you turn the radio on so you haven’t caught the start of a song but you catch the end of it, that’s good. I don’t know, maybe you like listening to classical music and it doesn’t matter whether you’ve heard the first part of the movement, but you hear the last part and it’s still cool”. Both of these associations imply a close environmental relationship between sound and body, where the rich aesthetic presence of art overrides the expectation of narrative continuity. Perhaps most telling is Sean’s analogy of
falling asleep to background music, as it suggests that time-based art can maintain an ambient presence while not intruding upon natural bodily ‘rhythms’. It seems that a harmony between body and art environment allows a pull towards a state of relaxation akin to the drift of sleep, which, notably, is a point where both cyclical and linear rhythms synchronise. Falling asleep is both a relinquishing of wakefulness and a surrender to a deeper state of relaxation, a crossing of thresholds into a space dominated by the activities of the unconscious. Occupying the Gallery and surrendering to a state of relaxation can therefore also be understood as crossing a threshold into a deeper, more internal realm of interaction with art.

Colleen’s encounter with Ulf Langheinrich’s *Drift* similarly yielded feelings of meditation and relaxation:

> I have to say that I only spent half the time, maybe ten minutes, in there. But I really liked it, I thought it was really quite relaxing. But, in the sense that even though it was a similar thing the whole time, I think you’re in the ocean and then flying, but I was still quite compelled to sit there and watch.

Colleen’s comment shows how a lack of recourse to physical intervention augmented her affective awareness, so that feelings of envelopment and relaxation “compelled” her to “sit there and watch”. Her attention became absorbed by oceanic passage and feelings of flight, and thereby focused as a sense of greater spatial attentiveness. This sensory absorption had been an explicit aim of Langheinrich’s work. He described how he had attempted to create an experiential ecology, in which "people should be able to inhale the work and not develop a resistance, like, 'shall I leave or shall I stay?' People should not be bothered with that question" (Digital Dreams 2005). However, Langheinrich’s suggestion that visitors yield to this work does not imply a relinquishing of agency, but rather, indicates an expression of agency which arises from the feeling of congruent rhythms. For Colleen, agency manifested as a feeling of relaxation. Moving image art therefore compounds this possibility through its very visceral, affective characteristics.

The exhibition’s curator, Mike Stubbs, also noted how a lack of physical intervention heightens visitors’ engagement with the work, not only through an augmentation of spatial and affective awareness, but also by drawing attention to one’s emotional responses. He says

> It’s not interactive, insomuch that there’s no direct way in which the viewer can affect the delivery of that which they’re experiencing or viewing. However, it’s probably got the strongest relationship between the object and the viewer. And that’s happening at a physical level... And you can observe that through seeing it a number of times around and depending on where you go into the loop of the media, it appears like a different piece of work. And
according to who’s in the room, in the way that any viewing experience is a communal activity or a single experience. But I’ve also maintained that it’s a very emotional work (2005a).

Affective awareness therefore enables visitors to cultivate a greater sensitivity towards their sensory responses, experienced as both a heightening of bodily perception and an awareness of their sentient reactions. This is a highly-subjective agency, as it arises when visitors develop a keen awareness of the eurrhythmic alignment between the rhythm of ambient space, and their own, internal rhythm. As Eno describes with reference to ambient music, when we are moved by the singular emotion of a strong, aesthetic experience, the experience reflects an enhanced state of awareness, as it highlights our own internal complexity:

The reason we can be moved by a single voice singing a simple song is clearly not because it has internal complexity, but because we do: we don’t just hear sounds, but hosts of associations and historical, social and cultural undertones. A single voice is powerful to us because it is different in particular ways from most of our other musical experiences, and because this particular voice is different in particular ways from other voices we’ve heard. Aesthetically, what we respond to are differences, not ‘absolutes’ (1994:42).

Art has a particularly effective - and affective - capacity to elicit an awareness of congruence, as aesthetic encounters heighten one’s ‘feeling’ of an experience. For example, Matthew described how he was often drawn most powerfully to works he perceived as ‘beautiful’, or which heightened his sense of aesthetic appreciation:

I don’t find it challenging, really, but it is beautiful, and it can be beautiful, and it can be quite disturbing. But, it seems to be just one, singular emotion that you feel from those video exhibitions… I’m not saying that all of them are just a singular emotion, but just in terms of what we’ve seen today. I think, you sit down, you start to engage with the exhibit and you’re left with a feeling – for me.

This comment about beauty is emblematic of a feeling of rhythmic congruence, as it recalls an awareness of a strong, singular response. Matthew also commented that when viewing art he would “prefer something that’s a little more visually beautiful”.

**Feelings of beauty**

In a wide survey of art commentary and aesthetic practice, philosopher John Armstrong argues that two key approaches explain why we are attracted to beautiful objects. He explains that perception of beauty in art have been either object-based, where beautiful objects share ‘secret qualities’ such as the serpentine line, proportion or a perfect fit between form and function

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1[07] Langheinrich has expressed a desire to capture the physical relations of encounter which Stubbs has noted, describing how he inscribes the substance of canvas into his digital techniques: "such a high-definition image brings back some of the resolution, some of the density, some of the depth of paintings, without having to deal with the objects - the structure - of the paint and the canvas" (Digital Dreams 2005).
or alternatively, beauty is perceived as something held in the eye of the beholder, a result of having had a special kind of ‘experience’ (2004:140). Whether from aesthetic impressions of form or ‘special kinds of experience’, feelings of pleasure arise when an individual is absorbed by holistic perception, as it is “this holistic character that helps explain why we often feel the effect of beauty even though we cannot explain what is that we like so much. We are receptive to the impression the overall character of the object makes” (2004:37). Matthew’s account of beauty therefore reflects how a congruence of rhythms - a ‘holistic’ impression of a work - resonates as a powerful aesthetic experience, despite the absence of cognitive interpretation or processes of reflexive perception. Armstrong describes this response as a moment of affirmation which reflects an awareness of our own subjectivity and humanity. He writes that an encounter with beauty

Consists in finding a spiritual value (truth, happiness, moral ideals) at home in a material setting (rhythm, line, shape, structure) and in such a way that, while we contemplate the object, the two seem inseparable. To be human is to experience life under two guises: physical and spiritual – this is how it seems, whatever the underlying facts. Thus the experience of beauty is a reflection, as it were, of what it is to be human (2004:163).

Visitor agency especially finds expression in beauty, as it has an affective capacity which both heightens and makes us aware of feelings of congruence, or, in Armstrong’s terms, awareness of “what it means to be human”. Visitors’ impressions of beauty therefore reflect an agency which wells from experiences which resonate internally, as they reflect a moment of our own, complex subjectivity.

In interviews, beauty was also a standard by which visitors measured the success of a work, and therefore became a measure of rhythmic congruence, as Heidi illustrates when comparing Crooks’ Train No.1 to Langan’s Too Dark for Night: “I didn’t appreciate the train one all that much. Because… it didn’t seem to have that much of a story, whereas the one in Africa, I thought that was really beautiful. And I had to watch it again just for the bit at the end”. In their interviews, visitors revealed that they were less receptive to works which lacked aesthetic resonance. These were often works which radiated a lower kinaesthetic intensity, as the quality and volume of light was less prominent when compared with other works in the Gallery. For example, of all the works in World Without End, Paul described how he was least receptive to Rev: “That was the only one I really didn’t look at, I think because it looked really pictorial, and I dunno, I just couldn’t find any interest in it myself because it didn’t look that nice.” Throughout visitor observations I had also noted that Rev, and a neighbouring work, the Light, appeared to attract the least visitor attention. Both were of grainy video-tone, and the screens being projected onto were among the smallest in the Gallery. These works appeared to
yield less ‘congruent’ experiences, as visitors offered only a quick glance before continuing to move further along the Gallery in search of the next work. Beauty therefore plays an essential role in compelling stillness, as it draws visitors’ attention towards the rich possibilities of embodied experience, and, as Ross Gibson describes, is powerful and transformative aspects of visitation:

The sensory power of exhibits is crucial to museology… If there is no sensory involvement, then people aren’t roused to care about exhibits, and the museum won’t have fully succeeded, for the visitors won’t have undergone any transformative relationship to the world that’s been intensified by the system of artefacts. This transformation is a palpable, somatic response that’s not readily decoded like a message or a batch of data. Not entirely reasonable, this transformative urge is a passion: something that passes through the visitor’s sensibilities while artefacts and people and time-scales fold into one another and alter one another within the overall patterning of the museum (2006:23.2).

