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THE WELLBEING MUSEUM

CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD AGE



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ABSTRACT

In an era of global ageing populations, oversubscribed public health systems and the prevalence of non-communicable diseases, wellbeing has become a societal matter of concern and policy priority. Contemporaneously, self-help and health and fitness cultures, along with an array of spiritual and holistic interests have played a role in furthering wellbeing activities. A body of epidemiological research points to the strong association of cultural attendance such as museum visitation with health and wellbeing. Yet little is known about how benefits are produced, the effects of different types of engagement and the circumstances and conditions under which they are most likely to occur. In response to these gaps, this study explores the museum encounters of people aged over 45 years, the mechanisms at work, the role of affect and the conditions of possibility for wellbeing that museums afford. Set up as a multi-site ethnographic case study, the focus is the more-than-human, situated, sociomaterial practices that occur in four museums: Melbourne Museum, Australia; Nantes History Museum, France; Te Papa Tongarewa, New Zealand; and Manchester Museum, UK.

Wellbeing is an ill-defined and elusive construct, with diverse, co-existing discourses and approaches that tend to focus on the identification of its determinates and/or components. However, taking a Spinozo-Deleuzian materialist view as this study does, it can be regarded as increased capacity. This approach affords the conceptual conditions to explore the lively interactions amongst spaces, bodies, perceptions, sensations, constructs and objects and their capacitating effects. Wellbeing emerges, it is argued, through an ecology of sociomaterial practices in more-than-human functional collectives. These practices enrich people's understanding of themselves in relationship with the world. And museums, as fully staffed storehouses of cultural heritage, artefacts, memories, history, identities and stories, have affective appeal, are highly accessible and provide particularly generative conditions of possibility for the wellbeing of older people.

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis comprises my original work towards the Doctor of Philosophy degree except where indicated in the text. The thesis is fewer than 100,000 words, exclusive of tables, figures, and references. The research was conducted with the approval of the University of Melbourne's Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC Project ID: 1851946).

Lena Roberta Gan

3rd November, 2023

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Further afield, I'd like to acknowledge the directors, staff and participants at the museums. I enjoyed every minute of the time I spent at each of the museums in your company. I am beholden to you for your trust and generosity in sharing the experience of your museums with me. And finally, I acknowledge and thank the University of Melbourne and Museums Victoria via the McCoy Project for their support in the form of a joint scholarship.

DEDICATION

To the friends and family I have lost on this journey: Helen Liesfield, Robert Gan, John Gan, Joyce Evans, Kaye Vella, Nyla Walkear, Andy Greenall and Alan Bentley. And to mum!

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Figure 69. Interactive display, Bunjilaka, Melbourne Museum. Image: Patrick Hamon

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NOTE ON PUNCTUATION ETC

I have deviated from APA7 guidelines with regard to quotes. Double inverted commas and italics are used for data excerpts and single inverted commas for quotes from the literature.

Translations from French to English are my own as are any errors.

Cover image: Collage created from images taken at the four museums.

Indicative museum floor plans: Open Studio Architecture.

1. SETTING THE SCENE

1.1 Unrealised potential: the Impetus

“The cultural institutions offer work in creative and interesting ways. Instead of a flip chart at the end of an agenda, they’ll do something different, they can do music, they can do art, you can learn new skills - it opens up whole new worlds for people. (Excerpt from an interview with a Manchester City Council Officer, 2016)

This study grows out of an academic and professional interest in ageing, ageing populations and wellbeing along with a lifetime of personal interest in the arts, culture and museums¹. The catalysts for this particular research focus were twofold. The first was a visit to Manchester in 2016. Manchester was the first city in the United Kingdom to join the World Health Organisation’s (WHO) global network of Age-Friendly Cities in 2010. Its cultural institutions embraced the age-friendly approach which complemented their existing work on social inclusion, intergenerational activity and wellbeing. They have since developed an impressive array of activities that are fully integrated into city-wide programs aimed at improving the lives of older people. What I saw in Manchester on that trip opened my eyes to the largely unrealised potential of cultural institutions. In particular, their capacity to address some of the issues associated with the wellbeing of ageing populations in enriching, collaborative, sustainable and cost-effective ways. The second catalyst was a body of epidemiological research indicating a strong correlation between regular cultural attendance and longevity, health and wellbeing. The reasons for that correlation however, were a mystery. Even after a lifetime of visiting museums², I really had little idea of what I was doing whilst there, nor what made them so compelling, stimulating and invigorating. This all led to the formulation of a set of guiding research questions.

1.2 Open-ended: the guiding questions

The confluence of challenges addressed in this study lies at the nexus of ageing populations, struggling public health systems, the devolution of responsibility for health and wellbeing to individuals along with diminishing government funding for public institutions. The aim was to better understand the strong association shown by epidemiological research between cultural attendance and wellbeing outcomes for older visitors in a museum context. This is in the hope that better understanding brings new opportunities, initiatives and the potential for museums to more actively involve themselves in wellbeing, and inform the current policy focus.

¹ Museums in this study refer to non-commercial, public institutions and include art museums (often referred to as art galleries in the US and Asia-Pacific).

² My mother was an artist and art history teacher, so the habit of visiting museums began at a very early age.

Having little notion of what was really occurring in museums at the outset, determined that the research questions should be open-ended. This accorded with what museum researchers Hooper-Greenhill and Moussouri (2002, as cited in Schorch, 2015, p.441) described as a dearth of 'open-ended studies that ask the simple question: What is happening here?' There was, I felt, much about visitor-museum entanglement lurking unnoticed between, beneath and amongst the statements, comments and opinions emerging from the traditional techniques of interviews, focus groups and surveys. Somewhat baffling is the scarcity of studies with a focus on the lived, embodied experience of museum visitors in visitor studies methodologies. This was especially puzzling in view of the fact that museum visitation is very much a bodily experience and it is only through direct experience that art and artefacts fully engage and communicate (Dewey, 1980; Hooper-Greenhill, 2000; McCarthy et al., 2004). In short supply were extra-textual experiences: the tacit, implicit and dormant; the dynamic, sensory and gestural; the intangible, invisible, indeterminate and the unconscious. These were what I was looking to access, although I didn't realise it when I set out. There were no hypotheses nor any real notion of what might be revealed, only the following guiding questions and a great deal of curiosity.

How are positive cultural encounters between older people and museums materialised?

- a. What are the mechanisms at work during these encounters?
- b. How is affect implicated?
- c. Which museum characteristics provide the conditions of possibility for the wellbeing of older people?

The study has three main components, the wellbeing construct, an ageing cohort and a museum context. What I sought to understand was what occurs during the museum visits of older people that enhances wellbeing. To do this necessitated reframing the concept of wellbeing, and taking an unusual methodological viewpoint. However, before outlining the research approach, I will first introduce each of the three components.

1.3 Wellbeing: the construct

'...our wellbeing approach... means giving people the capabilities to live lives of purpose, balance, and meaning to them.' (New Zealand Government, 2022, p.10)

Wellbeing is quite a chameleon; highly responsive to its context. In everyday life, it is commonly used to refer broadly to positive feelings of satisfaction, general health and more specifically mental health. However, it otherwise remains an ill-defined and contested concept (McLeod, 2017; McLeod & Wright, 2016; Sointu, 2005). The lack of consensus around its definition is highlighted in the diversity of measurement scales and indicators used (Atkinson et al., 2016; Gallou, 2022; Grossi et al., 2019; Thomson & Chatterjee, 2014). The Organisation

for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) for example, takes a capabilities approach (Durand, 2015, p.8), whilst the WHO-5 Well-Being Index measures the affective, hedonic dimensions of wellbeing and is widely used in public health research (Kusier & Folker, 2020). The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2021b) argues that a focus on wellbeing upholds sustainability, tracking the equitable distribution of resources, and general prosperity. And due to the shortcomings of macro-economic data as indicators of the state of people's lives, wellbeing has risen to the forefront of political agendas³. In Australia for example, the government (2022) recently put out its first report based on the overarching national framework to measure progress and wellbeing called 'Measuring What Matters'⁴. The stated aim is to provide a comprehensive, coherent and integrated view of both the economy and society that will inform policy making and improve accountability (2022).

Although currently high on political agendas as an indicator, wellbeing remains paradoxically elusive, entangled with and more often than not, conflated with health (Atkinson, 2011)⁵. In fact the WHO uses wellbeing to define health as 'a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity'⁶. From a purely biomedical viewpoint, health is conceived of in terms of the presence or absence of illness, infirmity or injury, and wellbeing as a positive state that encompasses mental health and quality of life. Biomedical definitions of health, or more accurately ill-health, are necessarily subjective, contextual and relative, and are also a function of evolving societal norms (Mol, 2002). In recent times an alternative approach has begun to emerge. Health and wellbeing are increasingly viewed as complex societal productions, incorporating factors such as lifestyle, social networks, and socio-economic, cultural and environmental conditions (WHO, 2015). Evidence from the Foresight project in the UK showed that 'a high level of wellbeing is associated with positive functioning, which includes creative thinking, productivity, good interpersonal relationships and resilience in the face of adversity, as well as good physical health and life expectancy' (Government Office for Science, 2008, p.61). Conversely, with low levels of wellbeing, people function considerably less well and have poorer health and life expectancy (2008).

'Our economy is based on spending billions to persuade people that happiness is buying things, and then insisting that the only way to have a viable economy is to make things for people to buy so they'll have jobs and can get enough money to buy these things. The net result is an atomised society of disengaged individuals – and then what? They become demoralised and socially powerless.' (Rosefeldt, 2023)

³ <https://www.oecd.org/general/compendiumofocedwell-beingindicators.htm>

⁴ <https://treasury.gov.au/publication/p2023-mwm>

⁵ This goes some way to explaining the array of measurement scales, indicators and variables.

⁶ <http://www.who.int/about/mission/en/>

The high degree of commodification and consumption that characterise many of today's lifestyles have been cited as underlying causes not only for prevalent behavioural and lifestyle pathologies, but also for loss of meaning and purpose in life (Eckersley, 2004). Material wealth alone does not lead to self-actualization, self-esteem and a sense of belonging (Koltko-Rivera, 2006; OECD, 2011), nor does it result in wellbeing. By the same token, a healthy economy does not come about without a flourishing citizenry; to have the one, requires the other. The implication being that wellbeing, as Sir Michael Marmot (2010) affirms, 'should be a more important societal goal than simply more economic growth' (p.10). Moreover, the recent pandemic with its impact on already oversubscribed public health systems along with the implications of rapidly ageing populations⁷, strongly highlight the need for a wellbeing focus.

Meaning, purpose and belonging to a community are fundamental to wellbeing (WHO, 2015). Communities value and provide support, acceptance and fulfilment to their members. Prior to the middle of the last century, extended families often lived in the same community, city or region, and older people were an integral part of family and community life (Whiteland, 2013). However, as working adults follow employment opportunities to geographically disparate locations, extended families have dispersed. Contributing to this trend are technological developments, an evolving economy, increased working hours, fewer secure jobs and the diminishing role of elders in families and communities (Kalache, 1996). Most developed and developing nations are impacted by social isolation, loneliness, ageism and single parent homes. What is more, the dynamic and fast-moving nature of the global economy plus the recent pandemic and ongoing climate emergencies have exacerbated insecurity and uncertainty. All of this is manifesting in alarming and rising levels of anxiety, depression and other mental health disorders⁸.

1.3.1 Humans, human bodies and ageing

'When you take a breath, you touch a part of the planet, with the inside of your body.'
(Nørretranders, 1999, as cited in Loenhardt, 2021, p.35)

Fundamental to any discussion about the wellbeing of older adults is an understanding of the terms 'human', 'human body' and 'ageing'. This is no simple matter as humans are less than entirely human⁹ nor is a body a single discrete unit. A human in this study is much more than an anthropoid, a hominid, a bipedal primate or a member of the homo sapiens species. A human in this study is an interactive, or more precisely intra-active¹⁰ and interdependent being

⁷ <https://globaleurope.eu/globalization/effects-of-aging-population/>

⁸ <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/mental-health-services/mental-health-services-in-australia/report-contents/summary-of-mental-health-services-in-australia/prevalence-impact-and-burden>

⁹ The human genome is found in only about 10% of all the cells that occupy our bodies (Haraway, 2008). Our bodies are symbiotic entities, hosting 40 trillion microbes, so many more than human cells (Sheldrake, 2020, p.18).

¹⁰ Term coined by physicist Karen Barad referring to the 'mutual constitution of entangled agencies'. In other words, 'distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through their intra-action' (2007, p.33).

inextricably entangled with its environment, which includes other organisms and material artefacts. The human body on a physical level is a dynamic assemblage¹¹, host to trillions of microorganisms called the body's microbiota or microbiome, along with artefacts such as clothing, glasses, hearing aids, mobile phones and other forms of technology with which it functions symbiotically. Ongoing exchanges of fluids, air, substances, microbes, information and artefacts lead to its ongoing and open-ended transformation across the life course. The human body is highly porous, synthesising inputs that flow through it, replacing millions of cells daily and generating incessant chains of reactions and signals in response to its milieu. There are no clearly defined boundaries between inside and outside nor between the entity and its environment. In other words, a body is co-extensive with its environment and mediates the subjective, fluctuating field of experience that we call life (Abram, 1997). In this sense, bodies are perhaps more usefully thought of as processes rather than things (Sheldrake, 2021). This process view of an interconnected, intra-active body, where a dynamic balance exists amongst systems, intra-actions and relationships, is fundamental to wellbeing in many non-Western cosmologies such as those of indigenous Australians (Suchet-Pearson et al., 2013) and Māori peoples (Bignall & Rigney, 2019). The view of wellbeing taken up by this study is similarly one in which wellbeing is produced in functional collectives as enhanced capacity.

By way of contrast, contemporary Western health sciences tend to isolate the body in space and time, separating it from its context and considering it as a relatively stable and discrete biological organism made up of multiple complementary systems and organs with clearly defined boundaries. What Western health sciences effectively work with is a snapshot or frozen image of a body at a particular time and location, generally taken when something is 'wrong' and needs 'fixing'. The focus is on any part of the body identified as malfunctioning, rather than on the whole body within its functional context. This approach works well for acute or discrete conditions such as broken bones and cataracts, but it is far less effective when there are coexisting chronic health disorders linked to the functional environment.

Human beings are highly individual and with age heterogeneity increases. Not only are body types, DNA, fingerprints, shape, size and weight diverse, but the ageing process in any two people is very different. Much more strongly linked to lifestyle than genetic factors, the ageing process is now understood as an interaction between intrinsic biological processes and social and lifestyle factors (WHO, 2022a). Furthermore, it is far more malleable than previously assumed (Dönertaş et al., 2019; Scott, 2021). Genetic factors can account for as little as 25% of how we age (Kirkwood, 2017; MedlinePlus, 2022)¹². In addition, chronological age is not as strongly linked with physiological age as is commonly assumed. One study has shown that by the age of 38 years, a person can have a physiological age of between 26 and 50 years (Belsky

¹¹ Assemblages are open contingent and functional collocations of entities, relations, affects and events.

¹² <https://ghr.nlm.nih.gov/primer/traits/longevity>

et al., 2015). Ageing is an ongoing and highly variable process throughout one's lifetime during which a multitude of bodily changes of varying intensity occur continuously. These are non-linear, profoundly transformative and impact us at all levels.

1.4 Older people: the cohort

'In many parts of the West, the (bio)medical model of ageing has come to dominate how we think about ageing and older people, framing older people through illness and impairment, and shaping negative attitudes towards ageing that are embedded across society and culture.' (Dodd et al., 2018, p.7)

For the first time in human history, not only individuals, but populations around the world are ageing. In 'so-called' developed nations, the average lifespan has been extended by 30 years compared to what it was a century ago (Harper, 2017). The United Nations (UN) World Population Ageing 2020 report projects that the number of people aged over 65 will increase from 9.3% in 2020 to 16% in 2050. Clearly the way societies function will change as ageing populations force us to review attitudes, systems, policies and assumptions.

Australia is no exception. It is estimated that the working age population aged 15-64 years will decrease from 66% in 2017 to around 60% in 2066 (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2018). In the same period, it is projected that the number of 65+ year olds will increase from 15% to around 22% (ABS, 2018). These demographic changes have significant social, economic and policy implications. With public health and aged care systems already struggling to keep up with demand, supporting older citizens to remain physically and mentally healthy, socially active and disability-free for as long as possible, have become public policy imperatives.

Despite signs of incipient change, attitudes, infrastructure, resources and systems in the health and wellbeing sectors, remain strongly focussed on illness rather than wellness. The commitment is to managing and resolving rather than preventing. As it is highly profitable, this focus is also highly resistant to change. The Baby Boomer cohort (Hamilton & Hamilton, 2006) however, does have the potential to compel large-scale change. Notably dissimilar to the previous generation, this generational cohort has different values, education levels, attitudes, expectations, health and wealth (Morris et al., 2010). These differences will have a major impact on the types of care, residential accommodation, products, services and support that they will need, seek, prefer and be able to pay for (Young & Tinker, 2017).

Changing capacities are a natural part of the ageing process, although the type and degree are highly variable. Research has found that meaningful engagement with life, quality social relationships, and cultural and creative participation greatly contribute to a satisfying later life and sense of wellbeing (Archer et al., 2018; Liao & Brunner, 2016; Shankar et al., 2015; Tomini

et al., 2016). Notwithstanding, older citizens as a group, is one about which we know little other than that it is highly heterogeneous. One reason that we know so little is that until the acknowledged onset of ageing populations, this cohort had effectively been ‘othered’ from the mainstream. It was unilaterally deemed unproductive and apathetic, so by and large, ignored.

Dominant societal narratives take a deficit view of ageing, focussing on increased social and healthcare costs, lack of productivity, frailty, illness and dependence. This view is reductive and encourages ageist attitudes in an already deeply ageist society. It has the effect of rendering invisible, silencing and persistently excluding older people from social, economic, political and cultural debates and systems (Walsh et al., 2017). In doing so, it undermines confidence, individuality and rich, productive lives, and neglects the significant contribution older people make through caring, volunteering and other unpaid and largely unacknowledged activities¹³. All of this disempowers and diminishes wellbeing. Also disregarded is the fact that older people continue to consume products and services, just not the same ones. Even more significantly, dominant narratives frame ageing as abjection, the regrettable decline from an ideal and productive youth and midlife, rather than part of the natural ongoing ‘process of differentiation’ that opens onto new potentialities (Sandberg, 2013, p.19). It is these new potentialities as fostered by the ‘conditions of possibility for wellbeing’ (Coffey, 2020) in museums, that are the focus of this study.

1.5 Museums: the context

‘A museum...is about what it makes possible.’ (Carr, 2006, p.16)

A considerable body of evidence exists that indicates older people are happier, healthier and more likely to flourish if they engage in social activity and participate in life (Glass et al., 1999; Luoh & Herzog, 2002; Menec et al., 2011). According to Australian Bureau of Statistics data, older people are key consumers of culture, and this growing trend currently correlated to education level, is expected to continue (Moretti et al., 2015). Corresponding findings were reported in the UK (Department for Culture, Media and Sport [DCMS], 2013). Yet, although in the past two decades there has been a burgeoning interest in the potential of the cultural sector to address pressing health and wellbeing challenges, it is only relatively recently that this has begun to manifest at policy level (Dow et al., 2023).

Epidemiological research, as mentioned, provides strong evidence that ‘general cultural attendance’ on a regular basis increases longevity and has a beneficial impact on mental health and wellbeing (Bygren et al., 1996; Cuypers et al., 2012; Davies et al., 2014; Konlaan et

¹³ For example, the ABS estimated the value of unpaid work in 1997 as equivalent to 48% of Australia’s GDP. <https://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/censushome.nsf/4a256353001af3ed4b2562bb00121564/fcac2b648f550b74ca257a75002adec9!OpenDocument>

al., 2000; O'Neill, 2010; Ruiz, 2004; Staricoff, 2004; Wilkinson et al., 2007). Culturally active participants, one longitudinal study found, had a significantly reduced risk of impaired perceived health compared to those who were not culturally active (Johansson et al., 2001). That study also noted that cultural stimulation requires regular engagement, like exercise. Evidence from a further study indicated the need for two or more hours per week of arts engagement for enhanced levels of subjective mental wellbeing (Davies et al., 2016a). In the light of this evidence it seems clear that cultural institutions are well placed to actively involve themselves in promoting wellbeing (Dodd & Jones, 2014).

Historically many cultural institutions were elitist and exclusive. However, with changing contexts, political and economic pressure and rapidly increasing older and more diverse populations, the focus of cultural institutions is changing. Museums are extending their mandates from preservation, presentation and education, into such areas as community engagement, social inclusion, urban regeneration, and wellbeing (Hamblin & Harper, 2016). These institutions are now seeking to maximise the number and diversity of their publics, and the reach of their programs to demonstrate return on investment. Bringing multi-generational and multi-cultural groups together in cultural institutions has the power to build and strengthen communities, and support and foster health and wellbeing (Chhabra, 2008; Gan, 2021; Sandell, 1994). Moreover, the potential to actively engage with older people as consumers of culture, knowledge bearers, champions, volunteers, grandparents, learners and donors is as yet, largely untapped.

Museum visits are complex, multi-layered and multidimensional experiences involving spaces, objects, movement, people, memories, sensations and feelings. In other words, they are highly personal, affective socio-material experiences. They entangle the human, more-than-human, the animate, inanimate, visible and invisible (Mulcahy & Witcomb, 2018). Visitors meander through diverse object-filled spaces, drawn to engage with certain artefacts and people whilst ignoring others. As they do this, they make complex and spontaneous associations and meanings that may or may not align with curatorial intent. The cognitive, sensorimotor and affective collude pleasurably in these embodied museum experiences (Best, 2002) where engaging with art and artefacts deepens our understanding of the experience of being human (Duke, 2017).

Museums are dynamic places. They are spaces of affective, connective and meaningful encounters which are potentially transformative. They encourage active, personal exploration and discovery and so, are ideal as the context for this wellbeing study. The artefacts in museums embody multiple and alternate places, epochs, cultures, affects and meanings. They have great capacity to elicit memories, emotions and thoughts, and in doing so, provide connections to 'other' worlds. A memorable museum visit, claims architect Juhani Pallasmaa (2014a), is 'an exploration and discovery in which the visitor's body movements, sensory

experiences, associations, recollections, and imagination contribute to the overall effect beyond what is explicitly presented and expressed' (p.241). In short, visitors go to museums to experience something different, to be surprised 'to feel, to be emotional' (Smith, 2014, p.125), to experience wonder and to 'see what unfolds within...' (Carr, 2006, p.16). Furthermore, museums are public environments that encourage self-determined action, open-ended exploration, and experimentation. As such, they open up possibilities that might not otherwise have been conceivable in 'everyday and taken-for-granted' lives (Lenz Taguchi, 2016, p.221). Researching these potentialities however, requires a less than conventional approach.

1.6 More-than-human, relational, processual: researching otherwise

The elusive nature of the wellbeing construct provoked a shift in focus from what it is, to what it does and the conditions under which it is produced. So, rather than using health sciences or policy definitions, I have adopted a view of wellbeing based on the work of Spinoza as taken up by Deleuze. In this view, the proxy for wellbeing is increased capacity or agency which is produced collaboratively in complex dynamic assemblages or functional collectives. As philosopher-physicist Karen Barad (2007) observes, '(e)xistence is not an individual affair' (p.ix), it is a complex ongoing process of intra-active relationships amongst humans, matter and noncorporeal entities. Bodies cannot exist or function in isolation, they can only participate collectively with-in, or in intra-action with the field of conditions in which they are immersed. I use 'with-in' to denote actively 'with' and immersed 'in'.

A body's capacity to form new and compatible relations (Buchanan, 1997), with-in its environment both redefines its potential and determines its capacity to act and respond. In other words, its wellbeing. New relations are formed through active engagement with the socio-material world in a series of encounters such as those that might occur in a museum. Openness and responsiveness in the form of affective, connective flows indicate a willingness to forge capacitating relations in an ongoing engagement with life (Duff, 2023). Using this formulation, collaborative assemblages that enhance a body's capacity such as positive social interaction, produce wellbeing. Conversely, those that diminish capacity such as illness or depression¹⁴, lead to disengagement and reduced responsiveness. When ill we withdraw into ourselves, become inactive and impassive, minimising external interaction whilst directing all available energy towards getting well.