Focused attention in the Screen Gallery – mediated through experiences such as beauty – therefore ‘rouses’ visitors, as it enables them to feel the extent of transformative response.

Stillness elicits precisely the awareness Lefebvre writes of, as visitors begin to delineate between states of eurhythmia and arrhythmia as feelings of transformation. An awareness of the congruence (or perhaps lack thereof) between one’s internal response and the external environment is therefore an awareness of the way one is subjectively situated in the world. It draws attention to the complexity of our own subjective experience, and the many different ways that we are conditioned by our environments. This affective awareness is therefore characterised by a highly-subjective expression of agency, as it is specifically located in the internally resonant feelings of congruence which arise from the joint processes of stillness and focused attention, and awaken within us an awareness of our own subjectivity. Stillness therefore becomes a powerful means of eliciting a new style of ‘highly-subjective’ agency in the museum. A visitor’s description of how they ‘spent’, ‘perceived’ or ‘felt’ their encounter in the Gallery can actually reveal the extent to which the museum environment is in greater ‘polyrhythmic’ harmony with their own internal aesthetic experience, meaning also that it is possible to appraise whether the flexible temporal boundaries of the museum enhance a visitor’s capacity to express agency. However, a question remains as to how stillness offers a praxis for the everyday.

In the previous chapter, I had argued that an aestheticisation of reflexive knowledge in the museum mirrors the combinard-like behaviour visitors employ as a way of negotiating a politics of individualisation in everyday life. However, stillness and a focused attention are not forms of behaviour characteristic of the ‘combinard’. It would therefore seem that a highly
subjective form of agency premised upon self-awareness has no place within the trajectory which relates agency in the museum to a praxis which can be used for negotiating daily life. However, if to return to Massumi’s idea that stillness becomes an active site when defined against movement as it harbours a potential for movement, it becomes evident that a praxis of stillness can play a very important role in the reflexive conditions of the everyday.

As I will now show by returning to discussion of Colleen’s interaction with Drift, taking time to become aware of one’s bodily and sentient responses also creates a new space for reflection in the museum. In the Screen Gallery, this space of reflection emerged when visitors found themselves lost to a moment’s daydreaming - a moment marked by a sense of inner expansion, or, as Bachelard explains, a ‘swelling of immensity’. It is through processes of reflection that visitors are able to express their highly-subjective forms of agency, and, through a productive form of stillness, explore a politics of movement which eases the demand of reflexivity in daily life.

3: REFLECTION AND THE POLITICAL POTENTIAL IN STILLNESS

Daydreaming

In the opening discussion of this chapter I had described how Colleen had responded to Ulf Langheinrich's work, Drift. She had described the experience as ‘almost’ a meditation. It moved her beyond distractions such as “the morning’s happenings” and allowed her mind to empty and “focus on nothing”. The congruence between art and environment lulled Colleen into a state of relaxation akin to dreaming, a simple surrender to the feeling of being “relieved, and comfortable, and relaxed”. Several other visitors made similar allusions to moments of aesthetic capture and transcendence. Heidi observed that “that’s what that space is – compared to an art gallery, it’s a space that takes you somewhere else”, as it's "a space you’re allowed to think in, almost… Allowed to think differently. It’s a bit of a dreamy kind of space. You get a bit lost. A bit carried away. It’s nice…Yeah, an environment more than anything, to sit and watch.” Fleur also employed a language of imagination and dreaming, describing Susan Norrie's Enola as “a very dream-like experience, watching that one”.

Gaston Bachelard describes how daydreaming is a dynamic, active state as it is rich with the swelling of immensity. He proposes that it is within these moments, when “a relaxed spirit meditates and dreams” that a potential for profound experience arises when interacting with art. He writes that immensity “seems to expect images of immensity. The mind sees and continues to see objects, while the spirit finds the nest of immensity in an object” (1994:190),
meaning that daydreaming is an internal swelling of immense experience. Moments of movement - of inner expansiveness – therefore become moments of transcendence, as “immensity is within ourselves. It is attached to a sort of expansion of being that life curbs and caution arrests, but which starts again when we are alone. As soon as we become motionless, we are elsewhere; we are dreaming in a world that is immense. Indeed, immensity is the movement of motionless man. It is one of the dynamic characteristics of quiet daydreaming” (1994:184). Dreaming can therefore be understood as a tacit working of agency, a ‘consciousness of enlargement’ (Bachelard 1994:184) in which one seeks expression, and perhaps realisation, of one’s dreams. Visitors’ comments about dreaming therefore reflect an active state of participation in the Gallery, as it was a process by which their aesthetic experiences became immense, and enlarged their space of consciousness.

For example, Fleur described how interaction with art in the Screen Gallery roused her sense of creative inspiration, and prompted further artistic research to enrich her own artistic practice: “I’m more interested in the works that are creatively or artistically orientated – which most of them are anyway. I guess the more ‘less traditional’ screen works. I get ideas from it, I get inspired by it. You know, I’ve gone back to the website and looked at particular artists and sort of seen what they’ve done.” For Matthew, a highly subjective experience of agency dawned with the realisation that his choice of occupation had not set him on a path towards fulfilment of his creative aspirations: “I go there to experience something new. I would love to be able to do something like that, I would love to have digital TV’s that I could hook up and make videos and then just have them shown. Maybe it’s something for me, where I wish I was doing something else in terms of my occupation.” The outcome of these deeply immersive experiences was the generation of a self-reflection, and, as Matthew had enthused, is where the creative expressions of artists inspired a sense of creativity within themselves, whether expressed as a desire to learn more about technology, create their own art, or the maintenance of a deep relaxation – and internal stillness - beyond departure of the Gallery. Therefore a moment’s daydreaming – a consciousness of enlargement – was articulated by visitors as a realisation of their own creative potential.

Generative reflection

In her notion of ‘distributed aesthetics’, Edwina Bartlem (2005) describes how immersive art has “the potential to transform how we perceive our bodies, consciousness, communities and

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108 Bachelard (1994:184) also writes: “In other words, since immense is not an object, a phenomenology of immense would refer us directly to our imagining consciousness. In analysing images of immensity, we should realize within ourselves the pure being of pure imagination. It then becomes clear that works of art are the by-products of this existentialism of the imagining being. In this direction of daydreams of immensity, the real product is consciousness of enlargement”.
relationships with digital technologies. Ultimately, immersive artworks re-shape our understandings of art spectatorship from a distanced and passive exercise, to an active and often intimate endeavour, that is both playful and performative in nature”. Bartlem argues that immersion does not equate with escapism, or a collapse of boundaries between self and object. Exploring the possibilities of Van de Vall’s ‘critical distancing from within’109, she instead argues that a generative capacity arises from interaction with immersive art, as it evokes a heightened awareness of naturalised and embodied forms of perception. The generative capacity of self-reflection therefore renders dreaming and affective awareness the foundation for a praxis in everyday life. In reference to his composition of ambient music, Eno defines this as a “kind of principle, on the idea that it’s possible to think of a system or a set of rules which once set in motion will create music for you” (1996a).110

This generative process of reflection was articulated by visitors in a number of different ways. Paul, for example, described how his interaction with art aroused an awareness of his own productive aspirations: “it’s not like ‘we’re not the only people that can do it’ – you can do it yourself as well, and I suppose that’s what draws people in to the whole thing”. Katrina also attributed the enhancement of self-capacity to her interaction with the Gallery’s art, suggesting that aesthetic forms of interaction can challenge the conventional ways of thinking about and responding to our environment:

Katrina: so if it gets somebody to do something different, or, gets someone to do something in a different way maybe, expand their minds in that way, maybe that’s a use for it as well.