Ordinary everyday experience tells us that the world we live in is open-ended, dynamic, responsive and lively. A desire to explore beyond human discourse and incorporate the fluid, disorderly and somatic realm of feeling and sensation in museum visits, made a new materialist approach a fitting choice. This approach is particularly 'attuned to non-verbal and

¹⁴ Depression in this view, is an assemblage in that it is produced through the intra-action of a body with its environment (McLeod, 2017).

non-discursive forms of communication’ (Hickey-Moody et al., 2021, p.5). New materialism is an umbrella term for a diverse group of theories with a similar worldview (Fox & Alldred, 2022). Rather than seeking to define, categorise or predict based on prior assumptions and understandings, this group of theories advocates following, mapping and making sense of what occurs and under what conditions. No priority is given to, nor distinction made between nature and culture, mind and matter, human and nonhuman and so on. Likewise, between the physical world and social constructs such as meanings, thoughts, memories and collective memories (Fox & Alldred, 2022). Everything is processual and has agency in this worldview and it is the nature of the relations between entities and their environments¹⁵ and what emerges from them that is of primary importance.

The key components in this study are all dynamic, intra-active processes. Ageing is a multifaceted, fluctuating and non-linear process, not a fixed singular state or condition. Similarly, the wellbeing construct is complex and fluid, characterised by ongoing ebbs and flows. And finally, museums are multi-layered, multi-dimensional dynamic public organisations rather than fixed, static, closed and immutable spaces (Massey, 2005). They incorporate myriad overlapping epochs, forms, cultures and artefacts, and research suggests that they have great capacity to facilitate enhanced wellbeing for older visitors (Camic & Chatterjee, 2013; Todd et al., 2017).

Museum visitation is a dynamic sociomaterial practice in this study. Sociomaterial practices are embedded engagements in the worlds of which they are a part (Massey, 2005). They are the means by which affect and hence capacity are made manifest. Affect from a new materialist viewpoint, is the force or intensity by which we register change of any type (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; 2020; Fox, 2012c; Fox & Alldred, 2013). To understand the potential of museums for the wellbeing of older people, it is important to understand the impact of material culture, its capacity to yield insights into social relationships and to connect people, objects and places (Message, 2011). In other words, how engaging with diverse material artefacts from different cultures, and eras in museum spaces can affect an individual in a manner that enhances capacity.

Qualitative in nature, this study explores how increased capacity to act and respond as a proxy for wellbeing, might materialise during the museum visits of older people. It does so by focussing on the complex flows of affects, relations, events, forces and spaces that constitute the vivid, embodied experience of cultural engagement for older people. It is designed to examine how older museum visitors are affected, and the intensity and orientation of those affects. This investigative approach diverges from standard definitions of wellbeing and traditional methodologies. It cuts across disciplines and sectors, and unsettles the mental

¹⁵ Environments or milieus are subjective and include the living, nonliving, corporeal, intangible and invisible.

habits of linearity, objectivity and dualistic thinking (Braidotti, 2002). It interconnects the fields of gerontology, health sciences, museum studies and continental philosophy, and draws broadly on the arts, architecture, sociology, ecology, design and literature¹⁶.

1.7 Nine chapters: the structure

The thesis is organised into nine chapters with the goal of better understanding the potential of museums for the wellbeing of older visitors. The next chapter elaborates on the social context of the study through the literature and outlines key findings and contemporary debates in the areas of ageing, the arts, health and wellbeing, and museum studies. The transition period from the previous century to the current one has seen a number of emergent trends, themes and approaches in these areas, many in response to the complexity of living in a global context with pressing 'matters of concern' (Latour, 2004) such as climate change, inequity and human rights issues. As an emergent field, this research into the wellbeing of older museum visitors looks to engage with some of these matters of concern, most particularly with inequity and human rights issues such as ageism.

Chapter 3 introduces the new materialist theoretical approach along with affect and assemblage theory. This approach offers productive and generative ways of accounting for the conditions of possibility for wellbeing (Coffey, 2020) with particular attention to the often neglected and elusive details of corporeal expression, gesture and sensory participation. Wellbeing is viewed as processual, collective and emergent; as a body's capacity for action constituted in ever-evolving affective encounters with other entities. As museum visits are embodied, affective and relational affairs, it is the engagements or entanglements of the sensing body with its environment that are the focus. The chapter also outlines the methods developed, the four museums, the participants and the recruitment process along with the limitations of the study.

Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 comprise what are generally known as the data chapters. They begin in chapter 4 with an in-breadth examination of perspectives on the museum as built environment, agentic milieu and public institution. This chapter includes data from all four museums and sets out the diverse possibilities or fields of conditions that a museum affords. It sets the context for the following three chapters. Chapter 5 explores in-depth, the nature, richness and diversity of a single visit in Manchester. A cohort-based approach in chapter 6 identifies resonant themes in a museum in Nantes. And finally, chapter 7 investigates participant engagement with consonant and dissonant themes in museums in Melbourne and Wellington. The data chapters work together diffractively, each building new insights that provide indicators for the next chapter.

¹⁶ Literature may seem an unlikely source, however professional wordsmiths are adept at expressing that which is intangible, transitory, elusive and difficult to articulate.

Chapter 8 discusses the major threads that emerged from the data analysis for the wellbeing of older museum visitors, structured around the four guiding research questions. This chapter begins with an account of how positive encounters between older people and museums materialise. What manifests I argue, is an ecology of consolidating and expansive practices underpinned by the perception-memory-imagination mechanism and facilitated by affect. Museums with their vast and constantly evolving collections and displays are places that inspire connection, reflection, speculation, experimentation and participation. They lead us to unexpected encounters with difference, to different ways of being in, and making sense of the world, and in so doing, build affective capacity or wellbeing. This is particularly relevant and generative for older adults confronted by a confluence of physiological and psychosocial change. Finally, chapter 9 provides an overview of the original contribution of this study, the implications and opportunities of the research findings for individuals, museums and society, and suggestions for rich and diverse areas of further research.

1.8 A wellbeing study

‘But health stories are about so much more than germs. They’re the most intimate and dramatic stories because they are about people’s bodies, and about people’s relationships with their family members and their societies. And they’re about the failures of governments, and prejudices, and money, and conspiracies and multinational pharmaceutical corporations and international trade. Some people ask me, “How can you write about diseases and public health crises all the time?” And I say, “because they’re about everything.”’ (Nolen, 2021, n.p.)

Although a wellbeing study rather than a health story, this study is about public health, prejudices, older people’s bodies, identities, relationships with the self, others and society, and a sense of belonging. Implicit but not the focus, are failures, discrimination, funding and questions of resource allocation. Wellbeing is about the quality of people’s lives, their capacity; and that underpins everything else! Given this, we surely already understand quite a deal about wellbeing, older people, their relationships and museums which is the focus of the next chapter.

2. WHAT DO WE ALREADY KNOW AND WHERE ARE THE GAPS?

2.1 Introduction

The interdisciplinary nature of this study necessitated drawing on a multiple and diverse set of sources. As such, this review of the literature adopted the Deleuzo-Guattarian ‘logic of AND rather than INSTEAD OF’ (Lecerle, 2002, p.60). Included is both white and grey literature that derives broadly from, but is not limited to the fields of health sciences, gerontology, museum studies, the arts and architecture. The review provides an account of the social context and establishes a baseline of existing knowledge about culture¹⁷ and wellbeing, the wellbeing of older visitors, and museums and wellbeing. It encompasses current debates, identifies major gaps and outlines next steps proposed by researchers.

The chapter begins with an overview of the social context, attitudes and approaches to ageing and older people. This is followed by an outline of the associations between culture, nature¹⁸, health¹⁹ and wellbeing, and a synopsis of the evolving roles, functions and definitions of museums in the 21st century. Museums as milieus are complex physical entities, comprising both content and container. Insofar as environmental factors have an overarching impact on wellbeing and ageing, I include the built environment, its design and the physical and affective impacts on the visitor experience. The chapter closes with a summary of the key findings from the literature.

2.2 Social context, ageism and ageing

In today’s global world, countries, societies, economies, finance and much more ‘intra-act’ (Barad, 2007) to produce converging megatrends and their associated high levels of insecurity and uncertainty. Public health systems have been sorely tested by the COVID-19 pandemic and found to be wanting. The combination of ageing populations, oversubscribed public health systems and neoliberal governments’ devolution of responsibility for the management of health and wellbeing to individuals (Laliberte Rudman, 2015; McLeod & Wright, 2016; Pack et al, 2019; Rose, 1999; 2001), has resulted in a perfect storm. One in which the individual is, to an increasing degree, obliged to find and pay for her own way to health and wellbeing.

Chronic or noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) such as vascular, musculoskeletal and chronic respiratory diseases, diabetes and cancer, currently account for a significant portion of the

¹⁷ I use the terms ‘the arts’, ‘culture’ and ‘heritage’ interchangeably, defaulting to the first two in general.

¹⁸ Many museums incorporate nature in various forms and it is known to have beneficial health/wellbeing impacts.

¹⁹ As wellbeing is generally conflated with health in the literature, it is often not possible to separate them.

global burden of disease (WHO, 2022b). Changes in social conditions along with globalisation, urbanisation, rapidly ageing populations²⁰, and the effective control of infectious diseases have all contributed to this situation. NCDs are the result of interacting ‘genetic, physiological, environmental and behavioural factors’ and age is a risk factor for them all (2022b, n.p.). As a group, they are the leading cause of illness, disability and death (Australian Institute of Health & Welfare [AIHW], 2022; van den Bosch, 2018). However, a very high percentage of these chronic diseases are preventable through lifestyle choices such as social interaction, regular physical activity, a healthy diet, not smoking and the moderate consumption of alcohol (Cacioppo et al., 2011; Szoeki, 2021; WHO, 2022a).

Social connection and integration so fundamental for wellbeing, have been found to be protective of many physical and mental illnesses. They also facilitate healing and enhance quality of life (Holt-Lundstad, 2021; Holt-Lundstad et al., 2010; Seeman, 2000). Humans are social beings and social connectedness can mitigate anxiety and depression, and augment self-esteem and empathy (Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008; Saeri et al., 2018). Social relationships afford a sense of connection, purpose, meaning and support, and are vital to health, wellbeing and longevity. Unfortunately, with age, social networks and opportunities for social connection diminish for many (Charles & Carstensen, 2010). This can result in vulnerability to social isolation and loneliness which are recognised public health issues associated with a number of negative health and wellbeing outcomes (Cacioppo et al., 2011; Leigh-Hunt et al., 2017) and decreased longevity (Holt-Lundstad et al., 2015).

There are many barriers to social participation. These include poor health and disability, a shortage of satisfactory opportunities, lack of confidence, living alone and lack of transport and/or financial means (Victor et al., 2005). Evidence indicates that older men have a higher risk of loneliness and social isolation (Milligan et al., 2015). However, one of the places where they are able to flourish, is in museums in the meaningful and esteemed role of grandfather (Herron & Jamieson, 2020). One study (Goll et al., 2018) found that fear of rejection and/or exploitation along with avoidance of situations that could undermine valued aspects of identity were barriers to participation. Furthermore, this study indicated that participants sought to uphold such aspects of identity as independence and youth, and longed for but could not find opportunities for identity-reinforcement (Goll et al., 2018; Shoenmakers et al., 2012). The drive towards eternal youth and the concomitant and deleterious ageist attitudes and stereotypes (Dodd et al., 2018; Kite & Johnson, 1988; Nelson, 2002) have amplified the emphasis on individual responsibility for self-management of health and wellbeing (Braidotti, 2009; McLeod & Wright, 2016). Yet as a society, we lack any policy focus around fostering the conditions that enable good health and wellbeing.

²⁰ ‘Funding aside, the greatest challenges to the health and social care systems come from an ageing population and a prevalence of long-term conditions for which there is no obvious cure’ (APPG, 2017, p.11).

2.2.1 Ageism

Ageism or unjustified prejudice and discrimination based on age, remains a socially tolerated form of discrimination (Robertson, 2017) with one in two people in 57 countries holding moderate to highly ageist attitudes (Officer et al., 2020). Epidemiological research shows that ageism has a number of cumulative negative impacts on older people, including reduced longevity, loss of confidence, withdrawal, social isolation, poorer health and diminished quality of life and wellbeing (Marshall, 2015; Ober Allen, 2016; Robertson, 2017; Twigg & Martin 2015; WHO, 2021b).

The Australian Human Rights Commission in a 2013 study, compiled the most common negative stereotypes of older adults. These stated that amongst other things, older people are lonely, boring, forgetful, bad drivers, grumpy, do not like change, complain a lot, prefer not to use technology, are a significant cost to the health system, don't contribute to the economy²¹, have difficulty learning new things or complex tasks, don't care about their appearance and no longer have sexual relationships. Neither a very positive nor accurate picture of what is by all accounts, a highly heterogeneous cohort about which we need to know more. However, it does go a great way towards explaining why older people resist and dislike being identified by age (Goll et al., 2018). Moreover, given the common and potentially large discrepancy between chronological and physiological age (Belsky et al., 2015; Szoek, 2021), categorising people by the former not only upholds negative stereotypes but can be highly misleading.

Ageism according to Bytheway (2005), is embedded in the social identity of the individual, which is both a bureaucratically managed identity and one conveyed by the body's appearance. Reductive ageist attitudes are internalised at a very early age which is one reason they remain so firmly entrenched (Robertson, 2017). Furthermore, they continue to be reinforced across the lifespan and are both self-directed and directed towards others at great cost to individuals, communities and society. Age is constitutive of identities in both early and later life, but not of those in the 'universal benchmark of ageless midlife' (van Dyk, 2016, p.115). Furthermore, the current array of positive adjectives applied to ageing such as healthy, active, successful, positive and productive, proposes van Dyk (2016), signals and affirms the otherness of post-midlife. It has been alleged that these so-called positive ageing models have been used by governments to rationalise and reframe the reduction of state-provided healthcare services (Macnicol, 2015). Museum programming for older visitors also tends to focus on geriatric illnesses or conditions such as dementia and stroke, thus unconsciously reinforcing the deficit model of ageing.

²¹ For example, Australians aged 55+ years contribute around \$74.5 billion p.a. to the economy in unpaid care and voluntary work. <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/education/face-facts-older-australians>

Despite being a current 'social urgency' (Tan, 2021, p.219) of some significance, ageism is rarely seen on museum programs. In one notable exception, researchers found that an interactive exhibition which aimed to disrupt age-related stereotypes at the Israel Children's Museum called 'Dialogue with Time', resulted in a significant reduction in ageist attitudes (Fruhauf et al., 2020). Further to this, the World Health Organisation (2021b) makes two recommendations to combat ageism beyond policies and legislation. These are educational and intergenerational activities, both of which are well within the capacity of museums. Intergenerational projects and programs are moreover, agents of social change known to foster more cohesive and inclusive communities (Gan, 2021).

2.2.2 Ageing discourses

Approaches to and discourses around ageing are many and varied. The most prevalent is the biomedical or deficit model with its focus on decline, loss of capacity and dependence. The proliferation of other models and discourses go variously by such names as healthy, successful, productive, active or positive ageing, and ageing well (Pocock et al., 2023; OECD, 2017; WHO, 2022a). These approaches appear to promote the optimisation of health and wellbeing in later life, placing an emphasis on autonomy, activity, health and youthful energy, and the avoidance of any signs of ageing - ageless ageing. In advocating for ageless ageing, they not only negate the ageing body, unintentionally uphold the deficit model, and reveal their ageist underpinnings, but also exclude those who do not conform to the prescribed characteristics (Gilleard & Higgs, 2017; Higgs & Gilleard, 2020; Katz & Peters, 2008; Laliberte Rudman, 2015; Mendes, 2013; Pack et al, 2019). What is more, these models and discourses, use a vast assortment of methods, evaluation criteria, definitions and assessment variables to measure health and wellbeing (Pocock et al., 2023).

Less well known are a number of theories that view later life as a distinct stage of life in its own right with its own unique potentialities rather than a worn out, deteriorating version of midlife (Carr et al., 2015). These include affirmative ageing (Sandberg, 2013), Erikson's developmental theory (Clayton, 1975), the 'ageless self' (Kaufman, 1986) and gerotranscendence (Tornstam, 2011). In spite of the general lack of consensus, in recent policy developments environmental factors are being acknowledged as having an overarching and interactive influence on all aspects of ageing and wellbeing (Pocock et al., 2023; WHO, 2015). This is one of the two main reasons for examining the museum milieu and its affordances in this study. The other being that tools are now available and adequate to the task of studying the complex entanglement of entities with their milieus.

2.3 Culture, health and wellbeing

A very large body of literature exists around the arts, health and wellbeing. However, the arts, culture and heritage are not clearly defined in most studies and documents. Arts Council

England (2022) for example defines the umbrella term ‘culture’ as including collections, combined arts, dance, libraries, literature, museums, music, theatre and the visual arts, however uses the terms culture and the arts interchangeably²² (p.19). Other documents discuss the arts, culture and heritage sector, yet often conflate the terms and/or use them interchangeably (Andrews, 2014; Dow et al., 2023; Innes et al., 2021; Mughal et al., 2022; Zbranca et al., 2022). Furthermore, studies often group engagements with culture into ‘arts participation’ or ‘active’ participation/engagement, and ‘cultural attendance’ or ‘receptive’ participation/engagement (All-Party Parliamentary Group on the Arts, Health and Wellbeing [APPGAHW], 2017; Dow et al., 2023; Fancourt & Finn, 2019; Zbranca et al., 2022). In this study, I use the terms ‘artmaking’ and ‘engaging with’ culture as it can be argued that culture is always participatory and cultural ‘attendance’ or ‘receptive participation’ does not do justice to the interactive nature of any engagement with culture.

The arts, health and wellbeing have long been associated. However, it is important to differentiate between art therapy, which is a form of psychotherapy, and artmaking and cultural engagement, which are defined as leisure activities. The arts, health and wellbeing activities are diverse and are practised in aged and respite care, hospitals, primary care, rehabilitation and health promotion (Davies et al., 2016b). There are multiple ways in which the arts have been shown to have a positive impact on health and wellbeing. From a human development perspective, they are instrumental in the acquisition of social and cultural capabilities (Wilson et al., 2017). In places of social activity such as museums, which are traditionally repositories of visual arts and cultural heritage, the arts act as catalysts for conversation and interaction, and can take people beyond their everyday lives.

Supplementing the well-documented benefits of art therapy, the arts are acknowledged to be meaningful, stimulating mediators in both formal and informal learning, and bring a number of intrinsic benefits that enhance the lives of both individuals and communities (Bennett & Froggett, 2020; McCarthy et al., 2004; Terrassa et al., 2016). McCarthy et al. (2004) differentiate between instrumental benefits which respond to social, educational or economic goals not specific to the arts, and intrinsic benefits which are inherent to the arts and enrich lives. A great advantage of arts initiatives is that they appear to be overwhelmingly viewed as positive by participants, and can provide positive, interactive contexts in which to address difficult social issues (Barraket, 2005, p.16). They can also provide a sense of purpose that strengthens personal identity, helps make sense of change, maintains a sense of coherence, and provides opportunities for positive social encounters. These all generate self-reported perceptions of wellness, resilience and quality of life (Antonovsky, 1987; Belfiore, 2002; Binnie, 2010; Camic & Chatterjee, 2013; Cohen, 2006; Cohen et al., 2006; Davies et al., 2016a;

²² Where not specified by the document/s cited, I use the terms culture and the arts interchangeably to denote the arts, culture and heritage.

Goulding, 2013; Newman et al., 2014). Furthermore, the arts can assist older people to remain healthy and independent; improve recovery from illness; enhance mental health; improve social care; mitigate social isolation and loneliness; promote more cohesive communities; encourage volunteer work; enhance the quality of the built environment; and ensure a more equitable distribution of resources and better access for the disadvantaged (APPGAHW, 2017). Despite this significant body of evidence on the positive effects of culture, there is very little information on how these benefits are achieved.

Epidemiological research provides evidence that ‘general cultural attendance’ such as museum visitation, on a regular basis increases longevity and has a beneficial impact on mental health and wellbeing (Bygren et al., 1996; Camic et al., 2017; Cuypers et al., 2012; Davies et al., 2014; Konlaan et al. 2000; O’Neill, 2010; Ruiz, 2004; Staricoff, 2004; Wilkinson et al., 2007). In a longitudinal study, Johannson et al., (2001) found that culturally active participants had a significantly reduced risk of impaired perceived health in comparison with those who were not culturally active. They also found that cultural stimulation was a perishable commodity and requires regular engagement. Additional research has indicated that leisure activities with no physical component such as a number of the arts, may contribute to improved ageing and reduced mortality, and so have great potential for engaging the frail elderly (Glass et al., 1999; Jacobs et al., 2008).

Research into the relationship between population health and arts engagement is relatively new. However, one study found a correlation between recreational arts engagement and mental health and wellbeing (Davies et al., 2016a). This research aimed to quantify a minimum level of arts activity that positively impacts wellbeing. Using the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS), a standard measure of subjective wellbeing, the researchers found that a minimum of around two hours per week of arts engagement provided a clear correlation (2016a). That being said, whatever the level of engagement, it is clear that investment in the wellbeing of citizens through the arts is equally, an investment in public health (APPGAHW, 2017; Dow et al., 2023).

Another initiative aimed at supporting health, wellbeing and independent living is social prescribing. The many models all connect primary care patients to sources of support within the local community, such as museums (APPGAHW, 2017; Chatterjee & Noble, 2013; Chatterjee & Thomson, 2015). Some of these models include: the arts, books, education and exercise on prescription, along with green activity and healthy living initiatives (Chatterjee & Thomson, 2015). Social prescribing, it has been proposed, ‘has the potential to become fully integrated as a patient pathway for primary care practices’ (Friedli et al., 2009; WHO, 2022a).

Co-chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on the Arts, Health and Wellbeing (APPGAHW), Lord Howarth, stated that the ‘conundrum that we have found ourselves pondering is why, if

there is so much evidence of the efficacy of the arts in health and social care, it is so little appreciated and acted upon' (2017, p.5). The APPGAHW Report had three significant key messages: the arts can help keep people well, aid recovery and support longer lives better lived; the arts can help meet major challenges facing health and social care such as ageing, chronic conditions, loneliness and mental health; and the arts can reduce costs of health and social care (2017, p.4). However, as Dow et al. (2023) point out, a more equal and integrated commitment from both the arts and health sectors than currently exists, is required to strengthen policy work in this area (p.157). Inadequate commitment along with the poor understanding of the mechanisms and conditions that produce health and wellbeing in interaction with culture, no doubt contribute to the lack of action noted by Lord Howarth.

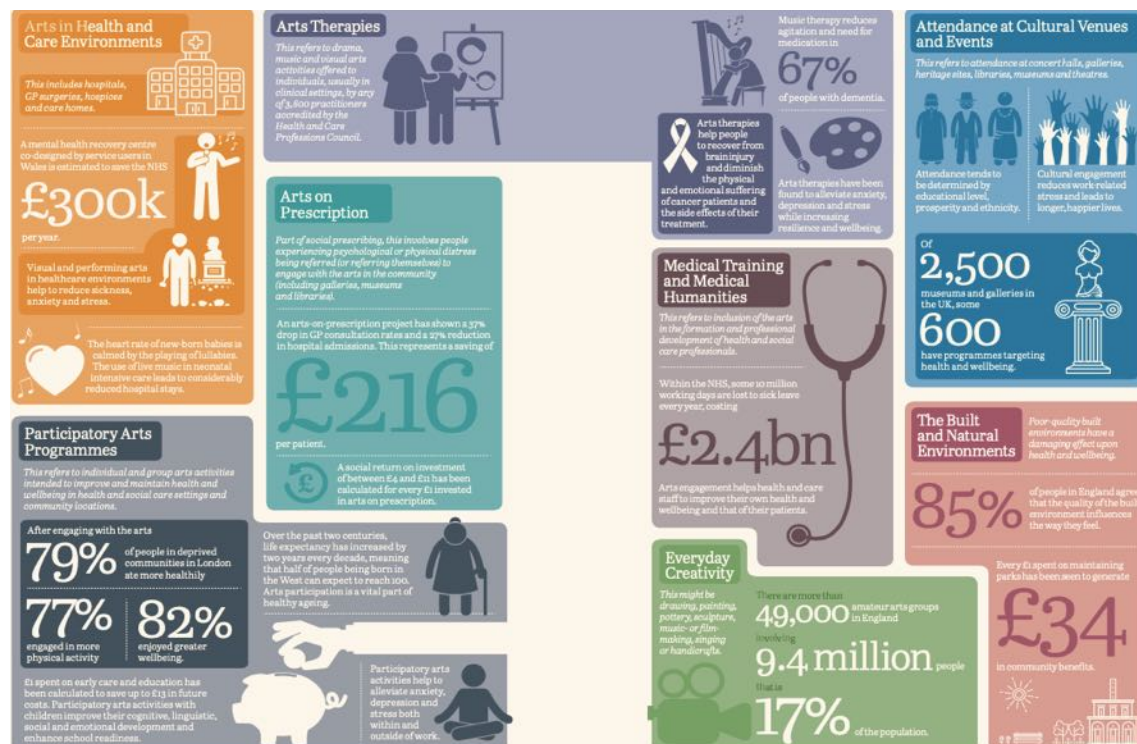


Figure 1. Visual snapshot of the arts for health and wellbeing UK (APPGAHW, 2017, pp.8-9).

2.3.1 Ageing, culture, health and wellbeing

Perspectives on ageing are evolving, and many now view the stage between retirement and functional disability known as the third age, as a time of growth and opportunity. Fraser et al (2015) undertook a literature review of research into the arts, ageing and quality of life. The review concluded that a growing body of work across a variety of disciplines indicates that the arts are beneficial to both the quality of life and health of older people. However, they identified a need for sustained programs of interdisciplinary research with broader definitions of the arts, given that much research is 'one-off' in nature and limits its conceptualisation of the arts in the context of health, to art therapy (2015). Sheets and Liebig (2011) consider that engagement with the arts in later life has the potential to increase wellbeing by 'creating

opportunities for growth and meaning' (p.129). They hypothesise a causal relationship between resilience and creativity. This is perhaps based on the notion that creativity requires flexibility, adaptability and openness to new ideas (Fisher & Specht, 1999). Cultural engagement does seem to develop habits, characteristics and attitudes that can enhance health and wellbeing in later life, as individuals adjust to ageing, enact identity processes to suit evolving circumstances and rebalance the self (Carr et al., 2015 p.16; Newman et al., 2014, p.446). These include humour, curiosity, intergenerational interaction, mastery of craft, learning for living, self-esteem, acceptance of death and dying, positive emotional experiences and lifelong learning and growth (Cohen, 2009; Froggett & Little, 2008; Sheets & Liebig, 2011).

Creative engagement has been identified as a key factor for mental wellbeing and adaptation to ageing (Bennett & Froggett, 2020; Matarasso, 2003; Smith & Andersson, 1989). Greaves and Farbus (2006) propose that the link between health and creative, social activity may be due to a combination of increases in mild physical activity along with improved psychological outcomes leading to improved self-care and health behaviours. Consistent with this, Cohen et al. (2006) contend that professionally run cultural programs can have a positive impact on the physical, mental and social health of older adults (Cohen, 2009). And according to museum director Linda Duke (2017), contemporary visual art experiences have the capacity to foster reflection, provide thought-provoking and meaningful challenges, and mindful, multi-sensory engagement. In spite of this, and the fact that human experience is always and only embodied, there has been little scholarly attention paid to the affective dynamics of museum exhibitions specifically (Varutti, 2022, p.3), and bodies intra-acting with environments, and the sensory aspects of cultural engagement in general.

In terms of general health and wellbeing, governments globally now acknowledge that social isolation and loneliness have long-term adverse effects. These include depression, increased blood pressure and rates of cognitive decline, risk of cardiovascular disease and risk of developing dementia (Amieva et al., 2010; Coyle & Dugan, 2012; Cutler, 2009; Fratiglioni et al., 2004; Hawkey & Cacioppo, 2010; Marmot, 2015; Owen, 2001; Shankar et al., 2011; 2015; Steptoe et al., 2004). In Australia and the UK, it is generally accepted that around 10% of people aged over 65 years feel socially isolated and/or lonely. This is likely to be a conservative figure, as many people will not self-identify as such. Research has shown that people's perception of being socially isolated and/or lonely can double the risk of developing dementia and is one of the top three concerns²³ of older people (Amieva et al., 2010; Philip, 2014; Wilson et al., 2017). Dementia and coronary heart disease are currently the top two leading causes of death in Australia (ABS, 2021). The cost of dementia in Australia in 2016 was \$14.25 billion and this is expected to rise to over \$1 trillion during the next 40 years (Brown et al., 2017). Significantly, longitudinal studies have consistently indicated the protective effect of

²³ The top three concerns of older people are physical pain, memory loss and loneliness (Davidson & Rossall, 2015)

social networks, creative participation and cultural engagement against dementia (Wang et al., 2002). Interventions that foster social contact and encourage creative activity under the guidance of a mentor, have also shown potential for positively impacting the quality of life and health of socially isolated older people (Andersson, 1985; Angus, 2002; Ciechanowski et al., 2004; Greaves & Farbus, 2006; McAuley et al., 2000). Yet for the most part, this evidence does not seem to have been acted upon in any significant way.

The percentage of older adults with higher education qualifications decreases with age. This largely reflects societal changes that have occurred over the past century. The interaction of demographic factors such as education and socio-economic status with other factors such as curiosity and interest, is crucial to arts engagement (Goulding, 2013). Social, psychosocial and physical factors have all been found to be determinants of engagement (Keaney & Oskala, 2007). Cultural engagement and artmaking declines markedly in people aged over 65 years. This is generally attributed to combinations of such factors as: poor physical and/or mental health, disability, poor mobility, poor hearing and sight, poverty, a dearth of social networks, limited access to transport, absence of company, lack of confidence, lack of education, feeling intimidated, a perception of the arts as elitist, and intellectual exclusion (Goulding, 2013; Ramsey, 2013). Modifying infrastructure, along with pedagogical programming and communication approaches, could readily reduce a number of these barriers in museums.

2.4 Nature, health and wellbeing

Culture is not the only contributor to health and wellbeing. A growing body of literature attests to the health and wellbeing benefits of engaging with nature (Louv, 2008; Ulrich, 1984; van den Bosch & Bird, 2018). From a biomedical perspective, contact with nature can improve immunity, lower blood pressure, reduce obesity, stress, anxiety and depression, mitigate asthma and cardiovascular disease, and increase life expectancy (James et al, 2016; Li & Bell, 2018). In health, wellbeing, design and scientific circles, the 'inherent inclination to affiliate with the natural world' is known as 'biophilia' (Kellert, 2012, p.xii). According to Rebecca Giggs (2020), with widespread anxiety around ongoing environmental degradation, people yearn for encounters with creatures from remote habitats in a bid to 'feel oneself minified and mystified by wilds where nature remains demonstrably sovereign, abundant and vigorous' (p,79).

Connecting with, valuing, and experiencing nature in all its forms is nourishing, soothing, healing and enriching, engendering feelings such as wonder, awe, fascination, curiosity, adventure, humility, respect, reverence, peace, timelessness and a sense of belonging and wellbeing (Coffey, 2020; de Wet, 2018; Louv, 2008; McLeod, 2017; Ulrich, 1984). Research has revealed that nature sensations are highly restorative and enhance healing, contentedness and quality of life; improve productivity, concentration, intuition and connectedness; mitigate chronic disorders; reduce stress; and build neighbourliness and a better sense of place (Dodd

et al., 2018; Hägerhäll et al., 2018; Kellert & Wilson, 1993; Korpela & Staats, 2013; Li & Bell, 2018; Louv 2008; Richardson et al., 2016; Sale et al., 2009; Townsend et al., 2018 van den Bosch & Bird, 2018; Vos et al., 2015). Moreover, nature is where people often seek respite from stress-filled lives. The novelty and complexity inherent in nature and the fact that nature always exceeds the imagination and is eternally strange and surprising (Giggs, 2020, p.137), enrich and intensify wellbeing (van den Bosch & Bird, 2018). Museums incorporating nature or the natural sciences, provide opportunities to engage with the exotic, the strange, the bizarre and that which we might never otherwise encounter.

Dodd et al., (2018) undertook a study into the imaginative use of the rich, unique and often neglected natural heritage collections in museums, to engage older people. Programs in multiple museums leveraged the capacity of these collections to inspire, enrich and connect people with the natural world in the light of known wellbeing benefits. They also had the intent of raising awareness about diminishing biodiversity, species loss, environmental degradation and climate change. An additional benefit was the inclusion of older people in meaningful, future-oriented debates around important contemporary issues. There was a range of positive outcomes such as visceral, emotional and sensory wellbeing, intellectual stimulation and pro-environmental behaviours (2018, pp.45-50). This is just one, albeit a particularly good example of how museums, using their collections, can proactively and imaginatively involve themselves in the health and wellbeing of their publics.

2.5 Evolving museum roles

From cabinets of curiosities to the new museology: The role of museums through history has evolved significantly. In the 17th century as cabinets of curiosities to house the collections of royal and aristocratic families, they were symbols of status. Access to them was at the whim of the owner (Arnold, 2006). By the mid 1800s, motivated by nation building and citizen shaping processes, the idea that social benefits could flow from museums accessible to a wider public, had gained acceptance (Sandell, 1998). Publicly funded museums were primarily concerned with promoting civic and social order during the late 19th century and were bastions of dominant Eurocentric ideologies (Robertson & Cohen, 2011). Despite this, the idea of the capacity of museums to deliver positive social change through education endured. Culture was thought to have potential for facilitating social cohesion and empowering publics (Chhabra, 2008; Sandell, 1998). Museum advocates argued that provision for the arts including museums was indicative of a civilised society. Both the arts and museums they claimed, could lead people to a higher social order and mitigate the impacts of urbanisation, mechanisation and industrialisation (Kavanagh, 1994, p.11).

Since the 1970s, the museum world has undergone a radical shift instigated by a growing critique of traditional approaches of representation along with political and economic

pressures. These have forced museums into the marketplace and led to a new institutional reflexivity and greater audience awareness (Ross, 2004). The revised outlook, termed 'the new museology', also referred to as 'critical museology' became widespread from the late 1980s (Message, 2011; Message & Witcomb, 2015; Vergo, 1989). Incorporating theoretical approaches into practice changed the nature of museum work. Museums were transformed from being, in simplistic terms, exclusive and socially divisive institutions, to more inclusive and socially responsible ones (Barrett, 2011). In effect, they have moved from being product driven towards having a greater focus on their publics. These trends have led to improved accessibility, greater public participation, reduced elitism and more democratic, inclusive and diverse representation. Although museums are embedded in networks of power relations supporting dominant interests, the new museology, with its concerns with politics and the public sphere, have led to museums concerning themselves with social justice (human rights, equity, disadvantaged and minority groups) and community building (social cohesion, belonging and citizenship) (Clifford, 1997; Message & Witcomb, 2015), without relinquishing the very important pedagogical imperative (Trofanenko, 2011).

Economic rationalism and social change: The advent of economic rationalism with its focus on business managerialism in the 1980s, brought with it associated demands for accountability and the diversification of museum funding sources. The focus at this time was on the economic rather than social impact of institutions, and museums were included in strategies for urban regeneration. It was during this period that admission charges were introduced at some museums and iconic museum buildings became popular. At the end of the 20th century, competition for scarce resources obliged museums to present compelling cases for their role and value to society by demonstrating their capacity to assist in cost-effectively addressing major challenges such as social exclusion, ageing, loneliness, chronic conditions and mental health (Australia Council for the Arts, 2020; Belfiore, 2002; Dow et al., 2023).

Research suggests that museums can act as catalysts for social change by challenging stereotypes, promoting tolerance and empowering communities (Sandell, 2003; VicHealth, 2019). Social justice and social inclusion have been identified as a key issues for museums at a juncture where migration, immigration, indigeneity, marginalised social groups and national identity are topics of mainstream discourse. Inequity and poverty were grouped under the umbrella term 'social exclusion' and the UK government promised funding to museums for education, combating social exclusion and promoting urban regeneration (Belfiore, 2002; Sandell, 1998; Scott et al., 2014). Social exclusion is defined as a 'dynamic process of being shut out, fully or partially, from any of the social, economic, political and cultural systems, which determine the social integration of a person in society' (Walker & Walker, 1997, p.8). Long et al. (2002) proposed seven indicators of social inclusion outcomes through culture, media and sport in the UK: improved educational performance and participation; increased

employment rates; reduced levels of crime; better standards of health; enhanced personal development; improved social cohesion and reduced social isolation; and active citizenship. Tony Bennett (2005) suggests that museums could be repositioned as instruments to promote cultural diversity, comparing them to civic laboratories. There is great diversity in practice and effect he claims, as 'museums are variously conceptualized as contact zones²⁴, as spaces for dialogic encounters between cultures, as instruments for the promotion of cultural tolerance, or as means for promoting and managing the identities of differentiated communities' (2005, p.538). Increasingly important in these turbulent and uncertain times, argues Clifford (1997), is the need for a collective identity, a distinctive and valued way of life (p.218). Museums nurture cultural heritage and in so doing, foster collective identity along with a productive tolerance for difference. Furthermore, research connects population health and wellbeing with the preservation of cultural heritage, particularly for First Nations peoples (Dalziel et al., 2019; Dow et al., 2023).

Relevant museums for the 21st century: There are many proposals for the role of museums in the 21st century as they strive to justify their position politically, financially and socially (Scott et al., 2014). The relevant museum according to Nielsen (2015), is one that provides itself and its users with useful and meaningful experiences (p.376). Barrett (2011) and Grinell (2014) explore the notion of museums as actors in the public sphere. Grinell (2014) contends that there are many different types of museums with very different roles in society and in what he calls postnormal times. Sardar (2010) describes these as times where 'little can be trusted' (p.435), and where much of what we have taken to be normal does not work anymore. He calls for a new paradigm in which all perspectives and worldviews participate in finding solutions to collective problems (2010) such as climate change. Cameron (2015) goes so far as to say that epistemologies based on 'facts and certain knowledge, such as positivist science, can no longer function in a world of complexity, uncertainty, and competing worldviews' (p.348). Differences, tension and disagreement are all intrinsic to human coexistence. However, what we all have in common is a quest for meaning, and in a pluralistic society, museums can provide spaces of convergence where all can meet on equal terms (Ramadan, 2010). They can be 'safe places for unsafe ideas, meeting grounds for diverse peoples and neutral forums for discussing issues of our day' (Gurian, 2001, p.2).

Definitions of museums remain various, and the idea of a museum, as Hughes (2016) claims has never been fixed but is an ever-evolving 'continuum upon which we find ourselves at a particular point in history' (p.61). O'Neill (2006) puts forward three perspectives: an essentialist one that adheres to the idea of the core functions of a museum are: preservation, research and display; an adaptive approach of museums being for the people; and an

²⁴ The term contact zone, 'is an attempt to invoke the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and... to foreground the interactive, improvisational dimensions...' (Pratt, 2008 p.8).

ideological one that proposes that museums are ‘instruments of bourgeois, ideological hegemony’ (p.97). A more fitting description many claim, was proposed at the International Council of Museums (ICOM) in 2019 of museums as ‘democratizing, inclusive, and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue about the pasts and the futures’ (Dercon, 2021, p.14). A revised definition of the one adopted by ICOM in 2007, was approved in 2022. It states that a ‘museum is a not-for-profit permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing’²⁵.

Situated places where things happen: Philosopher Michel Foucault (1984, p.7) conceptualises museums as spatio-temporal heterotopias, juxtaposing in a single real place, spaces and times that are incompatible and contradictory, whilst themselves remaining outside of time. Heterotopian space entangles us in its complexity, leading us to unexpected encounters charged with creative potential (MacLure, 2013, p.176). And museums for philosopher Peter Sloterdijk (Sloterdijk & Whyte, 2014), are xenological institutions, where we encounter that which is ‘strange, discarded, bizarre, excellent, and incompatible’ (p.446). Yet for all that, museums are always situated. They are embedded in communities and thus enable connection with the ‘local’ (Todd, 2017, p.86). What is clear is that there is no convenient one-size-fits-all role for museums; they cannot be all things to all people, nor should they be. Each museum must identify its strengths, goals, interests and publics and tailor a role to suit. Anderson and Adams (1998) suggest that a clear statement of mission defines a museum’s distinctiveness, is a guide for action, and a powerful benchmark against which a museum can assess its activities.

The museum has come a long way from the ‘sublime temple of learning’ to become an extraordinary world of experiences, ‘courting an increasingly spoiled audience’s favour’ (Schittich, 2016, p.9). Recently, there has been a trend towards programs of temporary curatorial projects which characterise museums as ‘places where things happen’ (Groys, 2016, p.18). Museums according to director Nicholas Thomas (2016), ‘implicitly foster and sustain civil society’ and provoke curiosity (p.143). He goes on to propose that the ‘social promise’ of the museum is that of a place that cultivates inquiry and affords a sense of possibility and encounters with difference (2016, pp.145-6). The challenge for museums now, is to construct ‘conditions that provoke engagement’ and include rather than distance audiences (Pimlott, 2022, p.119), whilst simultaneously meeting the ostensibly entrepreneurial conditions of their funding. In prophesying which museums would survive in the 21st century, journalist and museologist Kenneth Hudson quipped that it would be museums with charm and chairs (Bradburne, 2001, p.5).

²⁵ <https://icom.museum/en/news/icom-approves-a-new-museum-definition/>

2.6 Museums, health and wellbeing

Until relatively recently museums were rarely considered as partners by social, welfare and health organisations and agencies. However, this situation is changing rapidly as policy makers and health and social care professionals adopt a proactive, intersectoral, multi-agency approach to wellbeing and social care (APPGAHW, 2017; Ander et al., 2013; Davidson & Rossall, 2015; Dow et al., 2023). Partnerships between museums and the healthcare sector have the potential to achieve population level impact on health and wellbeing (APPGAHW, 2017; Camic & Chatterjee, 2013; Chatterjee & Noble, 2013). With over 100,000 museums worldwide²⁶ the potential for these partnerships is great²⁷. As museums become more socially active and aware of the interests and needs of their local communities, many have developed in-house and outreach programs and activities targetted at those who are often socially marginalised or excluded. Camic and Chatterjee (2013) developed a framework to assist museums and galleries involving themselves in public health. This framework proposes that healthcare, social care, charities and museums develop partnerships, and that health care and social services refer people to local museum-based programs offering coordinated health, wellbeing and social inclusion activities for different groups (2013, p.67).

Some of the cultural activities that museums offer with positive health and wellbeing outcomes include: gallery talks and tours; special exhibitions; museum object handling and discussion; reminiscence and creative activities based on museum collections; volunteering; and outreach activities (Chatterjee & Thomson, 2015; Dodd et al., 2018). First hand encounters with objects are immediate, intuitive, sensory experiences effected by the material properties and physical presence of artefacts according to Hooper-Greenhill (2000, p.112). And, it is the bodily, sensory, affective and non-verbal aspects of museum object handling that are particularly significant for people with dementia and their carers (Camic et al., 2019; 2021; D’Andrea et al., 2022; MacPherson et al., 2009; Rhoads, 2009). This speaks to Carr’s (2006) notion of a museum being about what it makes possible rather than about what it contains (p.16).

The UK’s leading age-friendly city Manchester, provides many examples of how museums are changing perceptions of ageing and culture, that contribute to the health and wellbeing of its older citizens. Age-friendly programs that focus on neighbourhood participation and social change have been co-created with older citizens. These programs include initiatives such as: mobile museum collections that visit hospitals and aged care facilities; ‘Culture Champions’ a large-scale volunteer ambassador scheme; the ‘Coffee, Cake and Culture’ series of guided museum tours combined with sensory-based activities; ‘Philosophy Café’, informal discussion

²⁶ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1201800/number-of-museums-worldwide-by-region/> (2021)

²⁷ In the UK in 2019, the National Alliance for Arts, Health and Wellbeing (NAAHW) and the National Alliance for Museums, Health and Wellbeing (NAMHW) merged to form the Culture Health and Wellbeing Alliance (CHWA)

sessions (Ward & Winn, 2015); and 'Inspiring Futures', volunteering for wellbeing. Of the 231 participants in the Inspiring Futures program, three-quarters attested to significant wellbeing improvements after twelve months which were sustained by 60% over two to three years (APPGAHW, 2017, p.76). Moreover, many museums around the world run programs for people with dementia including: Museums Victoria (Australia), Museum of Contemporary Art (Australia), Art Gallery of NSW (Australia), the National Gallery of Australia (Australia), the Oxford Museum of Natural History (UK), Pitt Rivers Museum (UK), Museum of Modern Art (USA), Walker Art Center (USA), Phoenix Art Museum (USA), the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art (USA), and the Museum of Art and Archeology (USA).

Aesthetic experiences such as engaging with works of art, are an enmeshed interplay of the sensorimotor, affective and cognitive (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1990; Gruber, 2019; Krueger & Szanto, 2016; Menary, 2010; Newen et al., 2018). They are relational experiences and involve a form of connective, empathic, embodied dialogue. Engaging with works of art can be absorbing and self-reflective, provoking a state of heightened awareness and sense of wonder (Csikszentmihalyi & Robinson, 1990; Duke, 2017). These encounters can elicit generative questions, nuanced discernments, rich comparisons and connections, and complex interpretations (Tishman et al., 2007, p.70). Characterised by the capacity to view ideas from multiple perspectives, connect ostensibly unrelated components in new and productive ways, they can generate unexpected and idiosyncratic conceptions (Amabile, 1996; Bennett & Froggett, 2020; Csikszentmihalyi, 1998; Duke, 2017; Gardner, 2007; Terrassa et al., 2016). Aesthetic encounters are an open-ended, creative and intrinsically satisfying process.

Outcomes of museum encounters and interventions contributing to emotional wellbeing include: a sense of connection and belonging; optimism and hope; moral values and beliefs; identity capital and self-esteem; emotional capital and resilience; opportunities for success; recognition of achievement; support; reduced stress; quiet, rest and sanctuary; social capital and relationships; meaningful pursuits; time in a safe, rich environment; and access to arts and culture (Ander et al., 2013; Camic et al., 2017; Camic & Chatterjee, 2013; Chatterjee & Noble, 2013; Clow & Fredhoi, 2006; Grossi et al., 2019). A study exploring how museum-based socially prescribed programs reduce social isolation and augment wellbeing in socially isolated older adults, found several interacting factors that contributed to the positive results for participants (Todd, 2017; Todd et al., 2017). These include the socially interactive context (social engagement, shared experiences, relationships), the museum as enabler of new experiences (facilitator, physical space, artefacts, activities) and the individual journey (personal connections, affective experiences, self-reflection) (Todd, 2017, pp.80-81).

2.7 Museums as built environments

Encounters with artefacts always occur immersed and entangled with-in social and physical contexts. According to Mesquita (2010) and Overhill (2015), environments impact cognition, the sensorimotor system, feelings and behaviour. As Overhill (2015) affirms 'motions invoke emotions; and architecture invokes motions' (p.6). Architecture is a whole-of-body experience; one sees, hears, smells, touches and senses other aspects of a building as one moves through it (Robinson, 2012, p.337). Built environments and their spaces are socially, culturally and materially constituted. They are not, states Pallasmaa (2012a), an end in themselves but rather frame, articulate, structure and give significance, relate, separate, unite, facilitate and prohibit. They have the capacity to focus perception, heighten awareness, and facilitate intense exchanges between artefacts and visitors (Pallasmaa, 2014b). There is an emerging field of research into the capacity of space to induce and embody affect that is palpable or has affective resonance to those in or using a space (Navaro-Yashin, 2009). Lighting, temperature, air quality, stairs, navigation, artefacts and other co-presences, size, shape, materials, atmosphere, volume and history all have a combined impact that strongly conditions the visitor experience (Hein, 1998; Tishman et al., 2007).