Natalia: So to challenge the norm, or the way we do things?

Katrina: Yeah, give them something to think about, and they can see it again in a different light. That’s kind of how other artworks are, I suppose.

For Heidi, this creative thinking and reflection were also made possible by sharing aesthetic experiences with others:

Natalia: What do you see as its value?

Heidi: I suppose… Just independent thinking. For people to go there and come up with their own ideas from other people’s… And all these sort of things, I think, it almost… People start thinking and start bouncing ideas off each other and the more places like that, the more people talk about different ideas.

This comment highlights a further productive value of the communalism discussed in the previous chapter. Knowledge shared between visitors not only enables new forms of learning,

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109 The notion of a ‘critical distancing from within’ refers to Van de Vall’s conviction (1992) that reflection and aesthetic self-reflexivity are central to experiences of immersion.

110 Eno specifically defines this as ‘generative’ music (1996a).
but also yields forms of meaningful experience in which visitors illuminate each other’s creativity, or ‘different ideas’. In this sense, a new, productive outcome of what Celia Lury has termed ‘experimental individualism’ may lie in the generation of a communal or group self-identity which is bonded through the dynamic exchange of individual experiences. This suggests that focused attention and self-awareness can become practices to be employed in daily life, as they enable individuals to express highly-self determined forms of agency as a realisation of their own subjective, creative potential, while also mediating new collective possibilities when these experiences are shared with others.

**Political potential: Resonance and reverberation**

The contemplative experiences in the Screen Gallery resonate with subjective forms of agency when, within these moments of creative inspiration, an individual identifies a specific pursuit or desire which they feel will surpass their everyday experience. Bachelard suggests that deeply aesthetic experiences resonante by swelling with immensity, until at a point they reverberate, and become articulated as a form of our own subjective expression.112

The resonances are dispersed on the different planes of our life in the world, while the repercussions invite us to give greater depth to our own existence. In the resonance we hear the poem, in the reverberations we speak it, it is our own (1994:xxii).

For visitors, this was experienced as a transcendental moment in which affective awareness and processes of self-reflection allowed their encounters to become resonant. These moments of subjective ‘resonance’ swell with an immensity until they reverberate as a renewed or newly-discovered self-capacity which is envisaged as a praxis beyond the museum. This is the realisation of a politics of movement. The reverberation of self-determined agency therefore manifests as the realisation of an individual praxis for each visitor. Reverberation is therefore articulated as an inspiration towards difference, a means of thinking outside pedagogical boundaries, and the parameters of the day-to-day. Within the context of my investigation, this is how agency finds expression in stillness, and will eventually exceed the pedagogical parameters of the museum by reverberating beyond the Gallery as a new politics.113 Katrina interpreted this possibility as a potential innovation of time-based art, where the time-

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111 The concept of ‘experimental individualism’ was explicated in the second chapter, and refers to the techniques and strategies individuals practice to construct their identities in a ‘prosthetic culture’.

112 In the terms of rhythmnanalysis, this is when a potential for change arises from the imprinting of new rhythms upon older existing ones.

113 In Bachelard’s (1994:xxiii) terms, “the image offered us by reading the poem now becomes really our own. It takes root in us. It has been given to us by another, but we begin to have the impression that we could have created it, that we should have created it. It becomes a new being in our language, expressing us by making us what it expresses; in other words, it is at once a becoming of expression, and a becoming of our being. Here expression creates being”.

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compressing demands of daily life become eased through still, aesthetic experiences: “Do we need to be stimulated so much, are our lives so plain, you know? …Yeah, [it’s] probably where the other artwork comes into it”. Screen-based art therefore has a capacity to elevate visitors from their everyday experiences, as the distinctive mediation of art and technology in the Gallery enables visitors to transcend their everyday ways of relating to a techno-cultural world. Stillness makes possible a praxis in which we can realise our own creative self-capacities, and through the reverberations of this experience, see this moment of reflection expand to challenge the conventional pace of living everyday life.

Conclusion
My observation of visitors’ interaction with art in the Screen Gallery has shown how agency finds expression in stillness, as well as play. The temporal elasticity created by artwork and institution allowed visitors to appropriate time and space in a way which compells a state of stillness. Stillness slows the pace of movement and focuses attention, in turn enhancing a visitor’s awareness of their presence and spatial environment. Stillness therefore heightens visitors’ awareness of sensation, sentience, the body’s occupation of time and space. This form of encounter elicits a feeling of singularity – perhaps even resonating as an impression beauty – and awakens the spirit in a manner which draws attention to complexity and difference. This transformation was the mainstay of the political project set by Lefebvre, a clear statement about mobilising individuals to affect change by becoming more attentive towards incongruities between self and environment. In the Gallery it became possible, through immersion in an aesthetic, ambient space, for visitors to cultivate an intuition towards their own rhythms and those of surrounding environments.

This awareness generates a space for reflection, described by visitors as a moment of daydreaming in which aspirations dwelling within the deep-set recesses of mind were honoured with the time and space for their realisation. This specifically manifested as a sensitivity towards that which arises internally and extends harmoniously into one’s environment as an experience of beauty, or calm, or peace. Awareness could therefore be considered another form of literacy which emerges from interaction with time-based art in the Screen Gallery, for it translates into a knowledge which values stillness. This knowledge illuminates the potential immensity of meaning which can stem from a calmness of mind and stillness of presence.

Within the context of the genealogy of the museum I have developed over the course of this investigation, experiences of stillness and daydreaming appear to signal a return to the more
traditional forms of museum visitor experience which are characterised by contemplative encounter, rather than the heightened interactivity characteristic of the ‘new’ museum. However, the contemporary manifestation of stillness in the Screen Gallery differs from this earlier form, as it exists alongside a potential for playful or performative participation which is mediated by moving image art. Reflection is made possible by affective awareness, meaning that the Gallery becomes a channel for highly-subjective forms of knowledge. I therefore contend that visitors’ comments about stillness highlight a significant shift within the museum’s genealogical trajectory, as the politics expressed within highly-subjective processes of reflection mark a further transformation within the museum’s history. The pluralist, community-based politics which the museum accommodated in recent decades are less a feature in the Screen Gallery than the more individualised politics which visitors have described. But, as has been shown in this study, an awareness of self has the potential to awaken a politics which lies deep within the visitor.

The conditions in the Gallery, for the most part, are affectively resonant and therefore conducive towards impressions of beauty and the production of stillness. However, as visitors’ comments above have shown, stillness is not a state which necessarily eventuates of its own accord. At times stillness must be worked at so that noises of distraction can be limited and minimised. It may require effort on the part of the visitor to resist the lure of other forms of sensory indulgence, and subvert the well-practiced modalities of behaviour characteristic of combinard-like life employed in the everyday. I therefore propose that individual experience can be reshaped to challenge the dynamics of rapidity and reflexivity which predominate in contemporary life, the ‘individualized individualism’ in which “individuals become actors, builders, jugglers, stage managers of their own biographies and identities and also of their social links and networks” (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2003:23). While reflexivity is an essential skill for navigating the conditions of contemporary modernity, it is a type of living bereft of reflection as opportunities for self-awareness are increasingly being diminished by the rupturing of temporal and spatial relations.