Space in everyday human terms is neither neutral nor is it static. It is more precisely a dynamic, open and infinite entity shaped and reshaped by people and other bodies as they interact through, with-in and outside it (Dumm, 2008, p.37; Latour & Yaneva, 2008). Bodies and space in temporal displacement are mutually shaped. When we 'enter a space, the space enters us, and the experience is essentially an exchange and fusion of the object and the subject' (Pallasmaa, 2014c, p.20), the individual and her milieu. Architect Juhani Pallasmaa (2014c) alleges that the 'power of architecture lies in its ability to strengthen the experience of the real, and its imaginative dimension arises from this strengthened and re-sensitised sense of reality, an experience of 'thick' space and time' (p.29). He goes on to argue that we seek out 'historically dense settings because they connect us experientially and imaginatively with past life and because it makes us feel safe and enriched to be part of that temporal continuum' (2014c, p.30).

Given the nature of this study, the architectural theorists included in this review, such as the phenomenologists, are those who appreciate the sensory, embodied, experiential aspects of buildings. Buildings and their atmospheres are sensory entities that provide a particular kind of 'sensory richness and empathetic charm' (Pallasmaa, 2014c, p.37). Pallasmaa (2014c) defines atmosphere as the 'overarching perceptual, sensory and emotive impression of a space, setting, or social situation' that provides 'the unifying coherence and character' (p.20) of a space, place or encounter. Weathered materials, patinas, evidence of everyday life and historical depth, all reinforce the sense of temporality. These contribute to the most enjoyable museum spaces often being those that have 'been installed in an adapted existing building'

(2014c, p.37). The museum buildings in Manchester and Nantes for example, afford the 'virtual presence of the past where qualitatively different times' (Crang & Travlou, 2001, p.173) irrupt, intermingle and enrich the present. These are buildings in which 'we have an emotional appreciation of the layering of temporal cues and traces, as well as images of past life' in the settings in which we find ourselves (Pallasmaa, 2014c, p.30).

A building, claims architect Valerio Olgiati (Olgiati & Breitschmid, 2019), is an 'organic whole, in which every element (should be) subject to the governing idea for that building. It is (that unity that) we physically encounter with our senses' and it should cohere, provide meaning and order, make sense and flow (p.73). Pallasmaa (2012a) adds that architecture 'articulates the experience of our being-in-the-world and strengthens our sense of reality and self', domesticating limitless space and endless time (p.19). It 'directs and organises behaviour and movement' (Pallasmaa, 2012a, p.68). Space according to Barrett (2011), enables the interaction of different spheres of social life, the public and the state, in different ways. The sensory experience of encountering buildings is largely visceral and subconscious. We experience them as materiality, 'spatial orchestration' (Williams, 2007, p.77) or flow, textures, materials, volumes, light and atmosphere. If we notice the built environment, it is likely to be because it is disturbing, uncomfortable or frustrating, or there is something unusual, uplifting or particularly appealing about it.

Museums like most institutional buildings, 'exude affects, their architecture and design producing spatialities that are reflective' of the values, traditions and mission of the organisation and encourage particular types of behaviours (Watkins, 2016, p.75). Physical spaces have traditionally been seen as 'necessary armature' rather than important players in determining visitor experiences (Gurian, 2001, p.2). However, as Liefoghe, Çiçek and Engels (2022) suggest, museum buildings are 'more than containers for content, they are mechanisms and spaces for staging museum visits and museum work' (p.1). They are built environments designed to meet diverse and evolving social and pragmatic needs. They incorporate spaces that 'excite and thrill, that calm and provoke intense reflection, and that stimulate thinking and learning' (Mortensen et al., 2014, p.329). They have the capacity to make the 'world at once familiar and mysterious, intimate and sublime' (Pallasmaa, 2012b, p.5).

Designing for visitor needs: Much of the older museum design literature addresses the needs and requirements of curators and other museum staff, but not visitors (Mortensen et al., 2014). Coinciding with the advent of the new museology, museum design has moved towards being more experimental, collaborative and pragmatic (MacLeod et al., 2015). It is also very much cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary in nature, involving professionals from the fields of architecture, interior design, display and graphic design, marketing, visitor studies, technology, theatre, education, animation, film and museum studies. Models of museum visitor experiences place a strong emphasis on the 'dynamic interplay between the visitor and the

designed museum space' (Rappolt-Schlichtmann & Daley, 2013, p.308). MacLeod et al., (2015) suggest that there is great potential for museum design research that: acknowledges the active role of the physical environment in visitor experience; links design and design processes more closely to the vision and values of the organisation; acknowledges the value of design research around issues of interpretation and visitor experience; realigns the role of the designer in relation to the museum; places greater emphasis on design thinking and knowledge; removes some of the obstacles limiting the impact of design; and creatively rethinks museum design.

In accordance with discourses of inclusivity and accessibility, public buildings such as museums, are expected to make visitors feel welcome. They will in theory, enable visitors to orient themselves and make sense of their visit, providing indicators that facilitate imaginative, intuitive and personally meaningful flows of movement through space. Ease of navigation enhances enjoyment and can alleviate anxiety around entering what might otherwise be daunting places (Todd, 2017). Spaces missing the inherent cues, pointers and configurations that allow visitors to prepare, navigate and read meaningful narrative into a setting, are meaningless, generic spaces. Architect Rem Koolhaas (2002) goes even further, defining these types of spaces that cancel distinctions, undermine resolve, confuse intention and cannot be grasped or remembered, as 'junkspace'.

Many built environments, designed to accommodate the elusive 'normal' or 'average' person, fail to cater to the full range of functional variability within populations. The WHO/ICF²⁸ defines disability as a 'contextual variable, dynamic over time and in relation to circumstances' (Fletcher, 2013, p.299). According to this conceptualisation, it is the interface between the person and the 'physical, communication, information, social, and policy environments' (2013, p.299) with which they interact, otherwise known as their functional environment, that determines functional capacity. This shifts the paradigm to functional limitation being a universal human experience. It also unpacks the conflation of accessibility and barrier-free design with universal design, design-for-all and/or inclusive design.

Rappolt-Schlichtmann and Daley (2013) suggest that there is great potential for Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in museum design given that information conveyed in museums is a combination of visual, auditory and textual components with input from tactile, spatial and social encounters. UDL is known for its flexible methods and materials and varied opportunities for learning based on the diverse ways in which people learn (Rose, Meyer & Hitchcock, 2005). The three key principles underlying the UDL framework are that design should provide multiple means of: representation; expression and action; and engagement (Rose & Meyer, 2002). However, providing physical access in environments such as museums

²⁸ International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health:
<https://www.who.int/standards/classifications/international-classification-of-functioning-disability-and-health>

does not necessarily facilitate engagement or cater to those with hearing, learning or spatial disabilities who are difficult to spot. Engagement, or the relationship of the cognitive, emotional, behavioural, physical and social²⁹, is strongly linked to learning. As visitors are always on the move in museums, design in this context could perhaps be productively viewed as 'information in action' or a form of choreography as suggested by Overhill (2015).

2.8 Conclusion

'Qualitative research and evaluation would benefit from more rigorous sampling, detailed compilation of case studies and greater use of arts-based and co-produced approaches.'
(APPGAHW, 2017, p.37)

There is abundant evidence to suggest that museums have great capacity to facilitate improved health and wellbeing for older visitors. As storehouses of cultural and natural heritage, artefacts, memories, history, identities and stories, they have the potential to engage deeply with their publics and provide them with rich social, educational, developmental and emotional opportunities. Ageing populations and the prevalence of age discrimination and noncommunicable diseases, have acted as catalysts for the exploration and, to some degree, the realisation of this potential, as governments seek cost-effective ways of promoting healthy, positive, active ageing and ageing in place (Cohen, 2009). However, despite the amount of evidence indicating positive outcomes of engagement with culture, the specific mechanisms of this engagement are yet to be understood (Newman et al., 2012).

Much of the research into cultural engagement lacks specifics, such as how benefits are produced; their connection to different types of engagement; and the places in and circumstances under which they are most likely to occur (Grossi et al., 2019; McCarthy et al., 2004; Milligan et al., 2015). Moreover, the documentation and evaluation of cultural projects and programs is inconsistent, and the language, definitions, analytical rigour and methodologies are highly varied (Bisla et al., 2011; Dudzinska-Przesmitzki & Grenier, 2008; McCarthy et al., 2004; Smiraglia, 2016). In visitor studies for example, vom Lehn (2006) identifies a puzzling lack of research into people's actions and interaction at the 'exhibit-face' (p.1353). He goes on to say that 'relatively few studies have employed video-recordings to reveal how people experience and respond to artworks and other kinds of exhibits in museums' (2006, p.1355). I would add that few studies investigate what visitors actually do during museum visits as opposed to what they say they do. Furthermore, there is a very heavy reliance on surveys, interviews and focus groups which all entail the interpretation of transcripts, so 'that which exceeds and precedes 'capture' by language' (MacLure, 2013, p.170), such as the affective and relational, goes unnoticed and/or unacknowledged.

²⁹ <https://www.edglossary.org/student-engagement/>

Chatterjee and Noble (2013) mention the limited number of robust studies on the efficacy of museum encounters. Moreover, it is unclear whether there are quantifiable differences in impact between 'artmaking' activities and 'engaging with culture' in museums, galleries and performing arts venues. Despite the quantity of research in the area, the links between the arts and health are to date, under-documented (Smiraglia, 2016, p.41) and under-theorised (Brodzinski & Munt, 2009; Daykin et al., 2007; Fox, 2012b; Raw et al., 2012). DiMaggio (2002, as cited in McCarthy et al., 2004) identified three misleading assumptions about arts benefits: all forms of arts participation produce similar effects; the effects will be the same for different types of participants and under different circumstances; and benefits are proportional to the level of participation.

Museums and wellbeing is an emergent area and although a search term, museums are under-represented in recent literature reviews on the arts, health and wellbeing (APPGAHW, 2017; Fancourt & Finn, 2019; Pennington et al., 2019; Zbranca et al., 2022). This, by way of speculation, may be due to the diversity of museums as institutions able to host performing arts, visual arts, literature, digital arts, natural sciences and cultural heritage along with cultural and community events and festivals. It may also be that as the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing Inquiry Report (2017) suggests, few museums have seriously embraced this future-oriented opportunity to participate in fostering wellbeing. Museums have a number of advantages as potential partners and resources for wellbeing. These include their general appeal, number, ubiquity³⁰ and accessibility, and their status as fully staffed public institutions. Museums are able to offer both one-off and sustainable programming; a recurrent and difficult to resolve issue with culture/wellbeing initiatives. Notwithstanding, the APPGAHW Inquiry Report (2017) acknowledges the need to extend accessibility given that current museum visitors are 'disproportionately prosperous, well-educated professionals in the 55 to 74 age range who visited when they were young' (p.30).

There are many gaps in this emerging area and researchers propose that next steps include: gaining a better understanding of arts-health concepts and the role of affect; creating opportunities for policy action; investing in sustainable programs; ensuring consistent and rigorous evaluation; developing a better understanding of the mechanisms underlying positive outcomes; developing more widespread partnerships between arts, health and social welfare organisations; trialling new and innovative programs; and promoting collaborative engagement with older people (APPGAHW, 2017; Benitez, 2012; Chatterjee et al., 2009; Fox, 2012b; 2012c; Frstrup & Grut, 2016; Gallou, 2022; Grossi et al., 2019; Hovi-Assad, 2016; Lackoi et al., 2016; O'Neill, 2010; Smiraglia, 2016; Thomson & Chatterjee, 2015; Varutti, 2022). It is towards the theorisation of culture and wellbeing, along with a better understanding of the

³⁰ UNESCO reports around 104,000 museums worldwide in 2021.
<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1201800/number-of-museums-worldwide-by-region/>

mechanisms, sensory, non-verbal, affective museum experiences, and their positive outcomes, that this study aims to contribute.

What this review highlights is that despite a vast body of research pointing to the strong correlation between culture, health and wellbeing, we know little about older museum visitors³¹ and the experiential dynamics³² of museum visitation and what it produces. Nor do we know much about the 'conditions of possibility for wellbeing' (Coffey, 2020), or the encounters and connections they afford in museums. Furthermore, there is relatively little literature that includes all three components of this study; wellbeing, older people and museums. And, even more significantly, none that I could discover that uses the worldview or the methodology that I outline in the next chapter.

³¹ The exception being an Australian study using interviews and focus groups undertaken by Kelly et al., in 2002.

³² By 'experiential dynamics' I refer to the lived, embodied, sensory and affective processes.

3. A WORLDVIEW AND METHODS

3.1 A new materialist worldview

‘...theory is ... a set of categories and domain assumptions aimed at clearing away conventional notions to make room for artful and exciting insights.’ (DiMaggio, 1995, p.391)

The theoretical framework or approach taken by a study is the study’s worldview based on the assumptions that the researcher makes about how the world works. Like the apparatus in a scientific experiment, it determines the ‘conditions of possibility’ for wellbeing (Coffey, 2020). This study into the wellbeing that emerges from the practice of museum visitation and the mechanisms that account for its production, takes a new materialist approach. It is one that acknowledges the porosity and permeability of all living entities, the agency of all matter and the fundamental relationality of the world. Framed in this way, the world is a dynamic continuum, a single interconnected and intra-active³³ whole (P. Edwards, 2010). The focus shifts from static objects or states to dynamic, formative and transformative processes and what they produce. This affords the conceptual conditions for examining spaces, bodies, perceptions, sensations, objects and constructs as complex, lively, relational, embodied, and processual phenomena (Barad, 2007; Bennett, 2010; Grosz, 2005; Massey, 2005).

The impossibility of separation, discrete entities and dualities, is exemplified by living, breathing, metabolising bodies. The world enters and flows through us with each life-sustaining breath that we take. Our bodies metabolise that which we take in, ingesting, filtering and assimilating that which becomes us, and returning or excreting that which does not. The mechanism of metabolism is moreover, how a body individuates as it integrates its milieu (Davis, 2021, p.120). We cannot survive without the milieus in which we are embedded and with which we are constantly intra-acting. These teeming milieus are constitutive of life. Yet much of what composes them is imperceptible, incorporeal and ephemeral as the recent pandemic so emphatically demonstrated.

Human beings like all other living entities function solely as an ensemble of relations³⁴ and are thus both multiple and interdependent entities (Deleuze, 1978). They are a brilliant example of a symbiotic interspecies collaboration. Our relationship with our milieus is similarly symbiotically and intra-actively social. Entities³⁵ are defined by their sociality, their webs of

³³ Intra-action differs from interaction in that it does not assume pre-existing separate and individual agencies but recognizes that agency emerges through intra-action (Barad 2007).

³⁴ Relations or connections can be external or internal to the body. For example a body’s good relations with its microbiota are imperative for good health. If we ingest something to which we are allergic, we compromise those good relations and consequently feel unwell. Taken to the extreme ingesting that which is poisonous to us such as arsenic, can destroy all internal relations and so kill us (Deleuze, 1978).

³⁵ Bodies or entities in this worldview are functional collectives and are both human and nonhuman.

relations with-in which everything is constantly forming, transforming, dissipating and reforming in a 'symphony of interacting bodies' (Woodward & Lea, 2010, p.158). The force for the aggregation and individuation of bodies is affect. Spinoza theorised affect as the material force relations amongst bodies wherein each exerts a causal effect and is constantly and reciprocally affected by others (Gatens & Lloyd, 1999, p.13). Put another way, affect is an active mode of relationality, of connectivity and is fundamentally social.

Through this new materialist lens, wellbeing is neither singular nor a state but a set of distributed and diverse capacities that is constantly fluctuating. We are collectively and symbiotically well or unwell in a continuous flux of wellbeing. To examine wellbeing requires attending to the intra-actions within assemblages and their effects, capacitating or limiting, that are made visible through sociomaterial practices. The intention in this study is to avoid 'ready-made' categories and conventions and instead, to follow living 'reality in all its windings' (Bergson, 2014, p.339); to make direct contact with the world and remain open to the myriad of possibilities that museum visitation embodies. In the sections that follow, I outline the origins of new materialism and elaborate on the assumptions, key propositions and affordances in the context of this study.

3.1.1 New materialism

New materialism is an umbrella term used by both Braidotti and DeLanda independently in the late 1990s, and describes a disparate array of post-anthropocentric and poststructuralist perspectives that provide 'new' ways of understanding sociomaterial practices (Fox & Alldred, 2016a; van der Tuin & Dolphijn, 2010). Under the new materialist umbrella, Alldred and Fox (2019) include: 'Barad's (1996) onto-epistemology; the materialist feminisms of Braidotti (2006b), Clough (2008) and Grosz (1994); Latour's (2005) actor-network theory inspired 'sociology of associations'; DeLanda's (2006) assemblage approach; non-representational theory (Thrift, 2007); and the 'vital materialism' of Bennett (2010) and Deleuze and Guattari (1988)' (p.701).

Two core assumptions that underpin more traditional methodologies are challenged by new materialist approaches: the ontological grounds on which binary distinctions are made; and the idea of matter as inert, passive, fixed and without agency (St Pierre et al., 2016). The foci of new materialist approaches are matter and the relations within assemblages or agential collectives of human, non-human, inanimate and incorporeal entities (Fox & Alldred, 2015; 2016a; 2018). Matter includes concepts, social constructs of human thought and human epiphenomena such as imagination, memory and reflections, which all produce material effects (Braidotti, 2013; Fox & Alldred, 2018; Massumi, 1995). Binaries such as mind/body, nature/culture and subject/object do not exist in and of themselves. Instead, emergent relations where human, non-human and inanimate have agency, cut across disparities and

open to continua, multiplicity and diversity (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008; Barad, 2007; Bennett, 2004; Coole & Frost, 2010; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Fox & Alldred, 2015; 2016a; 2018).

There is a surprising number of what might be called post-Cartesian antecedents to new materialism, that have rejected the binary oppositions entrenched in the social sciences and are thus ontologically monist³⁶. Included are the theories of Spinoza, Leibniz, James, Tarde, Nietzsche, Bergson and North Whitehead³⁷. Cartesian dualism alleges the distinct and separate nature and existence of mind and body. This concept permeates much of Western tradition and has left a legacy of binary oppositions or dualist thinking that still dominates cultural theory. Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza countered this with the proposal that mind and body are inseparably one and that a body is radically open to and constantly interacting with its environment (Gatens, 1996b). We cannot stop breathing, perspiring, eating, excreting, and leaving a multitude of other traces wherever we go. Nor can we switch off our senses or stop the brain processing their inputs. In short, our mind/bodies are in constant and ongoing intra-action with themselves and their surroundings.

The 'linguistic turn' of post-structuralism, which rejected historical materialism's reductionist focus on structural and 'macro' level social phenomena, has informed new materialist approaches (Fox & Alldred, 2015; 2016a; van der Tuin & Dolphijn, 2010). However, post-structuralism with its emphasis on the textual, discursive and culturally interpretive, was found inadequate for a deeper understanding of the dynamic complexity of sociomaterial practices, hence new materialism's (re)turn to matter, but matter with a difference (Fox & Alldred, 2016b; Lemke, 2015).

Although themselves highly disparate, new materialist approaches share several common notions that open up possibilities for new thinking, new ideas and change. The three major propositions are:

- a monist ontology wherein the universe is a dynamic continuum in constant flux and there are no distinct realms, binaries or dualities such as nature/culture, mind/body and social/material (Braidotti, 2016; Fox & Alldred, 2016b; Haraway, 1997; Pickering, 2017; van der Tuin & Dolphijn, 2010).
- a posthuman or more-than-human³⁸ focus on materiality in sociomaterial practices where matter is vital, lively and has agency or the 'capacity to affect and be affected' (Bennett, 2010; Braidotti, 2016; DeLanda, 2019; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Fox & Alldred, 2016b; Latour, 2005; MacLure, 2016).

³⁶ As discussed in later, indigenous cosmologies are similarly 'monist' and their contribution to Western thinking has long gone unacknowledged.

³⁷ See Appendix 1 for the origins of and influences on new materialism.

³⁸ In this study, I use the terms 'posthuman' and 'more-than-human', interchangeably.

- a relational world which continuously emerges from endless and uneven interactions of matter (human, non-human, inanimate, intangible...) within assemblages effected by flows of affect (Barad, 2007; Latour, 2005; Potts, 2004).

If we consider the universe to be a dynamic continuum then 'everything is connected and irreducible to a simple substrate' (Bennett, 2010, p.xi). Without hierarchies, realms or dualities, all entities are considered equal in that they 'are undetermined until they emerge in a particular entanglement, from which they obtain their specificity' (Madsen, 2021, p.6). At an analytical level, humans are no more important than other organic or non-organic matter. In the context of a museum, the smell of stone walls imbued with the smoke of centuries of cooking fires is just as significant as the memories or emotions that these might trigger in a visitor, the objects displayed in the space, or the narratives told and not told by information panels. In this worldview, '(r)eality no longer appears... in the static state...What was immobile and frozen in our perception is warmed and set in motion. Everything comes to life around us; everything is revived in us... We feel ourselves uplifted, carried away, borne along by it' (Bergson, 2014, p.325).

By doing away with hierarchies and categories as *a priori* considerations, entities are not coerced into *a priori* patterns or configurations but are freed up to interact, intermingle and become entangled with each other at will. Attention moves away from humans, their language and pre-determined constructs, to the interactions amongst entities, their capacities and their effects. This enables the consideration of the 'more than human aspects' (Andrews & Duff, 2019, p.124) of wellbeing and the bringing to light of some of the rich complexity that sits below the surface of appearances, and that manifests in the flow of sociomaterial practices. Thus by decentring, but not by any means discounting the human, it is possible to take into account the forces, capacities and agency of matter, which generally go unseen, unnoticed or undocumented when using traditional qualitative research methodology (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013).

These notions are far from new. The cosmologies or ontologies of First Nations peoples such as the Yolngu people of North East Arnhem Land in Australia, take a more-than-human and relational view of the world. Human and non-human for the Yolngu are entangled, co-constituted 'becomings' rather than discrete or pre-formed beings. Put differently, subjectivities are fluid and emerge through active engagement with the world (Ruddick, 2017; Singh, 2018). Humans are only a small part of an active and lively cosmos populated by diverse beings and ways of being that include animals, sunsets, light, waves, memories, dreams and so on (Suchet-Pearson et al., 2013). Implicit in this ontology is the profound interdependence of humans, their milieus and their wellbeing.

3.1.2 The affordances of a Spinozo-Deleuzian materialist approach

With its monist ontology and a posthuman focus on materiality and relationality, a new materialist approach provides many opportunities to broaden the ways in which we view, conceptualise and interrogate museum experiences and their implications for wellbeing. The emphasis on materiality provides a way of studying the more-than-human, relational (social), collective nature of wellbeing. What potentially comes into view is the contribution of thoughts, memories, desires, abstract concepts, atmospheres, gestures and feelings in intra-action with more conventional entities such as artefacts, narratives and spaces.

This materialist methodological approach invites exploration of the social, sensual, tactile, material and embodied ways that museums are experienced and complements the large body of more traditional, discourse-based research (Chakrabarty, 2002). Rather than focussing on what can be readily quantified and sidelining what cannot, this approach offers new ways of exploring the agency of matter and the forces operating in museums through their many materialities, thus, potentially expanding and enriching our understanding of museum experiences (Figure 2)³⁹. Conceptualising museum experiences as assemblages, flows, multiplicities, materialities and processes also has the potential⁴⁰ to open the way for new thinking and insights into wellbeing and importantly, for the possibility of change, transformation and enhanced wellbeing.