This means that there is little space in which one can find moments of beauty, or can take the time to sense a congruity within one’s environment. My analysis of stillness in the Screen Gallery has shown how these are important processes, as they enable individuals to realise the power of their own self-capacity, and can become a praxis to be used in everyday life. This is not to undermine the value of an aestheticised, reflexive knowledge. Instead, I contend that there is an important relationship between highly reflexive and still forms of praxis, as one cannot negotiate a politics of individualisation without the highly reflexive skills of the combinard. Indeed, in the present post-Fordist era of industrialisation, economies increasingly
prize the flexibility, mobility and informational intelligence which underpins ‘cognitive capitalism’ and ‘immaterial labour’ (Hardt & Negri 2004). What I do wish to emphasise about both of these praxes, however, is that a politics of individualisation necessitates highly individualised expressions of agency, whether one is playful and reflexive, or still and reflecting.

An important claim is to be staked on creating spaces for stillness in daily life, as opportunities for stillness are becoming increasingly scarce within the dynamics of spatial and temporal compression which characterise this era of globalisation and informationalisation. The conditions in daily life offer few opportunities for encounters with beauty, or possibilities for stillness. Perhaps this involves finding beauty in objects where it may not be self-evident, or ceasing one’s movement for a brief period, focusing attention to generate affective awareness and practice one’s attentiveness towards feelings of rhythmic congruence. Mike Stubbs emphasises the need to create these opportunities, and recognises the powerful role that art can play by unburdening daily life of its mundane aspects. He says:

I think this is more about trying to create opportunities in daily life where people are confronted with things which are not immediately palatable, not instantly recognisable, and somehow break into the patterns of daily life… So, historically, that might have had a spiritual edge to it, in terms of giving people the space to touch base with other stuff and don’t like, like the daily grind or the material nature of the immediate world. But at the same time as that, it can be as simple as… simple pleasure… (2005a).

A space given to ‘simple pleasures’, as this chapter has shown, is a space of stillness which is heavy with potential. It is potential at its most immense and immanent, where it is most weighted by possibility. When momentum gathers in stillness the likelihood of inertia recedes. As Heidi describes, moments given to daydreaming and reflection when interacting with art become powerful conduits for realising one’s own politics – one’s own creative capacities:

Heidi: Otherwise you’d end up really stale! Going to something like that really… Give you a new lease on life. And all the dreams you have – it’s possible.
Natalia: Do you mean dreams in terms of the things you imagine, or do you mean making things?
Heidi: Oh, I mean what you want to do with your life, and sometimes you think ‘it’s all a bit out of reach, it’s too difficult’, whereas you go and see something like that, and it’s all so – it makes everything clear. And makes everything possible.

The following chapter follows visitors as they depart the Screen Gallery, and assesses these generative capacities of a politics of movement. I examine how they may continue to resonate
within visitation experiences, and draw this study to a close by considering how it may reverberate as forms of praxis in everyday life.
POLITICS
CHAPTER EIGHT

A Politics of Movement

John Cage (1952: 4'33")
Chapter Eight
A Politics of Movement

Introduction
With a sigh and slow stretch, or perhaps a rapid checking of their watch, the visitor breaks their interaction with the artwork. Departing the intimate surrounds of the screens, they commence their slow release from the immersion of the Screen Gallery - a relinquishing of ambience. Luminescent screens, entrances to corridors and the shadowed outlines of fellow visitors pass by as the visitor slips between the drifts of sound and final echoes of encounter, and moves towards the automated escalator placed in the middle of the Gallery. While visitors traverse the Gallery, it gleams, silent and still, awaiting patronage as a small orange light blinks on its side, like a beacon on a lost ship. It emits a small whir as visitors alight, ready to transport them from darkness and towards the city daylight being filtered through ACMI's glass-encased foyer.

This procedure of exiting signifies another crossing of thresholds. This crossing was initially discussed in the fourth chapter, as I followed visitors’ descent into ACMI’s Screen Gallery. It also marked the advent of a phenomenology which explored a new juncture between art, technology and subjective experience. Stepping across the spatial threshold and embarking on a negotiation of movement through space, visitors showed how the rhythms of the everyday began to recede as they rendered their relationship with the art institution according to participatory acts and subjective expression. My phenomenological study revealed how these self-determined forms of interaction in the Screen Gallery signalled a relaxation of the museum’s traditional pedagogical boundaries.

In this study I have investigated how ACMI’s Screen Gallery, as a new and complex hybrid museum dedicated to moving image art, could realise the immanent potential within promises of unprecedented visitation experiences. I found that institutional pedagogy and visitors’ expressions of agency were most strongly defined by the highly affective, ‘ambient space’ of the Gallery. This term describes how visitors’ spatially immersive experiences are constituted by an interactive pedagogical exchange between individual and institution. I also found that visitors’ interaction with moving image art was influenced by modalities of agency which resonated at the levels of affect, reflexive perception and cognition. Drawn together, these modalities shaped visitors’ opportunities for learning as they traversed the Gallery, and oscillated between states of play and contemplative stillness.
These findings reflect the way that the Screen Gallery yields a distinctive ‘politics of movement’, and therefore represents a typology of ‘new’ museum. This politics accounts for the powerful modes of learning and behaviour which visitors experienced in the Gallery, and that could be applied in everyday life as a praxis for negotiating the conditions of reflexive modernisation. Underpinning these praxes are two distinctive forms of knowledge. The first, an aestheticised, reflexive knowledge, emerged out of playful behaviour. The rapid and reflexive forms of learning characteristic of technology-mediated play also made possible a new public intimacy, a space in which visitors shared their learning experiences. The second form of knowledge was highly individualised and subjective, and experienced by visitors as an affective awareness. This awareness generated a space for reflection in which visitors began to realise their own creative self-capacities as ‘reverberations’ beyond the Screen Gallery.

The previous chapter stopped short of explaining the full extent of this reverberation process, for it is the second crossing of thresholds - the threshold of departure - which concludes the narrative of a visitor’s journey through the Gallery, and draws this study to a close. Now, having followed visitors as they proceeded to the escalator, the significance and strength of reverberation - the translation of agency to a politics - can be appraised as this second significant threshold is crossed. This concern has been the deeply-held undercurrent driving my research, an aim to ultimately elevate the efficacy of this study into broader sociological and political realms, and in doing so, extend its focus beyond museums and their visitors. This chapter is therefore dedicated to an appraisal of the politics of movement as an exploration of how visitors’ experiences of moving through the Gallery may find application in everyday life as a praxis.

In this chapter I conclude the narrative of the visitor’s journey by considering how a politics of movement may be sustained within reverberations of experience. At first, I revisit the Screen Gallery to see how it has weathered the years which have passed since my empirical investigation concluded. To do so I examine how ACMI has transformed in recent years, and ascertain how these changes have affected the Screen Gallery. Finding that the institutional use of the Gallery has changed substantially, I speculate as to whether a politics of movement may find resonance in other museums or art environments, or, failing this, extra-institutional environments. I then review the ways that my methodology could be translated into further research contexts, and in closing remarks suggest how my investigation could extend beyond the specificities of the Screen Gallery to explore alternative environments as sites for a burgeoning politics.
**Issues of sustainability**

When the Screen Gallery first opened in 2002 it was within a period in which ACMI’s institutional vision was bright with promises of the new and innovative. Its organisational structure was freshly-forming, meaning that an emerging political potential could take root in flexible, if not experimental, conditions. This phase of ACMI was detailed in the opening chapter, where statements made by John Smithies, ACMI’s inaugural CEO, illustrated how organisational hybridity and the use of new technologies would be the provisions for realising ACMI’s potential as a new cultural institution:

> It is possible to include ACMI in the family of a museum, library or gallery but this too easily ignores the significant differences. The Australian Centre for the Moving Image is an example of a new generation of cultural institutions - one that will move beyond the limitation of a physical site and one that fully embraces and celebrates the dominant pervasive mediums of the past 100 years and the future (MATP 2003:25).

ACMI was borne of a contemporary juncture between art, technology and individualisation, and fashioned within a policy environment which, from the outset, forced a positioning within terms which have been difficult to reconcile. Many of these problems relate to its identity as a ‘hybrid’ cultural institution which negotiates pedagogical responsibilities arising from different phases of modernity, and doing so whilst largely reliant upon government funding. At one level, ACMI continues to bear a nineteenth century mandate as a civic educator, yet it is also positioned as a commercial player within Victoria’s cultural industries sector and must therefore return a profit by attracting sponsorship, tourism and business investment. At the same time, it must contend with external pressures such as those generated by a ‘culture of distraction’. These include competition from other cultural institutions and public events in Melbourne such as festivals and sporting events, as well as from rival cities which also stage ‘blockbuster’ events.114 In 2003, for example, then-state Premier Steve Bracks recognised the effect of this competition on museums and allocated a grant which enabled Museum Victoria to lower its attendance costs.115 He stated that "families will now be able to take their children to the museum for less than an outing to the cinema or the football" (Usher 2003:6), revealing how museum visitation and sporting events fall within a similar cultural arena in the eyes of government. As well as cultural excursions, a burgeoning domestic entertainment market,

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114 Of course, it could be argued that these very events could increase ACMI’s visitor attendance as a part of a groundswell interest in the cultural tourism sector. However, this also makes competition for public funding more fierce and creates an institutional association with events which specifically generate higher attendance numbers and spectacle, rather than exploratory and experimental installations which may attract fewer patrons.

115 Museum Victoria includes the Melbourne Museum, Scienceworks, the Immigration Museum and the Royal Exhibition Building. Admission to the National Gallery of Victoria and ACMI has always been free, aside from special exhibits.
such as DVD and video-gaming technologies, vie for the disposable time and income of the public. In addition, ACMI’s mandate was to be satisfied within time-frames which reflect politically bracketed policy agendas, rather than the much slower pace of transformation which museums have historically required - and as presented in the second chapter’s genealogy of the museum. Taking all of these factors into considerations, it appears that ACMI, as an experimental public organisation with scarce external funding, has very little leverage for financing exploration and creativity, and, in light of its dependence on the public purse, very little margin for error. In the Screen Gallery in particular, these responsibilities are burdened by the enormous expense of keeping pace with technological development.

For example, while visitors enthused over works which could push technological boundaries and elicit new modalities of interaction, these works are often very expensive to stage, and, as can be the case with many experimental technologies, may also be unreliable. This issue caught the attention of a number of visitors, as Fleur illustrates:

I think art and technology – it’s fascinating, but I think the problem seems to be that there’s not enough funding to do it… A lot of the things need ongoing maintenance and I think that’s the problem, obviously, when things break down there’s no-one to fix them, and that’s really frustrating when you go to see something and it’s not working.

This comment shows how moving image art is not only expensive because of its installation costs, but that it also becomes an especially costly investment when it fails to deliver the experiences it was commissioned for. A conflict therefore arises between public enthusiasm for innovation and the financial cost of materially supporting new visitation experiences.

The expense of new technologies is only one way that innovating visitor experiences can become an unsustainable exercise for museums. In the sixth chapter I argued that interaction with time-based art enhances forms of literacy through an aestheticisation of reflexive knowledge. I also showed that some visitors may lack the inclination to interact with art in this manner. While this analysis was primarily concerned with appraising new forms of visitor agency, as Matthew describes, the consequences of a ‘frustrating’ interaction with art can have very real, material outcomes:

I just think it’s almost – like, the thousands of dollars that are put into these exhibits and the backing that goes along with them, it just a shame that – it’s just that public apathy if something doesn’t work straight away and walking out of an exhibit, it’s a bit sad that so many people would come, come and see and exhibit like White Noise, or see an exhibit with any looping in it, walk in, realise that they’re half-way through, just go and throw it to the side.
Unfortunately, attempts to innovate will at times fail, just as it is not possible for all visitors to depart the Gallery satisfied with their interaction with art and institution. However, this is compounded by the way that dedicating a gallery to time-based can challenge the conventions for visitor interaction. In the fourth chapter I described how the Gallery had pushed the art of spatial navigation to the forefront of visitor experience. On one hand, visitors found the negotiation of multiple navigational paths and the opportunity to construct their own meaning an ‘empowering’ experience. However, at times others struggled with the highly subjective nature of this interaction. Clearly, a risk associated with staging exhibitions which challenge the traditional conventions for engaging with art is the alienation of some visitors. Indeed, some may even prefer not to rise to this challenge. Therefore, conventions which make visitors responsible for the parameters of their visitation, such as self-navigation and experiential knowledge - and which are often the very qualities for which visitors most value their experiences - can also be the most risky to present. This may bear poorly upon an institution’s reputation and subsequently make defence of its ongoing relevance to public and government a difficult task, as Trevor illustrates:

It’s a stupid name to tell you the truth. ACMI – that’s a centre for moving images, a name that someone’s probably thought one afternoon after a few bottles of wine. Because, most people would see it as a gallery, so, as soon as you put the word ‘gallery’ in something, in the front of something, people say ‘oh, an art or an installation place’… So for ACMI, if you were in the local pub, and I don’t know, if you said ‘I’ve just been to ACMI’ they’d say ‘what the hell’s an ACMI?’ . What is it? Whereas if you said to them, ‘I’ve been to the National Gallery’, they say ‘Ah! I know what that is’, you know? It’s paintings, or sculptures, or fabrics, or whatever. But ACMI – what’s an ACMI?

**A victim of hybridity and ambivalence**

In the years since ACMI opened issues such as these have placed it under a great deal of public, media and government scrutiny. While some of ACMI’s weaknesses were noted by visitors in their interviews, in the period following the conclusion of my empirical research, criticisms over funding, brand image and ACMI’s very purpose and relevance as a publicly-funded institution have intensified. For example, this statement by Gabriella Coslovich (2006), an arts journalist who has closely followed ACMI’s development, is exemplative of the style of condemnation ACMI has faced:

The centre’s mission is as vast and bewildering as the space it inhabits at Federation Square and, after four years’ existence, it is still trying to cement itself into the public’s imagination. Many people have no idea what it does or where it is. The centre’s name is a mouthful and its rationale is a bureaucrat’s fantasy: wordy and boundless (2006:27).
It appeared that ACMI had fallen victim to its own ambivalence and hybridity. Ted Baillieu, Victoria’s Opposition leader, recently attempted to garner electoral favour by playing off negative opinion of ACMI in the run-up to the 2006 Victorian state election. He described it as “an over-subsidised taxpayer-funded financial black hole”, and threatened to evict the organisation from Federation Square, cut its budget and review its financial structure (Burchall 2007:8).

These criticisms are often justified within arguments about ACMI’s management of public funding. ACMI posted financial deficits for a number of consecutive years, including almost $919 000 in 2003, which increased to $3.9 million in 2004 (Usher 2005:15). It has also struggling to secure additional funding sources, recording a decline in sponsored funds between 2004 and 2005 (Coslovich 2006:27). The media has also reported stories of institutional unrest, including low staff morale, job cuts and disruptive movement in upper-management (Coslovich 2004). When John Smithies resigned as ACMI’s chief executive in 2004, Tony Sweeney was head-hunted from the award-winning National Museum for Photography, Film and Television in Bradford, Yorkshire, where he had held a position as deputy director (Coslovich 2004). Sweeney was touted as a high-profile appointment who could steer ACMI into more stable and secure waters.