Drawing on his readings of Spinoza, Nietzsche, Bergson, Leibniz and Simondon, Deleuze's work both as an individual and with collaborators Felix Guattari and Claire Parinet, has a focus on relationality, affect, becoming and multiplicity. It provides different and creative ways of understanding, thinking about, and relating

to the world than what can be achieved with normative humanist, anthropocentric approaches. Redefining the complex and slippery term 'wellbeing' from a Spinozo-Deleuzian perspective as a body's distributed capacities or capabilities, facilitates an exploration of the ways in which a body's 'relations with other bodies diminish or enhance those capacities' (Hickey-Moody & Malins, 2007, p.3).



Figure 2. Embodied museum experience

This study leads with a Spinozo-Deleuzian philosophic approach using affect and assemblage theory, supplemented by Simondon's notions of individuation and collective life, and

³⁹ Figure 2 is a version by the author, of Sofia Warren's original work 'Feel This' for MoMA.

⁴⁰ I use the word potential in preference to possibility for the most part as possibility is predicated on what already exists whilst potential is not.

Bergson's theories on memory and matter to frame, inform and analyse the data. But how do these concepts as a group afford the examination of the wellbeing of older museum visitors? In the next sections, I outline how a relational world of assemblages with affect as its 'pulse' coheres with particular notions of spacetime, perception, memory, individuation and collective existence.

3.1.3 A relational world of assemblages

'The impossibility of a dualistic separation from an outside is very vividly embodied in the organic process of breathing itself.' (Loenhart, 2021, p.48)

People are born into a world surrounded by other people, places and things, with which they are always interacting (Fox, 2012a). As philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1964) puts it, 'my body is a thing among things; it is caught in the fabric of the world, and its cohesion is that of a thing. But because it moves itself and sees, it holds things in a circle around itself. Things are an annex or prolongation of itself; they are encrusted into its flesh, they are part of its full definition; the world is made of the same stuff as the body' (p.67). Throughout life, we are inextricably embedded in more-than-human networks of relationships. These networks of relationships or assemblages are critical in determining what a body is capable of, and in 'general the more relations a body has, the more it can do' (Fox, 2012a, p.205), or the better it can adapt to its surrounds and optimise its situation. Merleau-Ponty believed that a subject and its natural and cultural contexts are inseparable and mutually interdependent. He subscribed to biologist Jakob von Uexküll's idea of '*Umwelt*'⁴⁰ wherein organisms 'produce' their environments by choosing what they have the capacity to interact with (Hale, 2017, p2). Previously along similar lines, Spinoza had proposed that individuals interact with what they believe will increase their capacity for survival (Gatens, 1996a).

In this project, it is presumed that museum visitation is a process, an affective, relational, sociomaterial one in which agentic clusters or assemblages come into being in the 'intra-action' of such elements as atmospheres, artefacts, spaces, bodies and memories. Intra-action, a term coined by physicist and feminist philosopher Karen Barad (2007, p.33) refers to the 'mutual constitution of entangled agencies.' It differs from interaction in that it does not assume pre-existing separate and individual agencies but asserts that agency emerges through intra-action. It is co-constituted by human and more-than-human entities and forces such as affects. It is further presumed that this co-constitutive activity occurs in assemblages which in the Deleuzian sense, are dynamic and processual as opposed to static and structural (Fox, 2015, p.305). They are temporary shapeshifting, symbiotic collocations of relations, entities,

⁴⁰ Woodward & Lea (2010) refer to the '*Umwelt*' or the 'subjective environment'... or the 'collection of unfolding, localized, interacting force relations (with-in) which (a body) constantly participates'(p.157).

affects and events with a focus on relations. In Manchester for example⁴¹, a wellbeing assemblage formed in the museum's vivarium where participant Tess shed the stress of her day amongst the vivarium's relaxed and relaxing living inhabitants; *"I love this corner. I feel really rested, it's peaceful."*

Assemblage is the closest English equivalent of the French term '*agencement*'. Unfortunately, in translation it loses the implied dynamic agency of the arrangement and its purposefulness or capacity 'to give meaning to action' (Callon, 2005; Dewsbury, 2011; Muller, 2015; Muller & Schurr, 2016; Nail, 2017; Puar, 2012). The focus in '*agencement*' is not on content but on relations and what those relations give rise to (Phillips, 2006; Puar, 2012). Assemblages are agentic heterogeneous composites that take the place of the subject and recognise action as symbiotic (McCullagh, 2019). The key to assemblages is not what they are but what they can do (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), what these symbiotic collocations bring into effect. Thus, in the example above, the Tess-vivarium-inhabitants assemblage brought into effect sensations of restfulness, peace, relaxation and feeling good.

Significantly, an assemblage approach does not prescribe definitive theories, groupings or concepts, but enables 'an expansion of possibilities an invention of new methods and new perspectives, an active 'entertainment' of things, feelings, ideas and propositions that were previously unavailable to us' (Shaviri, 2009, pp.148-49). Component elements of assemblages or 'bodies' in the Deleuzian sense, can be anything from human, animal, vegetable, mineral, spaces, sets of policies and abstract concepts or constructs, to social collectives and human epiphenomena which all produce material effects (Braidotti, 2013; Fox & Alldred, 2018; Fox et al., 2016; Gatens, 1996a; Massumi, 1995). Architects Beatriz Colomina and Mark Wigley (2016) argue that 'even the smallest object, a door handle for example, is thought to change the well-being, emotions, and thoughts of whoever uses it, touches it, looks at it, or even reads about it, and also the lives of whoever encounters those who have encountered it, and so on in a kind of viral chain reaction that ultimately changes society' (p.89).

Assemblages according to Deleuze and Guattari (1987) have two organising tendencies: one towards structure or stability and the other towards change. How an assemblage changes or its particular capacity for variation and movement is what characterises or individuates it (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Nail, 2017). In the context of wellbeing, this capacity for variation determines openness to forming new connections, creativity, transformation and social participation. Affective flows play a central role in realising this capacity. They are both the assemblage's pulse and the key to individuation. Hardt (2015) argues that the more interactive and affected or responsive one is, the more alive one is. Conversely the more one closes off from the world the more one's vitality diminishes. He concludes that the individual most

⁴¹ See Chapter 5, 'Walking with Beris in Manchester', for more detail.

affected in the most ways is also the most powerful. In this study's context, the most powerful are those with the greatest sense of wellbeing.

Wellbeing like health is typically regarded as a condition or state pertaining to discrete individual bodies. However, taking a Deleuzian materialist approach, wellbeing can be re-conceptualised as the emergent expression of a lively aggregation or network of connections amongst bodies and their relations to physical, psychological and social elements (Andrews, 2019; Duff 2014; Fox, 2012a). Conceptualising wellbeing this way affords a focus on relations and affective flows amongst groups of entities with-in their milieus. It enables the identification of interactions and their all-important outcomes for, or effects on, the capacities of older museum visitors. It is to affective flows that I now turn.

3.1.4 The force that circulates: capacity-modifying affective flows

Deleuze was much influenced by Spinoza from whom he adopted the concept of 'affect' to describe the cohesive energy or force that circulates through, within, and overflows an assemblage. This force is predicated on matter being vibrant, lively and having agency, and is fundamentally social. Affect⁴², for Deleuze and Guattari, describes 'the change or variation that occurs' (Ott, 2017, p.8) as an outcome of an encounter. In any encounter, bodies and other materialities exert material force upon one another that results in the fluctuation of affect, and so enhanced or diminished capacity to act and respond according to the nature of the encounter (Fox, 2015; Gatens & Lloyd, 1999; Hickey-Moody, 2013; Ott, 2017; Slaby, 2016). There is no fixed, stable or limited quantity of affect as it is co-produced in 'intra-active' encounters, which can be mutually empowering, sustaining, debilitating or a combination.

Relational flows of affect⁴³ within assemblages modify capacities, augmenting, sustaining or diminishing them in an endless process of what Deleuze and Guattari term territorialisation, de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation. The processes or flows of territorialisation and de-territorialisation create and unmake social and spatial boundaries and identities (Dovey, 2015). Flows occur at different speeds and intensities and may be aggregative, sometimes resulting in relatively stable forms, or in cases of extreme de-territorialisation, producing a 'line of flight' or escape from an aggregation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Fox, 2015; Mulcahy, 2015). For example, a very strong reaction to a work of art or artefact in a museum might instigate a change of state from relatively neutral to one of joy, exhilaration, or horror. The materiality of museums provides opportunities for the unanticipated and unexpected in that 'museum objects frequently exceed their human prescribed meanings, causing museum visits to take flight in various serendipitous ways' (Hackett et al., 2018, p.484).

⁴² Greg Seigworth on affect and memory: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D84E7BLBKc>

⁴³ These relational flows of affect challenge the notion of what is generally considered the 'social'. In other words, the social rather than being a human endeavour clearly implicates the nonhuman.

The term 'affect' in general use is frequently conflated and used interchangeably with emotion. Definitions of 'affect' are many and contested and have different genealogies with origins in such diverse fields as linguistics, philosophy, geography, psychology and neuroscience. Leading affect theorist Brian Massumi (2002) describes affects as pre-cognitive, pre-personal, non-signifying lived 'intensities' that make up the virtual from which realities emerge. Whereas emotions he argues, are personal expressions of bodily changes, incomplete captures of affect within the interiority of a subject (Massumi, 2015). Philosopher Gilbert Simondon theorises affect as preindividual intensity, that is 'always in relation to an exteriority' (Celis Bueno & Schettini, 2022, p.127). As Keating (2019) suggests, it is a dynamic relational force that exceeds the individual, and according to Combes (2013), it is the 'liaison between the relation of the individual to itself and its relation to the world' (p.31). Affective intensities can also take the form of atmospheres; invisible, diffuse, vague, ephemeral phenomena which have or exert, and are, effects (Anderson, 2009; Anderson & Ash, 2015).

Spinoza differentiated between '*affectio*' (affection), the feeling state or perceived effects of the affected or modified body and '*affectus*' (affect), the continuous variation in a body's potential for action (Deleuze, 1978; Duff, 2010; 2014; Smith, 2012). These are of course thoroughly entangled. According to Massumi (2002) the variation in the intensity of affect is 'felt' and the potential for action is a body's assembled capacity. Ott (2017) postulates two main streams based on Spinoza's two dimensions of affect, with a third hybrid stream that attempts to link them⁴⁴. For the purpose of this study, I will discuss the Spinozist streams only. The first stream stems from the disciplines of psychology and neuroscience and theorists include Freud, Tomkins, James, Damasio and Brennan (Ott, 2017; Wetherell, 2015). This stream takes affect to be an elemental state whose boundaries with emotions, feelings, moods and passion are often unclear or even non-existent. The second stream has its origins in philosophy and the humanities and conceptualises affect as an intensive force or a pre-personal 'dynamic and forceful processuality' (Slaby, 2016, p.3) that flows through and amongst many types of bodies and other materialities. Theorists attributed to this stream include Simondon, Deleuze, Guattari, Massumi, Thrift, DeLanda, Anderson and Bennett. This second stream encompasses the new materialisms and regards emotion as a sub-category of the affective flows amongst myriad entities and their sociomaterial environments (Fox, 2015).

Focussing on affective flows or changes in intensity enables an examination of the open-ended 'passage of one state to another' during material encounters (Deleuze, 1988, p.49). Virginia Woolf (1993) provides an evocative description of Orlando entering a large mansion (or museum) early one morning where moods, rooms, time and Orlando him/herself affect and are affected as part of a fluctuating, entangled, atemporal whole. 'She fancied that the rooms

⁴⁴ In some quarters, affect scholarship is seen to be overly invested in the positive, thus foreclosing conceptions such as the potentially destructive force of affect (Palmer, 2020; 2023).

brightened as she came in; stirred opened their eyes as if they had been dozing in her absence. She fancied, too, that, hundreds and thousands of times as she had seen them, they never looked the same twice, as if so long a life as theirs had stored in them a myriad moods which changed with winter and summer, bright weather and dark, and her own fortunes and the people's characters who visited them. Polite, they always were to strangers, but a little wary; with her, they were entirely open and at their ease.' (pp.217-218). There is a sense of expectation, potential and energy. The Orlando-rooms assemblage embodies moods, weather, seasons, eras, people's fortunes and characters, protocols, feelings and emotions. It is through the flow of affect that this assemblage is materialised. We hold our breath as we wait to see how this potential will unfold, where this energy will go and what it might do.

3.1.5 Enhancing existence: *conatus*, encounters and adequate ideas

An entity's striving to persist as an individuated self and to enhance its scope of existence is what Spinoza termed *conatus*. It is conditional on the entity's capacity to affect and to be affected (Boundas, 2010). It is always synonymous with its power to act (Deleuze, 1992), and is always fully exercised by what we encounter in the world. Entities encounter other entities forming assemblages that generate affects. These can be 'joyful'⁴⁵ and enhance the overall power of affectivity (*potentia*), or 'sad'⁴⁶ and constrain or decrease it. As reasoning entities, we seek to maximise joyful encounters. However, 'the human condition condemns us to have only inadequate ideas' (Smith, 2012, p.36) and so we struggle to determine which encounters⁴⁷ will increase capacity. In our quest for joyful encounters, we explore, experiment, interrogate, speculate, delve and desire, and in doing so we are oftentimes forced to think by encountering that which is problematic (Deleuze, 1994).

Joyful or capacitating affects are both active and passive. Passive joy 'is produced by an object that agrees with us... but of which we do not yet have an adequate idea' (Deleuze, 1992, p.274), whereas active affect or joy is what we produce ourselves, it 'flows from our power of action' and is 'born of reason' (1992, p.274). Thinking, reasoning, meaning-making, 'the power of understanding' (1992, p.274) is how we come to form adequate ideas or common notions⁴⁸, ones from which active affects flow and which enable us to organise our encounters such that joyful ones predominate. It is the pursuit of joyful encounters that impels us to seek meaning, to understand that which we encounter. Thinking according to Deleuze, 'is always engendered through the fortuitousness of an *encounter* with a problem (under the form of an intensity), which alone guarantees the necessity of what it forces us to think' (Smith, 2012, p.142 original

⁴⁵ Joyful encounters in the Spinozan sense are those that enhance a body's capacity for action and sad encounters are those that diminish this capacity (Deleuze, 1978, n.p.).

⁴⁶ According to Deleuze (1978, n.p.), 'sadness makes no one intelligent' whereas 'joy makes one intelligent'.

⁴⁷ When a body is tired or out of sorts, the probability of sad encounters increases (Deleuze, 1978).

⁴⁸ Inadequate or affection-ideas are representations of effects based on feelings without their causes. Adequate notions are those known by causes rather than effects separated from their causes (Deleuze, 1978).

brackets and italics). Encounters produce sensations and problems; they engender and are the condition for thought (Wasser, 2012, p.124). According to Nietzsche, a good or healthy life is one in which the entity is capable of adapting or transforming itself in response to its encounters 'always increasing the power to live, always opening up new possibilities of life' (Smith, 2012, p.192). And freedom, 'the full possession of our power of action' (Deleuze, 1992, p.280), is 'when *conatus* is determined by adequate ideas' (Smith, 2012, p.37) such that our capacity to act is active and able to 'construct lines of flight', new possibilities that 'affirm the power of life' (2012, p.220). Yet, all of this occurs at a time and in a place, and involves particular faculties and epiphenomena.

3.1.6 Spacetime, perception, memory, imagination and habit

'What is time? A mystery, a figment – and all-powerful. It conditions the exterior world, it is motion married to and mingled with the existence of bodies in space, and with the motion of these. Would there then be no time if there were no motion? No motion if no time? ... Is time a function of space? Or space of time? Or are they identical?... Time is functional, it can be referred to as action; we say a thing is "brought about" by time. What sort of thing? Change!' (Mann, 1975, p.344).

'Time and place are usually the same word in Aboriginal languages - the two are indivisible.' (Yunkaporta, 2019, p.66)

The notions of space, time, perception and memory are key components of this study as museums are nothing if not storehouses of time and memories in space; memories of discoveries, cultures, times past, human ingenuity, art, nations, and nature, all embodied in artefacts. Foucault (1984) referred to museums as 'heterotopias of indefinitely accumulating time' (p.7). A heterotopia he went on to write, is 'a sort of general archive... (enclosing) in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes... constituting a place of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages... organizing in this way a sort of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in an immobile place' (1984, p.7).

Bergson's notions of space, time, matter and memory greatly influenced Deleuze. An early process philosopher, Bergson conceived of the 'cosmos as a vast unity of interpenetrating and interdependent processes' (Foley, 2013, p.7). In other words, as emerging, relational and constantly changing. Space and time are inseparable, and space is neither inert nor empty. It is 'full of air, light and the circulation of various forms of electrical, thermal, mechanical and chemical energies that sustain us and connect us to each other and the world' (Oliver, 2001, p.12). And like all else in this world view, space is the product of interrelations. If 'time unfolds as change, then space unfolds as interaction' (Massey, 2005, p.61), or the social dimension so important to wellbeing. In terms of time, Bergson differentiated between chronological or

linear time and experiential time which he called 'duration'. Duration in Bergson's (1910) view is a qualitative multiplicity, an unquantifiable organic transformation. In experiential time, the past is continuously and simultaneously being created with-in the present (Bergson, 2002). The Greeks called this type of time 'kairos', variously referred to as time 'that gives value' (Ramo, 1999, p.312), opportune time for action, and qualitative and/or meaningful time, as opposed to 'chronos' or linear clock time.

We become aware of or perceive⁴⁹ through our senses and these perceptions automatically elicit previous experiences or memories. An encounter with an object in a museum for example will trigger memory. An object will attract attention or resonate through its familiarity or connection to something from our past. We recognise something about it and this recognition is the result of the interaction of perception and memory (Guerlac, 2006). Chakrabarty (2002) cites an example of a Native American man who on recognising a painted animal skin cloak in a museum which he believed belonged to his grandfather, spoke of the garment with such emotion that the garment came to life. 'This garment, formerly beautiful and interesting but passive and indifferent, little by little became... [an] active testimony to a living moment through the mediation of someone who did not *observe* and *analyze* it but who *lived* the object and for whom the object lived' (2002, p.8).

Memory is both affective and elastic, it is permeated with internal states which themselves interpenetrate and overflow into each other, and it is never the same. From an indigenous Australian perspective, memory and mind are real despite not being able to be seen, touched, measured or proven. 'They exist but not in your brain. They extend out to your body to the land and your relations' (Yunkaporta, 2019, p.262). A memory is neither a full nor an 'accurate' representation of the past, but an intuition of multiple moments from the past reconfigured or blended in the present with affect and perception. Increased concentration or attention will activate richer, more and more detailed memories and heighten perception and the depth and intensity of the experience. The deeper the memory layers we access, the richer our perception of reality and the more meaning it has for us (Guerlac, 2006). Reflective perception which by definition involves memory, is a feedback loop wherein each circuit takes us deeper and deeper with the potential to transform and create new connections and new meanings (Bergson, 1990). And museums are places of transformation *par excellence*, dense as they are, with generative juxtapositions, rich accumulations of time and artefacts, and endless opportunities for serendipitous and transformative encounters.

Individual memory is beholden to collective memory. Without collective memory, there can be no sense of 'mineness' about individual memories (Colebrook, 2006). Collective memory or 'social representations concerning the past' produced, institutionalised and transmitted by

⁴⁹ The Latin verb *intelligere* means to comprehend or perceive (Simard, 2021, p.230).

various collectives, is also what we refer to as history (Jedlowski 2001, p.33). Individuals emerge from what Colebrook (2006) describes as the transcendental horizons of time and history. History or collective memory provides material with-in which individual memories are enfolded, creatively mixed and matched to generate new possibilities for expansion and growth or transformation (Braidotti, 2006b).

Just as memory and perception work in tandem, so do memory and imagination (Keightley & Pickering 2012; Smith & Campbell, 2016). As writer Javier Marias (2017) so eloquently puts it, 'nothing exists without the imagination. Even when things are happening and are present, they, too, require the imagination because it's the only thing that highlights certain events and teaches us to distinguish, while they are happening, the memorable from the unmemorable' (p.370). Memory is more than mere retrieval, it is constantly being creatively and imaginatively reworked (Braidotti, 2013). All encounters are transformations of the past in the present. Imagination models the present on aggregated traces of the past (Deleuze, 1994). It is the faculty of transversality that allows us to 'cross domains, orders and levels' (1994, p.220), connect the as-yet-unconnected, work with the potential of difference and create the new. It 'decides everything: it produces beauty, justice, and happiness, which is the greatest thing in the world' (Pascal, 1910). Perception, memory and imagination are what allow us to adapt and adjust, to modify habits.

Habit is what constitutes an individual entity and makes it possible to recollect, recognise, anticipate and conceptualise (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994). Habits are 'acquired predispositions to particular modes of responsivity and action' (Pedwell, 2021, p.9). They are how milieus impact and transform the 'forms of life they accommodate and are themselves impacted and transformed by these forms of life' (Grosz, 2013, p.219). Habits sustain a permeable core of provisional stability in constant creative flux with the external environment. They have opposing tendencies. On the one hand, they are torn between a striving for stability and resistance to change, and on the other, the impulse to escape constraint, assert agency and so evolve (Berman, 1988; DeLanda, 2013; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Pedwell, 2021; Rounds, 2006). Individuation stabilised by habit, is a subject's particular process of becoming in the world, a potentiality, a capacity for modifying its relations with its milieu and adjusting its internal structures in response to ongoing encounters. In other words, it is through identity that an individual transforms, maintains and is transformed by its environment, and this is very much a collective process.

3.1.7 Existence is not an individual affair

Life unfolds and expresses itself in shared experiences, embodied movement, fleeting encounters, affective intensities, compelling desires, and potent sensibilities (Lorimer, 2005). Motion, action, and change are constant and endless. Change can be perceived as, and

adapted to, in a capacitating or limiting manner, either increasing or decreasing wellbeing. Institutions such as museums can provide capacitating conditions characterised by 'an abundance of potential, the endless possibility for becoming, and becoming-more, for continual replenishment and transformation through these inexhaustible potentials' (Grosz, 2017, p.180). This is the world according to Simondon's theory of ontogenesis, the becoming of being.

Simondon's theory elaborates an ontology in which being is always a multiplicity. As a preindividual multiplicity, being is metastable⁵⁰ and contemporaneous with itself; it has 'only potentials for individuation [and] provides the conditions and means by which individual and collective existence comes into being' (Grosz, 2017, p.172). Individuated being is in a state of ongoing and generative becoming that remains connected to preindividual being (Combes, 2013; Deleuze, 1994; Simondon, 2009). The outcome of individuation is not a discrete, isolated, stable Individual, but a dynamic individual-environment pair that comes into being and functions at varying levels of complexity. And to be clear, Simondon's individual-environment pair is not a duality, but a porous, metastable, dynamic and affective assemblage analogous to wellbeing. Following Simondon, Deleuze and Guattari propose a conception of bodily life that is non-individual; that is never separate from 'the milieus and assemblages with which it is connected' (McCullagh, 2019, p.151). Ongoing individuation for the living occurs both through intra-active adaptation to and transformation of its environment, and the concurrent modification of internal structures such as habits (Combes, 2013).

Participation for the individual consists of interior (psychic) and exterior (collective) relations that engage preindividual potentials. Simondon (2009), states that '(t)he living is both agent and theatre of individuation; its becoming is a permanent individuation, or rather, *a series of outbreaks of individuation* advancing from one metastability to another' (p.8 original italics). In this sense, an individual's relation to the world, the collective, and collective reality is integral to its individuation. The interior functions or consciousness of an individual require participation in exterior or collective relations to explore and go beyond the dimensions of its being, to become more or to increase capacity and hence wellbeing. Collective life requires a constant 'delicate adjustment of wills' and 'reciprocal adaptation' amongst members (Bergson, 1911, p.8). Consciousness addresses problems of living - perception and action in an exterior milieu and affect, memory and feeling in an interior milieu - while reconciling potential incompatibilities and enhancing the intra-action of perception and affect as modes of connection between interior and exterior (Grosz, 2017).

As Barad (2007) so appropriately states, 'existence is not an individual affair' and entities or 'individuals do not pre-exist their interactions' (p.ix). Collective existence for an individual,

⁵⁰ A metastable body or system has apparent or contingent equilibrium.