However, criticisms levelled at ACMI’s spending of public funds have rarely taken into consideration the enormous cost and difficulty associated with supporting the kinds of visitor experience I have detailed throughout this study. In fact, the high financial burden associated with ACMI’s ambitions for the Screen Gallery had actually won the respect of visitors, as Heidi illustrates:

It must cost so much to set up something like that, yeah, but it’s so important. Like I feel like what I’ve just got now … Well I suppose my natural reaction is that it’s so much money for a piece of art, but then you sit down and you really appreciate it, and you think ‘it’s priceless’, and yeah, you should spend that much money, and it’s only until you go in there that you realise that it is so important.

Beyond appreciation of the risks ACMI was attempting to take, other visitors, such as Paul, noted the importance of broader governmental support for cultural institutions like ACMI:

I think it’s absolutely awesome that, I don’t know, someone – be it in the government or anywhere has had the initiative to actually make something like this. Which is like – I’ve been

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116 More recently, Ziggy Switkowski moved from his high profile role as an Australian telco chief, and took up the role of ACMI president at the end of 2005, only to resign 12 months later (Ziffer 2007:7).

117 Tony Sweeney oversaw the redevelopment of the National Museum of Photography, Film and Television, which posted a record attendance when it reopened in 1999 (Coslovich 2004).
all around the world and such and such, and I’ve never seen anything like it… I’ve never seen such – and like, this is just my personal opinion – I’ve never seen such dedication to this type of art, and video art, and these types of installations. And I just find it incredible.

These comments highlight the complex tensions that can develop when a contemporary museum attempts to negotiate a complex set of policy aims, visitor demands and continue to cultivate its own, institutional vision. In the second chapter Smithies had stated that “the creation of ACMI is a response to a changing world” (2002), and clearly, ACMI continues to respond to this changing world. However, what has changed more significantly in recent times are the terms which ACMI now responds to and the strategies it employs to do so.

**New institutional directions**

ACMI has responded to concerns over its institutional competence by undertaking a number of significant transformations in recent years. These changes signal ACMI’s entry into a new institutional phase. As Tony Sweeney recently described in his annual *Director’s Report*, at the heart of the organisation’s transformation has been a campaign to increase visitor attendance:

> Our focus is on strengthening our world-class positioning and unique independent voice as, increasingly, the leading international moving image centre. This past year has been a key period of transition for ACMI, moving from the first three years of start-up, into a new phase of development and growth. We have pursued an ambitious change program based on an agenda of cultural leadership, innovation, partnerships and reaching out to the widest range of audiences (2006:8).

ACMI has attempted to increase its audience numbers by enhancing its visibility. It has successfully drawn a greater online presence by sending weekly newsletters which alert subscribers to new exhibitions, film programs and give-aways. ACMI was also awarded a $4 million government grant to upgrade its visitor facilities. It has increased its commercial viability with an enormous redevelopment of its Federation Square frontage, where a new box office and reception desk are flanked on one side by the ACMI Lounge Café and Bar, and on the other by the resurrected ACMI shop (which had been shut down many years previously) [Figure 8.1]. These strategies have not only succeeded in increasing visitor numbers, but have also secured some political favour. Early in 2007 ACMI was awarded a further $5.8 million government grant to develop a permanent, historical collection of film, television and video on its ground floor (Ziffer 2007:7). This project was tendered to London’s high-profile Ab Rogers Design and Melbourne’s Denton Corker Marshall, who, as Sweeney enthuses, will

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118 Active visitor attendance (a measure of visitors who attend specific programs rather than casual visitation) increased by approximately 20% in the period 2005-2006 (Sweeney 2006:9).
collaborate to “realise our [ACMI’s] ambition to create a truly unique gallery for the twenty-first century” (ACMI 2007a).\textsuperscript{119} Using a permanent, historical exhibition to look to the future is a clear point of departure from the pliable, transient and flexible space ACMI was originally envisaged to embody, as discussed in the second chapter.

![ACMI’s new frontage](image)

The Screen Gallery has also been subject to strategies which seek to increase ACMI’s visitor numbers. At present ACMI is hosting a travelling exhibition from the Disney-owned Pixar Animation Studios, *Pixar: 20 Years of Animation* (June – October 2007).\textsuperscript{120} The Pixar exhibition is only the most recent in a line of ‘blockbuster’ travelling shows, including the retrospective exhibition *Centre Pompidou video art 1965-2005* (March – May 2007), *Eyes, Lies and Illusions* (November 2006 – February 2007), a historical, collection of moving image technologies, *Stanley Kubrick: inside the mind of a visionary filmmaker* (November 2006 – January 2006), and *TV50* (June – October 2006) in honour of fifty years of Australian television. This trend appears to indicate a new institutional direction in which ACMI has begun to ‘buy in’ exhibitions, rather than commission and curate its own.

At one level, this shift has been a success. In the attempt to stabilise itself financially and assert its institutional presence, ACMI has achieved the intended rise in visitor numbers as the Pixar exhibition attracted a record 164 750 visitors (ACMI 2007b). Indeed, predating the change of strategy, a number of my interviewees had expressed an interest in seeing more historical exhibitions, and to gain a greater contextual understanding of the technologies being used by artists to make moving image art. For example, in Chapter Five Steven had suggested that “it might be interesting to, say, have an exhibition on the changing history of the moving image technology, for instance – alongside the kinds of moving images those technologies can

\textsuperscript{119} Ab Rogers Design has completed projects for the Tate Modern, the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Science Museum in London, and the Centre Pompidou in Paris.

produce – that would be interesting”. While this comment expresses a thirst for new kinds of experience and knowledge in the Screen Gallery, a question remains as to the cost of this institutional reorientation, as ACMI certainly appears to have sacrificed the Gallery’s distinguishing contemporaneity and innovative edge in an effort to stop its institutional gaps. Therefore, the issue is, as Coslovich proposes, “not an argument against the existence of ACMI, but, rather, a question of how far the institution has strayed from its original intention of being innovative and creative, and of fostering Australian talent” (2006:27).

Sustaining a politics of movement
These institutional changes, and especially ACMI’s preference towards larger, blockbuster shows, has had a significant impact on the way a politics of movement finds light in the Screen Gallery. The most evident impact is reflected within the changes that have been made to its ambient space. While the Screen Gallery remains a dark place, recent exhibitions have been historically-focused, and contain very little art-based content. As a result, the Gallery’s installations have been curated in ways which reflect a return to object-based, rather than spatial experiences. As a result, when the conventions for interaction in the Gallery are more traditional, the qualities of suspense and anticipation which had characterised ambient space become less prominent. The feeling of immanence is diminished. This transformation of the Gallery’s spatial ecology has a number of significant repercussions for visitors. The space is less intensely affective, meaning that the modalities of affect, reflexive perception and cognition will form a different interrelationship. Processes of bodily enframing will find less practice, as there are fewer digital projections in the Gallery. Reflexive perception is a less prevalent form of interaction because the Gallery’s objects are rarely time-based. Furthermore, when these objects mediate historical, rather than technological knowledge, everyday technologies evade the scrutiny that arose from their recontextualisation in the Gallery. As a consequence, knowledge will no longer be aestheticised and reflexive, or circulate as an affective awareness. This means that the praxes central to a politics of movement may not manifest.

While I do not intend to engage in a debate over the direction ACMI has taken, nor denigrate the other kinds of value or learning that the new wave of exhibitions may bring to ACMI’s broadening audience base, what has become apparent is that the Screen Gallery is no longer an immanent space for a politics of movement. In terms of appraising how a politics of movement may be sustained, two issues arise from these observations. Firstly, there is a question of whether the institution can create conditions in which the politics can be revived, so that the project commenced by ACMI many years earlier can regain momentum and continue to offer visitors a praxis for the everyday. Secondly, there is the possibility that the
politics may find fertile grounds in arenas beyond the museum. Both of these speculative avenues will now be explored in the interest of evaluating the durability and resilience of a politics of movement.

**Relocating political potential**

Upon opening, ACMI’s Screen Gallery was new, cast afresh as an interface between art and technology, offering visitation experiences at the edges of contemporaneity, and an aesthetics laden with new potential where a new agency and its politics challenged the trajectories of museums of the past. In the passing of time and ensuing flux of change, various processes came to intervene and weigh upon this phase of emergence. As organisational direction, funding and internal politics fell under the harsh glare of the media scrutiny outlined above, the Gallery’s practice of exploratory inquiry ossified and dulled the passage of immanence. Now, as ACMI has gained notoriety for having substantiated its financial base and public image, the Screen Gallery’s reflexivity and creativity have effectively ‘gentrified’ to resemble a space more familiar to the visitor. While ACMI has begun to right itself institutionally in the eyes of government and some commentators, these strategies move the Gallery away from the possibilities of recreating a space in which such a politics can be located.

On one hand, this narrative of the Screen Gallery’s transformation suggests that the institutional realisation of a politics of movement may only be possible within the phase of immanence. This position would suggest that ACMI’s attempts to negotiate contemporary conditions reflect an institutional consolidation which disrupts the ambivalent, experimental ecology required for a politics of movement. However, if it is to regain its relevance as an ‘innovative’ organisation, and if to foster once again the early stirrings of a new politics, ACMI, as an arbiter of this politics, must develop strategies which enable it to look beyond the goal of visitor attendance and re-engage with its contemporary environment at a number of new levels. Innovation must therefore extend beyond exhibition of cutting-edge technologies and contemporary art; it must also be structural and systemic so that ACMI can again extend its margins to incorporate exploratory institutional practices.

Within the terms of this study, this question translates as a concern over the fortitude of a new politics, and whether it can be revived institutionally. ACMI’s recent successes generate three possibilities. Firstly, it could use its new-found financial and institutional stability and recommence the work begun in earlier years, such as commissioning and exhibiting contemporary art, and challenge its audiences with experimental and innovative museum experiences. Ideally, a rise in visitor attendance would suggest that it is now better placed to address some of these earlier institutional aims, as a stronger financial position enables ACMI
to make economic contributions to creative industries and the state, and also have greater resources with which to fulfil its original charter - to “research, collect, exhibit, create, teach, nurture and advocate the use of the moving image in all areas of society” (Cutler 2003:4). Alternatively, ACMI may further pursue the direction it has recently begun to take, opting for travelling and ‘blockbuster’ exhibitions which generate greater financial security and government support. Indeed, this direction need not undermine ACMI’s remit, as mainstream or travelling exhibitions can also challenge audiences in productive ways. *Pixar* had been an informative and detailed insight into animation practices, and even included an aesthetically pleasing and engaging penultimate installation reminiscent of ACMI’s earlier exhibitions.\(^{121}\) While *Pixar* had not featured contemporary art, a showcase of contemporary animation techniques, as well as insight into the moving image industry, is still of educational value to ACMI’s visiting public.

The third option integrates the earlier two possibilities and yields a range of alternatives. ACMI could stage both styles of exhibition, broadening its audience base with larger, blockbuster-style shows, but intersperse these exhibitions with contemporary art installations, and thereby expose a wider audience to a range of exhibition experiences of the moving image. This would enable the Screen Gallery to again become an ambient space, albeit on a ‘part-time’ basis, immense with the potential for new expressions of visitor agency and emerging forms of politics. ACMI’s hybridity could also play a central role in remobilising the Gallery as an innovative art space. Rather than becoming a burden, strategies can be formed which draw strengths from its hybrid nature. For example, historical exhibitions could be curated in ways which challenge traditional museum conventions and draw upon the experiential richness of ambient space. Alternatively, the Screen Gallery could again house contemporary forms of moving image art within its ambient space, but do so with fewer of the risks associated with relaxing its pedagogical conventions.

For example, a less expensive alternative to commissioning new works for the Screen Gallery could involve the development of collaborative partnerships with existing artists and art groups.\(^{122}\) This possibility would bring a number of benefits to ACMI and its visitors. At one level, it would allow a greater sharing of resources. At another, by integrating more closely

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121 This installation was called *Artscape* (2005), and was created by Pixar artists to show how digital animation is the product of traditional mediums and conceptual work. It was a showcase piece which digitally animated the concept art from a number of Pixar films.

122 For example, in Melbourne this could include close collaborations with groups such as the Australian Network for Art and Technology (www.anat.org.au) and Experimedia (www.experimedia.net), as they stage similar but smaller-scale exhibitions and programs with a strong focus on research and development.
with university, fringe and experimental groups, ACMI would gain entry to some of the most innovative and contemporary practices, which, as we have seen, is a dynamic difficult to incorporate into a comparatively inflexible institutional environment. This would not only award such groups a greater visibility and larger exploratory arena in which to test their work, but also inject ACMI with a new currency and relevance in the act of supporting and hosting leading arts practices.

Furthermore, presentation of experimental art need not become the expensive ‘risk’ I have described above. It could instead be presented within a test environment, a research and development ‘lab’ much like BetaSpace at the Powerhouse museum in Sydney, and perhaps in later years become substantially resourced in a way similar to Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie (ZKM) in Karlsruhe, Germany. While ACMI had used its Screen Pit a number of times to exhibit single, complex installations, this is not a permanent or frequent practice. A number of visitors in the fifth chapter had expressed interest in seeing ACMI create such an environment and to have aesthetic interaction with art supplemented by displays which demonstrate how its art had been made. This would recreate the possibility for ACMI to become a leader in the exhibition of contemporary moving image art and recast the Gallery as a more innovative space in the eyes of visitors. In short, these are all strategies which describe a potential, and seek to renew the Screen Gallery’s capacity to function as a space of immanence.

Sustainable politics: looking further afield

In the interest of exploring the durability of a politics of movement, other recourses to its sustainability can also be considered. As stated at the outset of this investigation, an aim of my study had been to reflexively develop a research methodology which could find application in settings beyond the museum. I will therefore return briefly to the ideas of immanence, structure and agency which have informed my methodological discussion, and evaluate how – and where – the investigative tools of my study could be deployed for further phenomenological and ethnographic investigation of the agency, praxis and politics detailed within this study.

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123 BetaSpace, as the name suggests, is a testing ground for media art installations in which artists work in close conjunction with Powerhouse staff to monitor visitor reception to their work, and use this information to develop their projects.

124 ZKM runs a number of different research institutes and laboratories, such as institutes for music and acoustics, visual media, film, education and economics, the restoration of audio and video, and technical exhibition services.
As argued in the third chapter, a study of structure and agency involves undertaking a retrospective construction of events. This locates, as Brian Massumi explained, the *immanent potential* which prefigures their realisation. Within the parameters of my investigation, I detailed how ambient space constitutes a field of immanence through a simultaneous meeting of histories pertaining to the museum, art, technology and the contemporary political climate. These trajectories were shown to come into a tense, polyrhythmic alignment in the Screen Gallery, and conditioned it as an ‘ambient space’.