‘provides a ‘much vaster’ place... by which the subject can understand and overcome itself and enter into new relations, not only with other entities in collective social and political life but also with the preindividual, the universe it touches’ (Grosz, 2017, p.192). Collective life ‘enables an individual to go beyond itself, to produce a relative context in which to position itself’ (Grosz, 2017, p.193). It has the potential for more, and more diverse connections and assemblages (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007), which bring greater capacity for action and so enhanced wellbeing. And collective existence furnishes individuals with recognition, collaboration and a means of defining capacities and of understanding his/her/its place in life relative to others with-in the milieu. By now it must be clear that in the new materialist worldview, multiple realities are fleetingly assembled as functional, agentic, dynamic, porous and unstable collectives.

3.1.8 An assemblage of sensibilities: concepts and tools

Assemblages are neither linear nor sequential; they overlap, coincide, intra-act and are multiplicitous. Their duration or lifespan in the case of organic matter, is highly variable, from fleeting moments, minutes and days to years, decades and millennia. Bodies are deeply enmeshed in their social and natural environments in assemblages (Bogue, 1989), or ‘dense networks of relations’ (Bennett, 2010, p.13) in constant motion. Thus according to a Deleuzian framing, a body’s capacities are in a constant state of ‘becoming’ in spacetime, which provide the necessary conditions for its emergence (Massey, 2005). A body’s collective capacities - its wellbeing - is radical openness, expansiveness and energy. It may manifest in museum assemblages as curiosity, enthusiasm, wonder, excitement, anticipation, reflection, and intensity. It is simultaneously a construct and the subject of this study (note the singular articles), and diverse heterogeneous multiplicities in motion. Yet, capacity functions not just through affirmation, but also through negation such as Colin from Manchester refusing to accept that *“if you grew up in Manchester, the chances of you getting lung cancer...are pretty strong.”*

The approaches, sensibilities, concepts and tools described in this section may appear to be an unlikely and disparate collection. However, they have been selected with the aim of bringing into view, and examining, new possibilities and opportunities that might not otherwise have been conceivable in ‘everyday and taken-for-granted’ lives (Lenz Taguchi, 2016, p.221). Extending possibilities and opportunities for artful and exciting experimentation and transformation enable us to move beyond the impasses, blockages and boundaries created by ‘taken-for granted regimes of meaning’ (Lather, 2007, p.85) or clichés about wellbeing, museums, and older people. This can occur through disruption, interruption and engagement with uncertainty, risk, the dynamic, the invisible, the silenced, the tacit and the previously omitted. What this toolkit enables is an examination of the realm of the lived, and the much neglected ‘affective potential of museums’ (Baker, 2008, p.23) as affording the conditions of

possibility for the wellbeing of their visitors. And working with this toolkit necessitates a natural inclination to wonder, the 'indissolubly relational', 'liminal experience that confounds boundaries' and resists containment whilst connecting and opening (MacLure, 2013, p.181). If as Colebrook (2014a) observes, 'we are nothing more than potentiality' (p.12) then:

'No body fully knows its own powers, and can only become youthful (or live) not by attaining the ideal it has of itself - being who I really am - but by maximizing those potentialities in ourselves which exceed the majoritarian, or which are not yet actualized' (Colebrook, 2014b, p 118).

3.2 On methods, research and inquiry

Each piece of research has its own particular character and context, and so methods need to be assembled to suit. My intention was to use methods that would push me to 'ask questions differently' (Springgay & Truman, 2018, p.208) rather than seek solutions. Prior to undertaking this research, I had been part of a team involved in two pilot studies in museums with older people. The methods used in the pilots were a traditional combination of surveys, focus groups and semi-structured interviews. Although the data were rich and fascinating, there was something missing, and I realised that it was the 'visit' itself. We had, like most of the literature, relied solely on what people 'said' they did and thought, rather than entangling ourselves in the process of doing. Yet as Deleuze and Parnet (2007) point out 'one never does what one says, one never says what one does' (p.71). Another thing that niggled with these pilots was the collection of predictable clichés used to describe what were surely rich, diverse, textured and very personal accounts of haptic, bodily encounters.

With the pilot studies in mind, I resolved this time, to experience actual visits with my participants. They would determine the trajectory, duration and 'shape' of the visit, or what turned out to be fascinating and enjoyable time-out-of-time spent together. Unable to entirely forego traditional methods, I 'hedged my bets' by including pre-visit surveys and post visit semi-structured interviews. Then in keeping with Maggie MacLure's (2023) assertion that 'you need methods, but they need to be bespoke methods – ones that you fashion for yourself in the middle of things' (p.217), I added two-to-three-day-later surveys 'in the middle of things' to complement the visits. This, I rationalised, would give me enough data with which to triangulate. It was besides, an attempt to apply diverse methods to suit the diverse cohort, or so I told myself. I speak again as though I was 'in control' which could not have been further from the case. Then, I had little idea beforehand which of the methods would elicit moments of intensity and altered capacity, nor who or what the participants might be. I was just hoping to attune to what was new, different and productive.

I truly had no notion of what I was going to find, which was really the idea and the motivation. I had not read any accounts of museum visitation that surprised me which was a surprise in itself. And, although I had formulated research questions, what I really wanted to do was to use Spinozo-Deleuzian concepts as my guide and 'attend to [my own] strange ontological hauntings' (St Pierre, 2019, p.12) about ageing, wellbeing and museums. Uncomfortable and risky to be sure, and there were prolonged periods where I very much felt myself to be working 'at the edge of incompetence' (Eisner, 1996, p.412). Yet something kept me going; a belief in the guiding concepts, the encounters, the world... (Deleuze, 1992; St Pierre, 2019).

3.2.1 Wonder-ful nomadic ethnography and the multi-site case study

This research could perhaps be described as nomadic, non-representational ethnography (St Pierre & Pillow, 2000; Vannini, 2015), employing as it does, methods able to capture what Stewart (2007) characterises as 'the awkward, messy, unequal, unstable, surprising and creative qualities of encounters and interconnection across difference' (p.128). Nomadic thinking attends to the 'in-between', the middle and the difficult to define. Or what Deleuze calls 'molecular becoming' that blurs and disrupts boundaries (Coleman & Ringrose, 2013, p.15). Non-representational ethnography aims to evoke and provoke, to turn to good account 'the creative and promissory potential of innovation, strangeness and performative aliveness', and to 'captivate with – a transformative sense of wonder' (Vannini, 2015, p.121). Wonder, or that which surprises, bamboozles and enchants, is indicative of engagement with life: of wellbeing.

'Wonder is a liminal experience that confounds boundaries of inside and outside, active and passive, knowing and feeling, and even of animate and inanimate... Wonder is in this sense indissolubly relational – a matter of strange connection. It is moreover simultaneously Out There in the world and inside the body, as sensation, and therefore is distributed across the boundary between person and world.' (MacLure, 2013, p.181).

Ethnographic fieldwork is exploratory by nature and would typically involve longer term engagement with a local context than the one to three weeks that I spent in each location. However, the open-minded, reflexive and immersive characteristics of ethnography and its acknowledgement of the disorderliness, serendipity, and 'luck' involved in research, suited this project well (Fetterman, 2010, p.2). An ethnographic approach accommodates what John Law (2015) calls the 'fractiverse' or partial participation in multiple realities. Multiple realities are also a characteristic of the case study. Although the definition of a case study is various and thus contestable, some of the hallmarks relevant to this research are that it rejects single realities, focusses on groups of actors, entangles the researcher and attempts to bring to light richness, complexity and embeddedness (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018).

3.2.2 The sites: selection

The intention of this study was to deepen the limited understanding of the capacitating potential of museum visitation. My hope is that this research will indicate approaches for museums to leverage their potential to engage with and foster the wellbeing of their citizens and other visitors. Curious about whether wellbeing emerged differently in different places, I decided to explore several museums and cohorts, in different countries and from different cultures. Multiple museums would provide me with a comparison of sorts, albeit uncontrolled, and potentially allow me to make unexpected connections. This thinking led me to select two southern and two northern hemisphere museums, one is a national museum and the others are located in regional/state capitals. All four museums⁵¹ are well established, of substantial size and with diverse foci. Each of the four museums had features of particular interest, for example Te Papa Tongarewa featured art galleries and a marae. Other features of interest included: heritage building, vivarium, age-friendly initiatives, a focus on disability access and a non-English speaking culture. Both Melbourne Museum and Manchester Museum were known to me prior to the study. The other two museums were not.

Museum	Melbourne Museum Australia	Te Papa Tongarewa Wellington, NZ	Musée d'Histoire de Nantes, France	Manchester Museum, UK
Established	1854	1865	1924	1835
Renovated	2000	1907, 1936, 1998	2007	1997, 2018
Features	Children's & forest galleries, Bunjilaka	Museum & art gallery, Māori marae	Medieval château, Disability access	Age-friendly programs, Vivarium
City type	State capital	National capital	Regional capital	Regional capital
Located	Central Melbourne	Waterfront Wellington	Central Nantes	Central Manchester
Size of city	4.7M	411K	660K	560K GM = 2.8M
Type	Public	Public	Public	University museum
Culture	Euro, multi & Aboriginal	Euro, multi & Māori	French	British & multi
Target markets	General, schools & families	General	General, schools & families	General, schools, community & seniors
Language	English	English	French	English
Size	Large	Large	5,000 m2	Large
Entrance \$	\$15	No cost	No cost	No cost
Seniors	Seniors \$10	N/A	N/A	N/A
Focus	Science, history, technology, Aboriginal culture, anthropology	National & natural history, Māori & Pasifika culture, art	Regional history & culture, slave trade, war	Natural & regional history, archaeology, anthropology
Programs for seniors	None	None	None	Age-friendly hub; various programs
Political context	Unstable	Stable	Stable	Stable

Table 1. Museum characteristics.

⁵¹ For indicative floor plans of all museums see Appendices 2a, 2b, 2c & 2d.

Melbourne Museum is one of three museums that form Museums Victoria, a state-based group. It was previously co-located with the public library and art gallery in a Victorian building dating back to 1859 in the Central Business District (CBD). The new building opened in 2000 and sits next to the World Heritage listed Royal Exhibition Building contiguous with the northern border of the CBD.

Established in 1865 as a national museum, the **Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa Tongarewa** has been renamed and rehoused multiple times. Just prior to being relocated in the new building on the waterfront in central Wellington in 1998, it was co-located with the National Art Gallery with which it has now been amalgamated, and the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts in Buckle Street. This amalgamation and relocation into the new building also signified a shift towards better representation of the cultural diversity of the country and a broader audience reach. The commonly used name, Te Papa Tongarewa is in the Māori language and translates as ‘our container of treasured things and people that spring from mother earth here in New Zealand’⁵².

The Château of the Dukes of Brittany houses the **Museum of the History of Nantes**. A stone bridge across the moat then a fortified gatehouse leads to the large packed-earth courtyard. The museum itself is located to the right in two buildings connected by an immense circular stone stairwell. It recounts the history of the city of Nantes in seven themes distributed throughout 32 rooms over four levels, exclusive of the entrance, cloakroom and bookshop. The rooms are organised chronologically with the exception of galleries seven to ten. An additional multi-storey building on the other side of the courtyard in the château complex serves as a dedicated temporary exhibitions space.

Manchester Museum began as a natural history museum, established in 1835 with an initial collection. The museum relocated in 1868 to Owen’s College, now the University of Manchester. It moved again into a new purpose-built natural history museum building on the university campus which opened in 1890. As the collections grew, the building was extended and has undergone multiple additions and renovations over the past 120 years. This has resulted in the lovely assemblage of three buildings which although they do not quite match, retain a strong sense of unity. The museum has just fully reopened in 2023 after an extensive renovation including the addition of a two-storey extension and new exhibition spaces.

3.2.3 The participants: local residents

Participants were all residents in the cities in which the museums were located and were familiar with their museum. This was with the intention of exploring the practices of museum visitors aged 45 years and over, when at home rather than when travelling. The aim was for a

⁵² <https://www.tepapa.govt.nz/about/what-we-do/our-history>

sample size of eight to twelve per museum that covered each decade in the age range from 45–90 years and was relatively evenly split in terms of gender. This did not end up working out quite so neatly, however I don't believe it had an overall impact. I elected to start the age range at 45 years as indigenous population researchers and organisations such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Australian Human Rights Commission, variously define 'older indigenous people' as those aged 45+, 50+ and 55+ years. This also meant that more than one generational cohort would be included in the study. The museums recruited the participants through their networks, except in Wellington where I supplemented the single recruit through personal networks. None of the participants were known to me. Furthermore, at each museum, I requested interviews with three staff members in the roles of management, strategy, programs, audience/visitor insights or communications. The directors of the museums in Nantes and Manchester very generously granted me interviews, and in Manchester a further eight staff volunteered to be interviewed.

The cohort in Manchester was very mixed and largely from the volunteer team, so they attended the museum on a weekly basis and held it in great affection and high esteem. Education levels ranged from primary to tertiary. The participant cohorts at other museums were predominantly tertiary educated professionals.

MANCHESTER	Age/Gender	Descriptors: profession, health...*
Kevin	69 M	Public servant (Retired) – bypass surgery; volunteer
Colin	71 M	Accountant (Retired); volunteer
Anna	79 F	Teacher: special needs (Retired); past volunteer
Robert	68 M	Solicitor (Retired) – Polish/Italian; volunteer
Doris	63 F	Social worker; past volunteer
Paul	56 M	Unskilled worker – mental health issues; volunteer
Tess	61 F	Historian/archaeologist - Italian
Sylvia	67 F	Teacher: special needs (Retired) – imminent hip replacement
Beris	65 F	Hospital technician (Retired) - widow; volunteer
NANTES	Age/Gender	Descriptors: profession, health...*
Margot	65 F	Administrator (Retired)
Gilles	73 M	Engineer (Retired)
Evelyne	64 F	Pediatric nurse (Retired)
Victor	73 M	Literature teacher (Retired)
Carole	52 F	Local government councillor
Yvonne	68 F	Primary School teacher (Retired)
Laurent	66 M	Publisher – hip issues
Clémence	62 F	Pediatric nurse (Retired)
Aurèlie	61 F	Medical representative (Retired)
WELLINGTON	Age/Gender	Descriptors: profession, health...*
Helen	65 F	Occupational therapist

Robyn	59 F	Allied healthcare
Karen	59 F	PR consultant
Julia	54 F	Manager, hospital
Andy	62 M	Design engineer - Italian
Joyce	69 F	Rug weaver/repairer
Edgar	65 M	Journalist (Retired)
Chris	76 M	Engineer (Retired) – Māori/Dutch
Amy	78 F	Law/social work (Retired) – two ankle replacements
MELBOURNE	Age/Gender	Descriptors: profession, health...⁵³
Charlie	68 M	Biochemist (Retired) - has leukemia
Naomi	65 F	Writer/teacher (history) – Scottish – widow – had breast cancer
Grace	66 F	Manager; occupational therapy clinician
Leela	69 F	Teacher (Retired)
Evan	72 M	Military/psychologist (Retired) - Welsh
Nadia	51 F	Art teacher/artist
Kaye	50 F	Actuary – Finnish/Australian
John	77 M	Metallurgical engineer (science) (Retired)
Kathy	58 F	Human Resources educator – Romanian/Hungarian
Sara	86 F	Librarian/linguist (Retired) - widow
Louise	75 F	Farmer (Retired) - widow
Luke	76 M	Primary School teacher/principal (Psychology & geology) (Retired)
Debra	45 F	Allied health worker with young children
Noah	62 M	Linguist – Polish/Irish

Table 2. Research participants

MANCHESTER: Role
Director
Buildings & Operations Manager
Age-friendly Culture Champions Manager, Greater Manchester (on secondment)
Visitor Team Head
Curator of Community Exhibitions
Visitor Team Coordinator
Curator of Botany
Age-friendly Project Officer; Southway Housing Trust; collaborator
Retail Manager
NANTES: Role
Director
Cultural mediator ⁵⁴

⁵³ * Participants were not asked for this information but volunteered it. All names are pseudonyms.

⁵⁴ The Cultural Mediation Team is comprised of art history graduates with comprehensive knowledge of the collections and specifically trained to cater to the needs of different publics including those with functional limitations: physical, auditory, visual and cognitive. They run guided tours that aim to enhance the quality of visits.

Visitor Services Coordinator
Audience Development & Public Policy Manager
MELBOURNE: Role
Director, Research & Collections
Senior Programs Officer
Strategic Projects Coordinator
WELLINGTON: Role
Public Programs Manager
Head, Audience insights
Visitor Host; Assistant Supervisor, Toi Art

Table 3. Staff participants

3.2.4 Collecting data: the methods

‘...the task is to imagine methods when they no longer seek the definite, the repeatable, the more or less stable.’ (Law, 2004, p.6)

Following Law, I employed a diverse range of what I hoped were inventive methods. ‘Inventive’ methods according to Lury & Wakeford (2012), address a specific problem, are adapted in use and are ‘always oriented towards making a difference’ (p.11). These included accompanied walking visits with GoPro cameras attached at chest-height to researcher and participant alike, research journals, surveys, semi-structured interviews and a graphic. The walking visits were not ‘interviews’ as such, given there was no structure, nor did I ask questions seeking specific replies or information. It was more along the lines of a shared museum visit between friends-of-friends or trusted strangers. The research was undertaken over a six-month period during which I spent one to three intensive weeks at each museum with participants and staff.

‘The world was outside of him, around him, before him... Motion was of the essence, the act of putting one foot in front of the other and allowing himself to follow the drift of his own body.’ (Auster, 1987, p.4)

Walking: One of the key elements amongst the methods was the walking museum visits. People’s experience of, with and in museums are complex. According to Dirk vom Lehn (2006), people ‘see and make sense of the artefacts through a range of activities, including walking and looking, glancing and inspecting, pointing and showing, talking and discussing and so forth’ (p.1353). Walking and talking are ‘quintessential features of what we take to be a human form of life’ (Ingold & Vergunst, 2008, p.2) and are intrinsic to museum visitation. The choice of the walking visit was motivated in part by the fact that ‘one never does what one says, [or] says what one does’ (Deleuze & Parnet 2007, p.71). Participating in the visit was about experiencing what actually occurs during a visit rather than hearing/reading about what people thought

occurred, or thought I wanted to hear. In Fox and Alldred's (2018) analogy, I was jumping into the boat as it floated down the river and becoming entangled in the flow that I wanted to understand, rather than observing and documenting from a fixed point on the river bank.

Walking is a complex physiological activity involving 'more than 1,000 muscles...synchronized to move over 200 bones around 100 moveable joints' (Prince et al., 1997, p.129). It figures prominently in the wellbeing literature as highly beneficial and is a serendipitous side effect of museum visitation. Walking as movement, is one way in which bodies connect with their environments and their sensory surrounds; 'it activates modes of participation that are situated and relational' (Springgay & Truman, 2018, p.4). It also produces 'more spontaneous data' (Evans & Jones, 2011, p.856), as both the walking and the surrounds act as foci for conversation and exchange. This is particularly so in a museum with its array of diverse artefacts, displays, galleries, bodies and atmospheres, and to my mind, it worked '*à merveille*'.

'Movement, not pondering, brings new knowledge.' (Bartenieff & Lewis, 1980)

Walking has been described as 'thinking in movement' (Sheets-Johnstone, 1999, p.419). Many philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes, Immanuel Kant, Bertrand Russell, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Friedrich Nietzsche were also great walkers (Solnit, 2001). Jean-Jacques Rousseau stated that 'I can only meditate when I am walking. When I stop, I cease to think, my mind only works with my legs' and, that '(t)here is something about walking which stimulates and enlivens my thoughts. When I stay in one place I can hardly think at all; my body has to be on the move to set my mind going' (cited in Solnit, 2001, pp.14 & 19). Furthermore, movement can also turn 'our attention from minds to bodily encounters, the powerful affective force of the small and the mundane' (Hackett et al., 2018).

In a museum walking is informal, it is convivial and social, and can help overcome typical power relations between researcher and participant (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009). Researcher and participant together become fellow travellers on an expedition. Walking with someone according to O'Neill and Hubbard (2011, n.p.), is a 'powerful way of communicating about experiences; one can become 'attuned' to another, connect in a lived embodied way with the feelings and corporeality of another. Walking with another opens up a space for dialogue where embodied knowledge, experience and memories can be shared' (2011, n.p.). It was precisely this connection, attunement, and the potential for sharing that I sought to achieve with this choice of method.

Recording: To document these walking visits, I used GoPro cameras to capture the doings and sayings on the shared visits. When developing the methods, I had in mind the 'embodied spatial nature of museum visiting, the tacit ways in which museums may feel meaningful to [visitors] and the vibrant materiality of the museum itself' (Hackett et al., 2018, p.481). What

the cameras recorded was not only trajectories through each museum and the intra-action of bodies, displays and artefacts, but also, rhythm, tempo, body language, tone of voice, energy, and other sensory details that would be impossible to capture in the moment or in any other way. The walking visits also gave researcher and participant time to develop a relationship of trust and respect that was, I believe, instrumental to the richness of the data. The cameras moved freely, subject to the movements of our bodies. In the analysis I sought out moments that 'glowed' (MacLure, 2010, p.282), changes in intensity, an 'exhilaration of the senses' (MacLure, 2013, p.180), indicative of changes in capacitation or wellbeing. The cameras afforded a visual record of these somatic moments.

Selection: The selection of methods was informed by my experiences with two pilots projects in museums and my own history as a museum visitor. As I had little idea of what I did during a museum visit, I did not expect anyone else to know either. Haraway (1988) wrote that researchers 'do not create the world (they) investigate' (p.594), but rather establish a conversation with it. The implication being that we are of course, an entangled part of the process. This I felt, was sound advice and I had it in mind when selecting the methods.

Process: Initially, I was concerned that the cameras would be distracting but found that they were forgotten within a few minutes once we started walking and talking. After the visit, I undertook semi-structured interviews with each participant, but found that in most cases these added little to the conversations we had had during the walking visit. During these interviews I asked for permission to send further questions in a few days. The rationale for this was that I often find it difficult to provide meaningful responses to questions in the moment and like Andy from Wellington, need time for processing. *"I normally leave the visit in the back of my mind for some time before I actually understand what it left me with..."* The questions in these post-visit surveys (PVS) were formulated in response to both the pre-visit surveys and the first few walking visits. They provided very rich, personal, and thoughtful responses that differed markedly to the pre-visit surveys. I attributed this difference in great part to the relationship of trust and mutual respect that had developed during the walking visit. To my surprise and theirs, several participants in each museum commented on how much they had enjoyed the process. The implication being that they had not expected to do so, or not as much anyway. And, to be clear, neither had I expected to find the process so affecting, intimate, enjoyable and enriching.

"Good to be part of this project, really. Thanks!" Andy, PVS, Wellington

"I would like to thank you for these thought-provoking questions and hope that my answers may be of some use. I found it a very interesting exercise trying to find the reasons why I go to the Museum and to also try the self-analysis." Colin, PVS, Manchester

“Thanks for a lovely experience at the museum, I really enjoyed my visit.” Louise, PVS, Melbourne

“It has been very interesting to spend time with you in Manchester Museum and to have the opportunity to consider why museums, art galleries and libraries are still so important in our daily lives in the twenty-first century.” Sylvia, PVS, Manchester

Data Source	Purpose, scheduling and description
Pre-visit survey	Provided with the Plain Language Statement and Consent form, these four simple questions were intended to focus attention and stimulate reflection on museum visitation. Participants returned them on the day of the visit.
Walking visit	Reflexive ethnography: living the visit. See, feel, hear, and sense whilst interacting and being immersed. Using the GoPro cameras on myself & the participant, freed me up to be present rather than trying to observe, remember or document. Visits were shared museum visits between trusted strangers. Duration was 45mins-2hrs determined by participants. The maximum duration of each visit was 2hrs the maximum capacity of the camera batteries. 41 participants resulted in a total of 57.5 hrs x 2 (115 hrs) of video data.
S/S interview	These semi-structured interviews were undertaken directly after the visit to collect more specific details around museum visitation and to collect any additional comments or reflections on the visit. Interviews were informal and lasted 30-45 minutes. Staff interviews were of a similar duration.
Key word graphic	After the semi-structured interview, participants were asked to write five words/sentences connected to the concept of ‘museum’ on a graphic.
Post-visit survey (PVS)	Participants were sent a series of seven questions two - three days after the visit. This provided them with more time to reflect on the visit. Responses were very thoughtful.