Future studies of this nature would involve a similar historical excavation which seeks out immanence, for it is within these conditions of potential that new political opportunities can be located. This is the task of the rhythmnanalyst, as ethnographic study requires the researcher to become embedded within their empirical environment and use their subjective experiences as a standpoint from which to reveal the ‘polyrhythmic’ ecology of everyday life. In doing so it becomes possible to detect the incongruities between one’s own internal experiences, whether sensory or cognitive (or indeed, in the interrelationship between both), and those of the contemporary environment, and extrapolate an area for further research.

While rhythmnanalysis has offered a rich framework from which to pursue a reflexive, phenomenological investigation, Lefebvre’s thematic interests are also relevant to political studies concerned with movement. Despite the fact that the rhythmnanalysis project was developed with an aim to instrumentalise political change through a largely Marxist politics, its underlying concerns with progress, modernisation, and one’s place and power within contemporary environments continue to reverberate as issues within this first decade of a new century. My study has found that the contemporary conditions of modernity require individuals to simultaneously negotiate multiple forms of agency. Visitors’ deeply affective experiences in the Screen Gallery showed how modalities of agency can find expression within ambient environments, some of which are fluid and reflexive, while others take slower, more reflective forms. I have also argued how these contemporary modes of agency elicit praxes within conditions of play and stillness, and thereby highlight the value of materiality and presence in a culture increasingly dominated by narratives of speed, virtuality and dematerialisation. By mapping the conditions which bring these elements into a juncture with one another, and exploring the tension which informs their inter-relationship, it becomes possible to explore contemporary manifestations of agency, and an arising politics.

**Conclusion**

As mass industrialisation came to mark the dawn of ‘simple’ modernity, the new-found dependence on the machine provoked political and cultural anxieties over progress and its
effect on everyday life. A further modernisation of modernity in recent decades – a ‘reflexive modernity’, had been marked by debates about the increased enmeshing of body and machine, seen, for example, in a fascination with the figure of cyborg throughout the 1980’s and early 1990’s (Haraway 1991). In the mid-1990’s the advent of the Internet and World Wide Web prompted discussion about virtuality, as the dematerialising possibilities of technology moved the focus of these debates towards disembodiment and the post-human (Hayles 1999), and the new modes of interactivity being made possible. Accompanying these discussions have been narratives which detail the unrelenting acceleration of technological culture, and the way it has contributed to the dissolution of state structures and a dematerialisation of cultural forms. However, the discussions of contemporary agency and politics which have emerged from my study of the Screen Gallery shows how in recent years this illustration has evolved, and become more complex.

My study’s phenomenological analysis not only reaffirms the museum as a physical site to be visited, as opposed to recent scholarship and industry discussion exploring the possibilities of the ‘virtual museum’, but also one which emphasises the value – and indeed, an entire politics – of stillness and materiality. These themes of presence, immersion, sensation – a reembodiment of experience – and are all central to the activation of this politics, and its realisation through aesthetic immensity. Therefore, despite the arguments outlined in earlier chapters which had suggested that the conditions of a reflexive modernity are rapidly eroding capitalist institutions, I propose instead that within this environment the museum plays an even more prominent role as a dedicated site for objects of new technology.

In his compelling discussion of the museum as a ‘present’ site within a culture of amnesia, Andreas Huyssen similarly argues that despite trends towards immateriality and informationisation, there remains an indisputable “need for auratic objects, for permanent embodiments, for the experience of the out-of-the-ordinary… a key factor in our museumphilia” (1995:33). He explains how this is symptomatic of Kulturgesellschaft, a new phase in consumer society where the “growth and proliferation of cultural activity… is interpreted as an agent of modernization” (1995:32). The longing, or ‘fetishisation’ for authenticity in an increasingly rabid consumer culture posits the museum as a mass medium - a ‘privileged agent’ of modernisation (1995:32-33). Material engagement with art therefore becomes increasingly valuable in our daily, ‘amnesiac’ lives. My visitors have reaffirmed the necessity of experiential encounter, whether with art, institution - and even strangers - as a

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125 Huyssen defines Kulturgesellschaft as “a society in which cultural activity functions increasingly as a socializing agency comparable to and often even against the grain of nation, family, profession, state” (1995:32).
feature within their daily lives. This shows that technology, while capable of mediating ‘virtual’ and disembodied experiences, can also be a powerful means of generating new physical experiences, especially when mediated by art.

A number of conclusions can therefore be drawn upon evaluating the robustness of a politics of movement. Firstly, as a spatial reflection of the contemporary environment, the immanent potential for this politics emerges in only very specialised conditions within the museum. This means that mediating very contemporary forms of agency and politics through art and technology is difficult to sustain in an institutional environment, as it requires ongoing adaptability and flexibility, and a great deal of government and financial support. However, a politics of movement may reside within immanent conditions beyond the museum, as urban and private spaces are increasingly becoming domains of the moving image, as well as the many new forms of technology-mediated encounter which may proliferate in years to come.

For example, the spatial experiences of interacting with the moving image which I have documented, have now begun to filter beyond ACMI, and into the streets of metropolitan Melbourne. The city’s dark spaces of passage are being increasingly ‘augmented’ (Manovich 2003) by moving image and digital art installations in subway underpasses, dedicated media art bars, and labyrinthine lanes and alleyways [Figure 8.2]. This increased likelihood of spatial encounter with the moving image in darkened urban spaces highlights the dynamic possibilities for a politics of movement, as the modalities of agency which were particular to the Screen Gallery are likely to have found application within similar spaces of ambience, such as those noted above. Therefore at one level, the flourishing of these ‘fledgling’ spaces suggests that the political possibilities of art which I have detailed may be furthered by fringe artistic practices which emerge in extra-institutional environments. In addition, the increased ‘visibility’ of moving image art in urban scapes suggests that the modalities of agency and arising politics have consolidated into something of a mainstream presence, making the broader praxis of a politics of movement a dynamic part of everyday experience.

![Figure 8.2] Media art in Melbourne: City Lights project, Horse Bazaar, Loop Bar

Yet, perhaps emerging most strongly from this analysis of a politics of movement, is its grounding as an antidote, or resolution, to the tensions which arise within a reflexive phase of modernity. Materiality, embodied presence, slowness and awareness underlie a praxis for negotiating the conditions of individualisation. As Sean shows, the power underlying this praxis is its regenerative capacity, as a few moments taken to visit a quiet space can ‘recharge’ the soul:

Maybe it’s like going to the park during your lunch-break. You’re there, and you’re a part of nature and the park or whatever, and you’re there because it does something for you, so, it’s good for your soul, or you need to see green, or whatever. And it’s not the first time you’ve been to the park and it won’t be the last time, and you won’t see all of the park, but you sit somewhere that’s comforting and maybe it recharges you, so maybe this art is like that.

My study has shown how art which recharges is art which enables us to become aware of our self-capacities. Visitors experienced this in the museum as an enhanced sense of body in space, an attunement with environments, when they found themselves quiet, and even calm. These forms of behaviour enable us to relinquish control of negotiating the everyday, and allow the demands and pace of life to recede. The challenge now, as technologies continue their advance, and the conditions of daily life continue to transform around us, is to draw from our surroundings and create the spatial environs in which a politics of movement can take seed, and where it can swell and expand with the new expressions of potential.
Tranquil foliage that really is lived in, a tranquil gaze discovered in the humblest of eyes, are the artisans of immensity. These images make the world grow, and the summer too. At certain hours poetry gives out waves of calm. From being imagined, calm becomes an emergence of being. It is like a value that dominates, in spite of minor states of being, in spite of a disturbed world. Immensity has been magnified through contemplation. And the contemplative attitude is such a great human value that it confers immensity upon an impression that a psychologist would have every reason to declare ephemeral and special. But poems are human realities; it is not enough to resort to ‘impressions’ in order to explain them. They must be lived in their poetic immensity

(Bachelard 1994:210).


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