Table 4. Data collection methods⁵⁵.

Ethical research: The research was undertaken in accordance with the protocols approved by the University of Melbourne’s Human Research Ethics Committee. However, further to this, I do feel a strong sense of responsibility to all involved including the museums as institutions. This responsibility, as Braidotti (2006a) notes, ‘implies accountability, situatedness and cartographic accuracy’ (p.235). In my case it took the form of care. Care for the wellbeing of staff and participants during my encounters with them; my capacity to be attentive to and responsive with them in a capacitating manner (Mulcahy & Healy, 2023). And also, care with regard to the depth, quality, accuracy and potential of the research.

⁵⁵ See Appendix 3a for survey and interview questions, and 3b for the key word graphic.

Although museums are generally viewed as 'safe places' there is always the potential for an artefact or exhibition to cause distress. Had this occurred, my intention was to offer the participant a discontinuation of the visit and/or a pause for recovery in a neutral space such as a nearby café. In the event, responses were enthusiastic as mentioned above. In spite of this, I remain mildly unsettled with regard to the following points. Foremost is the inclusion of some very personal stories that participants shared despite my care over the manner in which I have incorporated them. Additionally, there was the dilemma of anonymity. The cohort in each museum was not large enough to ensure anonymity. This was even more apparent where staff members were concerned, although the one or two critical comments made were exclusively related to building design. And finally, I was keenly conscious of video-taping in public spaces even though I would be the only one to see these videos.

3.2.5 Qualitative/post qualitative inquiry and analysis

'Take joy in your digressions. Because that is where the unexpected arises... If you know where you will end up when you begin, nothing has happened in the meantime.' (Massumi, 2002, p.18)

'This method respects the visible and hidden complexities and uncertainties of the real-life world in which we are living.' (Roets & Braidotti, 2012, p.168)

The study was set up as an ethnographic multi-site case study, but in the analysis, it moved of its own accord towards the post-qualitative, towards the immanent (St Pierre, 2019; 2021). Throughout this study, it became clear that one doesn't 'do' what is normatively termed data in any conventional way, that is, as though they are external to the researcher. Data collection and analysis is an intra-active, collaborative process. The 'data' have personality. Occasionally they seemed deceptively accommodating, but mostly they were provocatively elusive tempting me onwards with glimmers of substance, depth and unexpected dimensions. At the end of each bout with the data, I felt frustrated yet enthused enough to persist.

Dancing with data: Undertaking analysis I was simultaneously within and outside of the many elusive and evanescent almost-narratives with which I was wrangling. And, as with any tussle, it was a tacit and improvisational conversation, a 'push and pull' as I groped and grasped for insights and meaning (Myers & Dumit, 2011). I struggled to remain open to digression, uncertainty, the unexpected, and to what might rise to the surface; what the encounters might 'tell' me if I would just give them the time to do so. The difficulty of course was in not jumping in and trying to shape or explain them before they could speak for themselves. This was an iterative process of replaying videos and reliving visits over and over, until amongst the multitude of possible narratives, glimmers developed into a recognisable glow.

Sifting through my memories and the data, I was alert for moments of affective intensity that stood out, encounters amongst the many that resonated of their own accord, that sought me out and lured me onwards. These were moments when spacetime behaved differently, felt different; pooling, thickening and slowing around memories, rushing, expanding or lightening in response to sensations. And, where bodies behaved differently; pausing, concentrating, gesticulating, focussing, becoming silent or profoundly open to sensation. And, when there was the very strong impression of strange presences, memory-ghosts, resonances and palpable atmospheres. These were ‘wonderous’ moments of confounded boundaries, openness and connection (Coleman & Ringrose, 2013, p.20). Each iteration built on and deepened impressions and insights as I learnt to recognise glimmers and glows, and was able to see more, and more differently. It was, as Myers and Dumit (2011) suggest, a question of ‘Where to look? How to look? What to look at? What counts as an interesting phenomenon?’ (p.254). With repetition, I became attuned to the ‘vitality of small, energetic events and the transversal associations that these might afford’ (MacLure, 2024, p.247). In mapping these intensity-rich encounters and their associations using event diagrams⁵⁶, I came to see that they often, although not always, occurred with confronting, challenging and dissonant content such as war, colonialism and slave trading, or with the familiar, wondrous or uplifting such as municipal icons, art and nature. It was around these thematic nodes that encounters aggregated, meanings coalesced and patterns finally began to emerge. The data stories were woven together on the basis of these patterns.

The speaking body: Highly instrumental in making the cuts and in interpreting the data was the non-verbal. As I revisited the videos, often at 2x, 5x or 10x actual speed, words became blurred, were backgrounded or entirely obliterated. In the process, whole other realms appeared, non-discursive realms of gesture, posture, stance, fluidity of movement, pauses, tonal changes, pace and so on. The hand gestures in Figure 3 below, are but a small selection of these bodily responses. For the most part, I was not specifically aware of these in the moment⁵⁷. In fact, I was astounded at how much I had failed to register at a conscious level. Merleau-Ponty (1962) described this fittingly when he said that ‘nothing is more difficult than to know exactly just what we do see’ (p.86). With regard to gestures, Abram (1997) alleges that they are spontaneous and immediate, a sensuous ‘bodying-forth of... emotion into the world’ (p.74) and thus, full of pre-conscious meaning. He also maintains that ‘linguistic meaning is primarily expressive, gestural, and poetic, and that conventional and denotative meanings are inherently secondary and derivative’ (1997, p.80). The expressive, gestural and poetic is perhaps what Deleuze (1994) was referring to as the ‘wild element’ in language. This ‘wild element’ was, I realised, fundamental to how data and I came to an arrangement, to

⁵⁶ Event diagrams are what I call mind maps of particularly powerful, intense or focussed encounters.

⁵⁷ Hand gestures are only one visible example of the complex body language of participants, an example that maintains the anonymity of participants.

what resonated, glimmered and glowed, and eventually coalesced into meaning. My subconscious had been hard at work in the background.



Figure 3. A small selection of the omnipresent hand gestures from all four museums.

The speaking milieu: The bodily responses were only part of what appeared in these fast-forward video skims. I became acutely aware of corridors, galleries, stairs, ambient lighting levels, steps, ramps, trajectories, artefacts, escalators, ceiling heights, colours, pace, lifts, materials, textures, spatial volumes, windows and other people. I also became aware of how little of the built environment I had consciously registered. It was only when it obtruded in some way, generally through its singularity, appeal or inconvenience. Overall, this process of speeding up and slowing down the video recordings, moving them out of standard durations, or what is known as real time, afforded a transformation to my perceptive capacities; to perceive new phenomena, to perceive them differently, and importantly, to perceive the many realms of information that exist beyond words.

Extracting snippets, phrases and stories from ‘the theatre of...telling, the landscape of...memory, the sensate land’ (Davis, 2007, p.35) removes much of their in-the-moment affective power, their vitality. It alters meaning no matter how accurate the transcriptions or descriptions. The rich, dynamic environments, perceptions, sensations, gestures and intra-actions are forcibly transposed into static, sequential, two-dimensional ‘words on paper’, becoming other, different and regrettably less lively. However, for all that, new meaning does come into being as the next four chapters demonstrate. It must also be said that what is articulated here is just one of the many possible and similarly fascinating narratives.

3.2.6 Limitations

The unstable, untidy and ephemeral: This project is interdisciplinary, bringing together as it does, the key knowledge areas of gerontology, health and wellbeing and museum studies amongst others and mediated by continental philosophy. By bringing these diverse subject areas together, it aimed to create a conversation ‘in order to break out of ... disciplinary ‘territorialities’’ (Coleman & Ringrose, 2013, p.2). Putting Deleuzian concepts to work with their focus on difference, multiplicity, sensation and fluidity means that what counts as limitations in conventional research can be that which is of most value. That which evades definition, hovers in liminal space, is ephemeral, fleeting, unstable, sensed rather than seen, and exceeds tidy categories: is that which has the capacity to provide different understandings and different ways of knowing. What is esteemed is ‘embodied action rather than talk or cognitive attitudes’ (Vannini, 2015, p.4), that which unsettles, enlivens, and energises. The underlying assumptions with this type of research are that there is no epistemological objectivity, no presumption of definitional authority and no goal to produce stable, generalisable findings, or ‘tracings’ in Deleuzo-Guattarian terminology (1987). This type of research is very much exploratory, with only vague unformed notions of what might occur, and an openness to the continual unfoldings, the ‘unholy mixture’ (Lecerle, 2002, p.53) of relations that might form. The researcher ‘participates from the inside’ as a way of perceiving ‘the beating heart of the tacit’ that animates our movements and feelings (Ingold, 2015, p.ix).

These are methods that seek to bring to light our 'more-than-human, more-than-textual, multisensual worlds' (Lorimer, 2005, p.83).

Variable efficacy: What became clear during the data collection stage was that some of the methods such as the graphic, the semi-structured interviews and the pre-visit surveys did not yield the hoped-for richness, but rather in the case of these last, clichés, tropes and platitudes. This was no reflection on the participants as the post-visit surveys attest. However, it did push me to reflecting on the 'generalisability' of surveys as a research method, certainly for this type of study. I was very glad at this point that I had used a mixed bag of methods of which the walking visits and the post-visit surveys yielded an abundance of rich and glowing potential.

Self-selection: Another point to note was that participants in the study all volunteered for the research, so were self-selected and hence more likely to be positively disposed towards museum visitation or perhaps to museum research. An interesting matter came up in Nantes. Staff assisting with recruitment mentioned their struggle to recruit participants which they attributed largely to the fact that the study focus was 'older' adults. It seems there is some reticence around being classified or even self-classifying as 'older' in France. This did not seem to be a factor at the other museums. An additional notable point regarding recruitment, was that at Melbourne Museum, there was an over-abundance of volunteers for the project. Over 100 people applied for 12 places. There was clearly a lot of interest, enthusiasm and goodwill within this museum community that would be worthwhile investigating further. Conversely, it was difficult to find participants in Wellington. One participant explained that the museum had well and truly over-surveyed (in her opinion) its visitors for some time with a consequent reluctance to engage on their part. It is also worth noting that the recruitment mechanism/s may have been a/the determining variable rather than the study's focus or participant enthusiasm.

Participant profiles: Participants at three of the museums, were largely well-educated, professionals of mid to high socio-economic status. This reflects the current limited profile of museum visitors (APPGAHW, 2017, p.30). By way of contrast at Manchester Museum, the participant cohort was mixed in terms of education and socio-economic status. With regard to the capacitating impacts of museum visits, I noticed no differences amongst this mixed cohort. In fact, if anything, those who came from less privileged backgrounds seemed to have a greater appreciation for, and to derive more benefit from their intra-actions with museums. Certainly an interesting theme for further investigation. Moreover, there were no notable differences in how differently aged or gendered participants engaged with the museum.

3.2.7 Breadth and depth

Like most researchers, I had a plan, or many plans in what was an atemporal and a-linear process. The middle data chapters were the first to come together and these were eventually bookended. What was somewhat surprising was that there was a logic to them... in the end. It was once again a logic of assemblage; assemblage at different scales. The sequence that emerged is composed of a first data chapter that provides an in-breadth exploration of museums as assemblages (Cameron, 2015; Pfefferkorn, 2024); as context, fields of conditions, agentic entities and public institutions. It is intentionally broad, outlining the diverse and different ways in which the museum assemblage enters into relation or actively participates in a multiplicity of assemblages. In other words, the ways in which museums entice their publics to engage. This breadth forms the overarching landscape within which individual visits, the smaller assemblages, materialise. It also informs the discussion around the conditions of possibility for the wellbeing of older people that museums afford. The data derive from the visits and post visit surveys (PVS) with/from participants (referred to by pseudonymous first names), and interviews with staff (referred to generically as 'staff'). In the interests of anonymity, I have intentionally varied the accuracy of staff pronouns.

By way of contrast, the subsequent three chapters take an in-depth view of individual museum visits. The second data chapter has as its focus, one individual's journey through Manchester Museum supplemented by anecdotes from other participants. It examines the vibrant heterogeneity of a single visit. The third data chapter located in Nantes, explores cohort assemblages through the themes which resonated with a majority of participants; slave trade, war, iconic biscuits, a Duchess and her château, and water. And the final data chapter located in Melbourne and Wellington interrogates assemblages which formed around consonant and dissonant histories. Museums, it will be seen, are places that are always in motion, that 'can enchant and move us' (Hackett et al., 2018, p.482). Their materiality can 'open up possibilities for the unexpected and unanticipated' (2018, p.484). These data chapters comprise glowing excerpts from the dynamic and shifting dance of meaning and matter (Barad, 1996, p.188). And these excerpts lay the foundations for the discussion chapter which responds to the research questions.

4. THE AGENTIC MUSEUM AS MILIEU

4.1 Fluid, relational, evolving entities

‘...the milieu is...constitutive, a part of the being, represented not only as its exterior but also that with which it must internally resonate.’ (Grosz, 2012, p.42)

‘...functioning is determined... by...physical and mental capacities [and]... the interactions each of us has with the environments we inhabit across our lives.’ (WHO, 2015, p.26)

Museum assemblages as fluid, relational, evolving entities are not confined to national or local contexts but are instead interconnected in proliferating webs of relationality. These webs are made up of an amalgam of ‘diverse people; ideas, entities, and processes; geopolitical contexts and situations’ (Cameron, 2015, p.350). They provide a context, a milieu or functional environment with, and in (with-in) which individuals intra-act⁵⁸. It is museums as milieus, or fields of conditions and what they afford and foster, that are the focus of this chapter.

An entity and its environment are inseparable, according to Simondon’s (2009) notion of the individual-environment pair. They are a dynamic, symbiotic, intra-active unity that is permanently in process (Combes, 2013; Grosz, 2012; 2017). Participation, or engagement with-in a milieu results in the modification of both the internal resonances of a being and its external relations. An individuating milieu is created in the process of individuation, which separates the incipient individual from its environment (Grosz, 2017). Thus, there can be no individuation without an associated milieu. Put another way, that which is not individuated becomes the milieu and as this process is continuous, there is a high degree of dynamic permeability between the milieu and the individuated entity.

The milieu or environment in this study, is what the individual is immersed in and in relation with, but other than it. This incorporates the physical, the incorporeal, the human and the non-human. Environmental influences include such elements as policies, the economic situation, societal and community attitudes and norms, artefacts, and the built environment. Having adopted a new materialist approach in this study, it follows that the individual and its capacity to act are co-constituted with-in the milieu (McCullagh, 2019). Thus I have focused on the contexts that enable action and afford the conditions of possibility for wellbeing. This focus makes visible the assorted entanglements between humans and nonhumans that when using more traditional approaches, are not visible (2019). In examining these milieus and the conditions they afford for wellbeing, I begin with the most tangible, the built environment and how people experience it. The literature in this area tends to focus on the design of built

⁵⁸ As mentioned, intra-action contends that the entangled actants or agencies that are being mutually constituted emerge from the intra-action and do not exist prior to it (Barad, 2007, p.33).

environments and general principles of built environment use, rather than on the intra-action of individuals with built environments. Yet it is this intra-action that determines a building's effects or how it is experienced by visitors. Although this section makes no pretence at an architectural analysis, I do draw on architectural writings and theory that accord with the study's new materialist framework to guide the investigation. In particular, those concepts that speak to the processual imbrication of individual and environment; to our perceptions and understandings of the built environment (Mallgrave & Goodman, 2011). Following the built environment, I explore the less tangible elements of the museum assemblage, its collective internal life, and conclude with the museum in the public sphere; its outward facing activities.

The four museums in this study are public institutions and agentic entities. They are the rich, heterogeneous spaces with-in which visitors intra-act. Data from the four museums is decidedly asymmetric. At the two smaller regional organisations in Nantes and Manchester, I was able to interview the directors along with several staff members in different roles. These interviews provided me with a conception of the culture and the general approach of these organisations. They also revealed how staff members interpreted the vision and strategic goals along with many specifics relating to their roles. Although the perspectives and particulars of these interviews varied greatly, I was struck by the high degree of alignment between the directors and their staff. At the larger organisations, a multi-site state museum in Melbourne and a national museum in Wellington, both of which had recently undergone significant restructuring, I did not speak with the directors but interviewed three staff members at each. This was inadequate to form a sense of the organisation as a whole but provided views that complemented those of the diverse cohort of participants at these museums.

Participant comments have been selected from both the visits and post visit surveys (PVS), and staff comments from the semi-structured interviews. These methodological variations and limitations influenced the form, foci and selection of vignettes demonstrating the different ways that museums function as environments and agentic entities, and how they afford the conditions of possibility and opportunities for wellbeing as participants in Simondon's intra-active and dynamic individual-environment pair (Combes, 2013; Grosz, 2012; 2017; Simondon, 2009). There is no intent to provide an overview of the four museums or to compare them except insofar as comparison contributes to the examination of any individual aspect or theme.

4.2 Encountering museum buildings

'A building is encountered; it is approached, confronted, related to one's body, moved through, utilised as a condition for other things. Architecture initiates, directs and organises behaviour and movement. A building is not an end in itself; it frames, articulates,

structures, gives significance, relates, separates and unites, facilitates and prohibits.’
(Pallasmaa, 2012a, p.68)

Both staff and participants in this study had a surprising amount to say about their museum buildings, and although participating in research conceivably heightened their awareness, many of the comments indicated that quite a deal of thought had previously been given to the topic. It was clear from the comments too, that the museum was not the building nor the building the museum, yet it significantly impacted the overall experience. Rather than a critique of the buildings, the focus of this section is the visitor experience of museum buildings, the building’s capacity to affect or engage, and the characteristics that afford this capacity.

What is important about buildings and specifically museum buildings as milieus that foster wellbeing, is their capacity to open up or extend possibility (Olgiati & Breitschmid, 2019, p.127). Architect Valerio Olgiati (2019) claims that to have cultural and social value, a building must have a speculative dimension. Speculative spaces are thought provoking, they ‘invite deep exploration’ (Pimlott, 2022, p.127) and the ‘construction and reconstruction of... everyday life’ (Olgiati & Breitschmid, 2019, p.70). The built environment characteristics that seem to contribute to this speculative dimension are sensory factors, haptic qualities, the logic of a building, its spatial sequencing or flow and its atmosphere.

4.2.1 Spatial sequencing and intuitive flow

‘...museums are partly distinguished from other forms of historical representation by their ‘sited-ness’; by the non-verbal nature of their messages that resides not just in material culture, but also in the museum’s particularly visible sense of spatial orchestration.’
(Williams, 2007, p.77)

Wellington participant Karen, commenting on navigation at Te Papa, admitted that *“it’s actually a real rabbit warren... a very confusing place.”* Confusion, lack of clarity and physical barriers such as stairs, or lifts that are difficult to find, interrupt the natural flow of one’s movement through space (Olgiati & Breitschmid, 2019). Participant and staff comments indicate that interrupted flow was a common experience in both the Wellington and Melbourne buildings. To understand better what this might mean, I begin with the museum in Wellington (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Aerial view of Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington. Image: Chris Cameron, Alamy



Figure 5. Wellington | a. Entrance foyer | b. Stairs between levels

In built environments, we subconsciously read a ‘narrative into the setting’ (Pallasmaa, 2014c, p.30). The foyer of a public building for example, is a space of welcome, a transition space, one in which the visitor adjusts her senses from the outside everyday world and anticipates entering into a discourse with the building and its contents. It is also a space for meeting, greeting, information, pause, and repose, and will in some way prepare the visitor for what she is to encounter. Through a relatively modest and unassuming entrance, visitors to the Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa Tongarewa in Wellington, or as it is more commonly known, Te Papa, reach the lobby. With its immensely high ceiling, criss-crossed by suspended walkways, its spinning stone water sphere, cloakroom to the right, shop to the left and broad staircase and escalator straight ahead, it is reminiscent of a commercial centre lobby (Figure 5). To access the foyer and information desk, visitors must take the stairs, escalator or lift, up another level

towards the light, then walk to the far end of a vast, open, multi-level, plaza-like space. One staff member at the museum explained that *“...there are so many stairs, and the lifts are not so visible... When you come into that lobby downstairs, it’s not really clear what you should be doing, it’s not intuitive. Then there’s the big foyer but it would be better if that was down a level, that would make more sense as you come in and see the Information Desk. We have hosts and we probably need them more than if the building was more intuitive... it just becomes all too hard for everybody... I would love to make things a bit more obvious and accessible.”* This person’s comments were representative of participant comments, whose responses to the building expressed varying degrees of dislike, with one or two positive comments about the natural light and places for people to sit. Amy for example, said *“I keep getting muddled... It doesn’t seem to have a plan.”* By ‘plan’, I suggest that Amy was referring to the coherent logic of the building; what Olgiati (Olgiati & Breitschmid 2019) calls, its ‘governing idea’ (p.73).



Figure 6. Aerial view of Melbourne Museum. Image: John Gollings

The main entrance to Melbourne Museum (Figure 6) opens onto a vast, open, multi-storey area which is confusing in that it is not immediately apparent where one should go. The reception desk is well hidden in plain sight; directly ahead. Leela in Melbourne said that *“I actually find it [the building] a little bit confusing. I’m never quite sure where I’m meant to be going, and where things are, and why we’ve just come from dinosaurs to Australian animals.”* On the days that I visited with participants, there were no maps available in English which was problematic for several of them. Staff directed us to a signage column, but the information on it was minimal. Beyond the reception desk, the visitor finds herself in another immense double-storey concourse with escalators at each end (Figure 7). It is from this concourse that

the fragmented and well-concealed exhibition spaces are accessed. A staff member, elaborated: *“It does contradict most people’s normal experience of museums where there’s an obvious through line and everything connects and if you start in one place and follow a particular path then you will necessarily get to see everything... So, this building lends itself to discovery... but I think for more casual or one-off visits it’s probably quite frustrating.”*

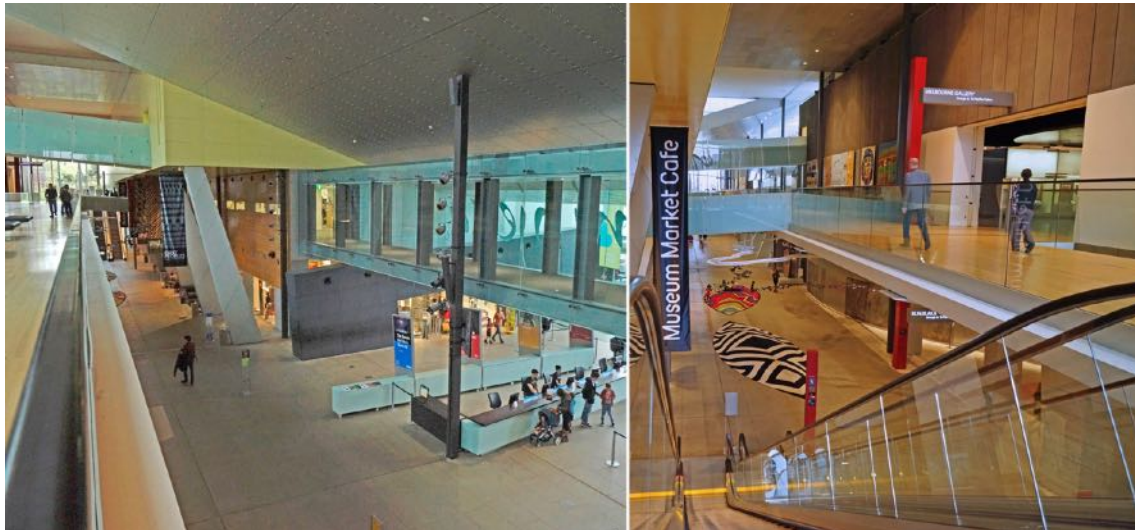


Figure 7. Melbourne | a. Reception viewed from level one, west | b. Escalators, east

4.2.2 Sensory atmospheric entities

One feature of Melbourne Museum that did elicit universally positive comment was the Forest Gallery. This is a liminal space, a threshold between inside and outside containing a living slice of Victoria’s temperate rainforest complete with native fauna (Figure 8).



Figure 8. Melbourne | a. b. Forest Gallery

Walking through it is both refreshing and invigorating which Pallasmaa (2012a) would arguably attribute to the interactive engagement of all sense modalities. He explains that a 'forest enfolds us in its multisensory embrace. The multiplicity of peripheral stimuli...pulls us into the reality of its space' (2012a, p.71). Perception does not function by adding the inputs from each sense modality, but simultaneously and interactively with all senses (Merleau-Ponty, 1991).



Figure 9. Aerial view of the Château of the Dukes of Brittany, Nantes. Image: Valery Joncheray/LVAN

The vast and breathtaking medieval Château of the Dukes of Brittany (Figure 9) plays a central role in the history of Nantes and is the fitting location for the Musée d'Histoire de Nantes, the Nantes History Museum. Inextricably entangled, the museum and château are in constant conversation, a conversation that is neither assured nor predictable, nor without complexity explained a staff member. They permeate each other, generating an atmosphere, opening up possibilities with, within and around the layers of histories that they embody. It is also the case, as another staff member pointed out, that “...we have a wonderful tool in the form of a medieval château...” In this particular instance, the building is at once an incarnation, and an immersive and authentic experience of Nantes in the Middle Ages. Nantes participant Margot, agreed, stating that “this entire building is the real museum of history...”

The museum was extensively and sensitively renovated over a 15-year period. The combination of a medieval château, the requirements of a museum, and French heritage laws not necessarily aligned with notions of inclusion and universal accessibility, was challenging. Yet the architects have risen to the challenge, incorporating one clearly visible principal, and three secondary lifts, a floating mezzanine and other features that facilitate accessibility and the display of museum artefacts with minimal impact on the building itself (Figures 10, 11). A

staff member explained that with the renovation “*we have created some interesting precedents, but the museum remains a complex building for older people*”. It is a very large and labyrinthine multi-level museum in a medieval château with stairs everywhere and low lighting levels. However, it does have a logic, the unifying logic of a fortress that makes it comprehensible.



Figure 10. Nantes | a. Museum building | b. Chateau & moat | c. Main stairs



Figure 11. Nantes | a. Main lift | b. Entrance foyer & welcome desk

Clémence from Nantes, noted that “*this museum is interesting... there are museums that touch people, they are powerful because of what you feel there, the atmosphere they discharge... it affects me, this mixture of the ancient and the modern.*” The atmosphere that Clémence was referring to is that overarching affective, sensory and unifying impression exuded by a space (Pallasmaa, 2014c). As we enter a space, the space enters us by way of its sensory richness and atmosphere, which form our first impressions (Pallasmaa, 2012b). Natural materials, argues Pallasmaa (2012a), trigger the haptic senses as the experience of colour, texture, warmth,

weight and density. They also show their age, which in turn highlights historical depth and character. Conversely, many contemporary buildings claims Pallasmaa (2012a), aim for ageless perfection. This is possibly a reflection of today's youth-obsessed and deeply ageist society that is so detrimental to the wellbeing of older people.

Participant Carole, said of the Château that houses the museum, *"it's true that one is imbued with the peaceful atmosphere, steeped in history."* Evidence of time passing and of everyday life such as weathered materials and patinas, contribute to the atmosphere and add richness and depth to the experience of museums located in existing adapted buildings (Pallasmaa, 2014c). The Château/Museum in Nantes is a site of historical memory, of co-existing collective identities and colliding temporalities, and of juxtaposed asynchronous moments. It a repository for different eras and a spacetime where matter, memory and imagination connect the personal and the social (Crang & Travlou, 2001). Participants seem to be very willing to tolerate a degree of physical discomfort in buildings such as the Château if they are compensated with an 'experience of 'thick' space and time' (Pallasmaa, 2014c, p.29) and an imaginative and experiential connection with past life, and life in general.

In resonant environments we both feel more, and more consciously (Wittman, 2019). When we reach out and touch a wall for example, we also feel our fingers, our hands (2019). Placing her hand on a stone wall of the château, Nantes participant Aurélie said, *"I love stone, its old, there are others who have touched it... What I like here is the sensation of stone and wood... Yes, there is an odour, it's the smell of history, it's wonderful."* A staff member elaborated, explaining that the *"French have a profound attachment to their 'old stone', to its associated historical imaginary... the French are fundamentally very proud of their history. The Château makes us much more popular than if we were just a museum... If they (the French) don't have time during the year... when they are on vacation, they visit a cathedral, a château, a garden - there is this connection..."* One could say that the museum in addition to affording a museum experience, also provides French visitors with their dose of 'old stone' and its rich 'realm of imagination and projection' (Pallasmaa, 2014b, p.20).

Manchester Museum is a university museum located on the campus, amongst a group of neo-Gothic buildings on Oxford Road. It stands out by dint of the warm coloured old stone façade with regular windows and the tall, hatted tower. The building is friendly, welcoming and interesting, and I liked it from the outset (Figures 12, 13, 14). We sense buildings, maintains architect Peter Zumthor (2014), we encounter them with our bodies; 'feel their material-haptic qualities, hear their sounds, see their lights, sense their temperature and smells etc' (p.7). This is very much how I first encountered Manchester Museum. It was an instantaneous immersive and multisensory impression, a friendly presence or atmosphere that enveloped me comfortably. Part of this was due to the volumes of the spaces, and part to the materials; the

dark wooden banisters, floorboards, walls and display cabinet frames, the leaded glass windows, the stone and tile floors, all with a vitality of their own.



Figure 12. Aerial view of Manchester Museum. Image: Nick Higham, Alamy

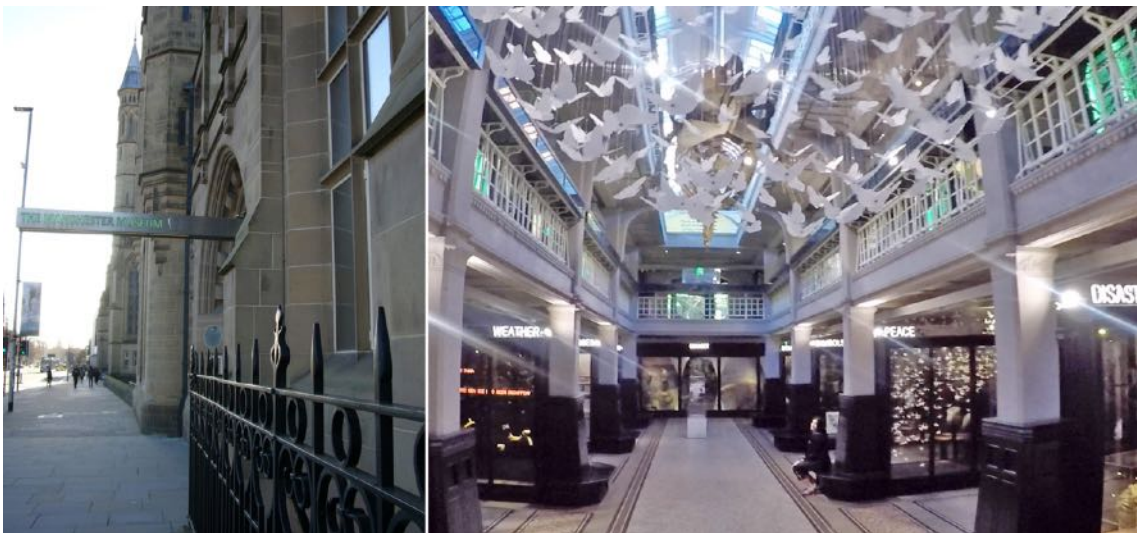


Figure 13. Manchester | a. Temporary entrance | b. Ground floor galleries

Millions of shoes have walked across the wood, stone and tile floors over the decades, creating slight concavities, altering shapes, textures and colours. Manchester Museum volunteer Paul said of the museum, “you’re surrounded by history... The actual building itself... Yeah, a sense of history, a sense of atmosphere and a sense of people who have worked here in the past, who have learned here, studied here. You can almost see them, it’s almost like they leave an imprint.” Millions of hands have touched, grabbed or caressed those polished banisters and

newels, smoothing contours, adding to their patina till they exude something intangible but palpable. And countless stories are embedded in the building waiting to be discovered, uncovered, reworked and retold. A staff member said of the building, “...*this is a beautiful building. It’s an old, old building. There are three buildings that have been cobbled together.*” Volunteer Beris added, “*I love the building... it’s fascinating.*”

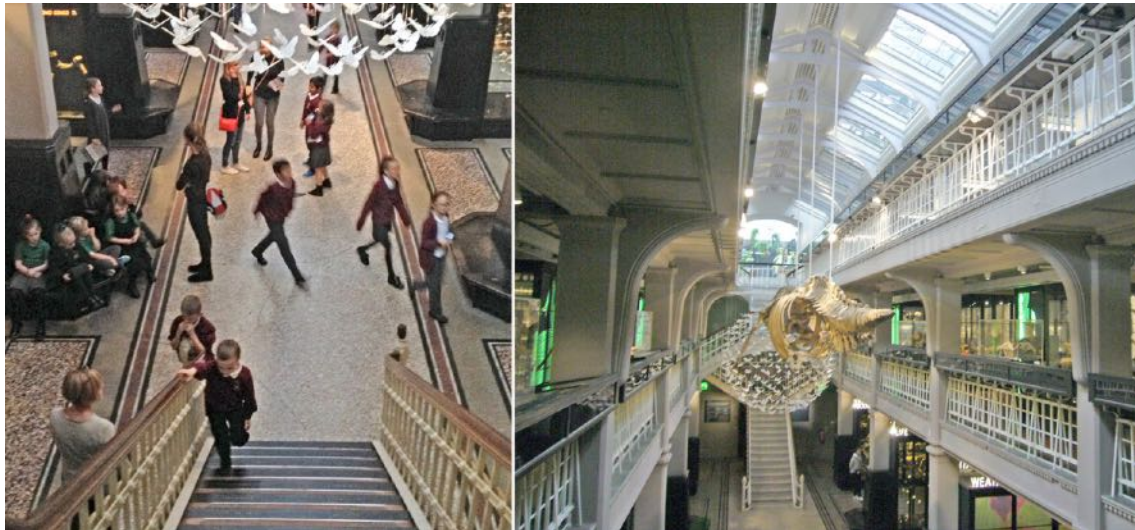


Figure 14. Manchester | a. Stairs to ground floor | b. View of all three levels from level one

4.3 The collective life of a museum

‘Alone or isolated, the subject as individual is left to anxiety, the insecurity of a being cut off from its milieu; but collective existence provides a “much vaster” place, or many, by which the subject can overcome itself and enter into new relations...’ (Grosz, 2017, p.192)

Museum assemblages are relational entities enmeshed in diversified networks and flows that have the capacity to extend the agency of their components such as their publics (Cameron, 2015). Simondon maintains that collective existence extends capacity and empowers an entity to go beyond itself (Grosz, 2017), to make more, and more diverse connections (Deleuze & Parnett, 2007). There are many ways in which museums extend the capacity of individuals through actively incorporating them in their assemblages, their activities. In doing so, they reinforce a sense of belonging, of contributing to their communities and of citizenship, while fortuitously enhancing their own distributed agency. The focus of this section which blends and overlaps with the next section, is the internal collective life rather than the outward-facing life of the museum.

4.3.1 Co-curation: incorporating many voices and perspectives

The Nantes History Museum worked closely with its community to develop a collection and exhibition about the two world wars. Dissatisfied with the contemporary section of the

museum, the conservation team put out a call to the community for objects and stories pertaining to these wars. In doing this, the museum actively sought connection and the participation of its citizens, and provided an opportunity for them to engage in co-creating something of collective significance beyond what any individual or group of individuals could have achieved. What was highly significant personally, gained collective significance in being displayed in the museum with other personally significant artefacts and stories as part of a larger narrative. The resulting exhibition *En Guerre(s)* (At War), rather than being conceived 'for' the public, was co-curated 'with' the community, and significantly informed the current permanent exhibition which is a source of pride and resonates particularly strongly with older citizens. This type of shared, dynamic process allowed the museum to incorporate many voices and perspectives (Barrett, 2011). The invitation to the community to collaborate closely on a topic of such consequence was a clear expression of shared concerns and the value and respect that the museum has for its community. It strengthened the museum-community relationship, and engendered a sense of ownership and belonging amongst its members.

4.3.2 Volunteer programs: inclusive and mutually beneficial

Volunteer programs are another way that museums include citizens in their activities. The volunteer program at Manchester Museum is key to its operations. Diverse backgrounds are welcomed, and volunteers are embraced and included as part of the team by the museum. Volunteers are provided with training and a broad range of opportunities to work with different objects, collections, people, programs and audiences. It is a mutually beneficial and highly satisfying arrangement wherein volunteers learn, gain skills, share interests, make friends, meet people from different cultures and become part of a friendly supportive, collaborative and inclusive community. They, in turn, share their knowledge, enthusiasm, skills and time with the museum, staff and visitors. Volunteer participants at Manchester are all keen, committed and passionate and those qualities greatly contribute to the vibrant, friendly atmosphere at the museum.

Volunteer Paul explained that *"at the end when they [visitors] say, 'well that's very interesting, thank you very much', it makes you feel that you've done well by people."* You bring joy to people's lives, I suggested. *"Yeah, and they do the same for you."* For Paul it was very clear that his exchanges with visitors at the museum were mutually uplifting. *"And when you're teaching people and when you're teaching children as well, which I love to teach children you know because I want them to learn what I never did. I want them to grow up to become doctors and archaeologists and to fulfil their life potential."* Paul had left school at a young age and was eager for the children with whom he came into contact at the museum to have the opportunities that he had missed out on. His role at the museum apart from affording him with social and learning opportunities also provides meaning and fulfilment.

Although not paid, the volunteers are invited on day trips to such places as the British Museum. There are also training courses and exchange programs with other museums both within the UK and throughout Europe. Volunteer Kevin explained that *“one of the lads... goes to London every week on a course about Egypt. One day a week. He signs on. He can’t get a job, so he goes...on a coach and gets back at midnight. This is every week for a year he’s been doing it because he’s that interested...”* Manchester Museum has a significant collection of objects from ancient Egypt and Sudan and the ‘lad’ in question had developed a passion for this area through his volunteer role at the museum, a passion that led to his extending himself through further learning.

4.3.3 Forming connections: coffee and a frog

Connection came up time and time again in all of the museums, connection to objects, collections, galleries, the building, staff, the museum, the organisation, the community, the city, other people, other times and other cultures. Remaining connected for people post-retirement can be precarious, and if you add mobility issues, financial insecurity and poor health, it can become, as one staff member put it, ‘a perfect storm’. Yet, another staff member explained that, *“People feel more connected to the city when they come to the Museum or the Art Gallery. If people feel welcomed and relaxed, they get a sense of the greater community.”*



Figure 15. Manchester: one object tells so many different stories | a. Vivarium | b. Golden Mantella frog
c. Kakapo | Butterflies

Connection took many different forms as a staff member explained. Some come for a quiet moment to reconnect with themselves, others to learn or to research, and there are *“people who might just want to walk around, have a coffee, and look at a frog.”* She also mentioned that there were people who came in specifically to chat with the Visitor Services Team and that sometimes *“it’s just a bit of therapy, a bit of down time...”* Another staff member confessed that he loves looking at objects and collections and *“seeing how different people connect with them because one object tells so many different stories and everybody brings their own personal perspective to something. There is no right and wrong”* (Figure 15). Different people with different backgrounds, experiences, priorities, interests and agendas will interpret and understand differently (Message & Witcomb, 2015). This echoes Haraway’s (1991) notion of there being no single perspective as each subject is embodied and embedded

within sense-making processes with their associated versions of 'socially created realities' (Roets & Braidotti, 2012, p.169).

Connections can be asynchronous and geographically remote in nature. Volunteer Kevin recounted how *"one woman sent me an email from Italy, and she said, 'in 1955 my mother saved this parakeet and gave it to the Belle Vue Zoo...' And she said, 'can you find out what happened to it?'"* Closer to home, the handling tables present a wonderful opportunity to connect haptically and socially as Paul explains, *"you get to meet a lot of people, so it's a social thing as well."* This is significant as an individual's capacity or potential is ultimately defined by her connectedness or relatedness, and the intensity of, and manner in which she is connected (Massumi, 2015).

4.3.4 Shared enjoyment: the museum social

"One of people's primary needs is about spending time with friends and family... The people you go with is as important as the thing you go to." Staff member, Wellington

Nantes participant Aurèlie, explained that shared visits bring *"the pleasure of disseminating, exchanging, sharing and understanding..."* Helen from Wellington agreed saying that *"if I have visited with another person, there is a feeling of shared enjoyment."* Social interaction for many people is an essential component of cultural engagement. In their extensive study, Kelly et al. (2002) found that most older people visited museums with their partners, family, friends or other social groups. The exception being those already engaged with the museum such as volunteers. A study on the frequency of museum attendance, uncovered how pervasive the social aspect of museum visits is (Brida et al., 2016). In the interactive experience model proposed by Dierking and Falk (1992), museum visits are depicted as a social activity in the context of relationships. Factors and variables from physical, personal and social contexts interact to create a unique experience. Friends, family, partners, museum staff, strangers and society may all form part of the social context of a museum visit. What visitors look at and how they experience and make sense of what they see occurs in social interaction, concluded vom Lehn (2006) in his study. He added that this shared, interactive experience manifests both verbally and bodily. Cognition and articulation are key components of social interaction and are also what Zylinska (2009) describes as 'acts of bringing forth a world' (p.123), and in sharing those worlds, of reworking them.

Opportunities for social connection with like-minded strangers abound in museums, and they also provide an enjoyable shared leisure activity for couples, groups, families and friends. Wellington participant Chris and I found ourselves in conversation with a very enthusiastic stranger about the construction of a *waka*, the immense wooden canoe outside the entrance to *Mana Whenua* (Figure 16). The *waka* had an atmosphere, an energy, an attraction that was

contagious. We were all affected by the *waka*. Its resonance and the intensity of interest that we brought to it, and which flowed amongst us, was enough to overcome any barriers we might have had with regard to speaking to strangers. We happily shared the experience of being mutually entangled in an affective sociomaterial assemblage. The *waka* had drawn us together as objects do. It facilitated and helped structure our interactions (Gosden et al., 2007). This type of adhoc engagement through objects with strangers including museum staff, was not an isolated incident and occurred in all museums with many of the participants and for many different reasons.



Figure 16. Wellington | a. Waka, Otago Museum⁵⁹ | b. Wood engraving of a waka by E. Mervyn Taylor | c. Entrance to Mana Whenua, Te Papa

Museums are environments primed with artefacts, narratives, information and displays that create opportunities for sympathy to emerge, according to Massumi (as cited in de Freitas, 2019, p.91). Sympathy can lead to serendipitous social experiences that stimulate communication and meaning making (Silverman, 2010). The social aspect of museums is a very important and inextricable part of visitation. And, the social interaction may not necessarily occur in the moment or even during a visit. Melbourne participant Kathy explained that, *“If I went alone, I would share with family later on, or if I went with someone we usually discuss on the train going home.”* Melbournian, John concurred: *“visiting a museum, I feel my own feelings and thoughts and perspectives and can share them afterwards.”* Participants confirmed that they visited with partners, parents, children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, friends and visitors to the city or country. Amy from Wellington said, *“I would’ve come with my husband on occasion but that was quite a while ago. Mostly I would come with the children on a regular basis... They ran to the things that they liked... And we always looked at the birds... and they always liked going outside, that was wonderful.”* Participants also enjoyed visiting on their own and being able to share the experience later with friends and family. Aurélie from Nantes, acknowledged that *“it is something I like to do on my own and share later...”*

Variable visitation configurations are good reason for curators to cater to multiple visitor types rather than targetting one market segment to the exclusion of others. Consistent with the

⁵⁹ It is not permitted to photograph the waka at Te Papa, however this waka is very similar.

dominant neoliberal ideology that permeates public policy, the notions of market segments and visitors as clients and consumers, rather than citizens, have been normalised even within such public institutions as museums. These now use sector specific cultural segmentation or psychographic profiling tools to define market segments based on the values, beliefs and motivations of visitors. A staff member at Te Papa mentioned that their museum had been quite successful with cross-generational programming on the assumption that *“children don’t visit the museum on their own”*, and so offering parallel points of connection for both children and adults seemed logical. These parallel points of connection gave rise to ‘wonderful’ shared experiences of material objects (affective sociomaterial experiences), such as *‘things that they liked’* and *‘the birds’*.

4.3.5 Nourishing the senses: haptic encounters

‘Any footage or picture we’d seen of these beasts (taxidermy animals) paled in comparison to their three-dimensional presence and magnetism in the museum.’ (Giggs, 2020, p.112)

Museum visits are made memorable for many reasons including haptic experiences. These are multi-sensory and extend beyond direct physical contact with an artefact. Nantes participant Victor, explained that *“the object nourishes our senses, even if we only touch it with our eyes!”* When our eyes roam over an object, exploring its haptic qualities, we simultaneously imagine the sensation of touching it; its weight, texture and form (Dudley, 2015). This only occurs in direct encounters. *“The real object reveals its true size, colour, beauty etc,”* wrote Charlie from Melbourne. According to Pallasmaa (2012a), the optical function of the eye which we use when looking at images on screens, separates us and makes us spectators. Conversely haptic vision, hearing and touch are all-encompassing and engender a sense of proximity, intimacy and affection. In three-dimensional, face-to-face encounters, there is a tension and an interplay between the optic and other senses which enriches the experience. Artefacts embody affects, they have an inner force, a resonance, an atmosphere that emanates from them, beckoning, embracing, and at times engulfing the unwary (Figure 17). These embodied affects are only perceptible in the presence of an artefact.

Sharing space with objects and/or experiencing them from the ‘inside’ was both explicit and implicit in the responses of participants to a question in the PVS about the importance of seeing objects in real life. Nantes participant Yvonne, wrote that *“seeing real objects gives the impression of becoming one with them, of experiencing them from the inside.”* And, Melbourne participant Leela wrote that *“an object provides a direct link to those who used/wore/touched it...”* Being in proximity with artefacts and even more so without glass barriers, makes them more real; more understandable, tangible, alive, memorable, and also provides a connection with the creator. A staff member at Nantes History Museum was very conscious of this, saying that *“where we can, we don’t isolate objects in glass containers, the objects breathe the same*

air as the visitors; proximity to objects is fundamental” (Figure 18). Proximity allows the viewer to capture the ‘essence’ of an object, its atmosphere. These are absent in two-dimensional representations.



Figure 17. Embodied affects | a. Dog head, Nantes | b. Windmills, Melbourne | c. Tapestry, Melbourne



Figure 18. Proximity to objects | a. Glass models of sea anemones, Manchester | b. Mask, Wellington | c. Dinosaur: ‘Anthropocene Shelter’ by Gregor Kregar, Wellington. Visitors could touch it with gloves.

Touch, vision and all other senses work together to provide knowledge of objects as lively three-dimensional entities. This requires the subjective synthesis of various tactile and visual experiences of these objects (Bogue, 2013, p.137). It is of course an entangled process; the physical and emotional responses, perception and cognition are actively affected by the attributes and proximity of objects (Dudley 2015; Ingold, 2010). Furthermore, that which affects is in turn affected as Victor from Nantes explained: *“It [artefact] is a fascinating, but also a disturbing reminder of a past moment, a moment that no longer exists but, in a way, continues to exist through the sensory interest that we bring to it.”* Sharing space with objects is very much a multi-dimensional, sensory and sensual experience. Melbourne participant Naomi, wrote: *“a tactile experience or being able to understand how an object fits into a setting, adds a depth of knowledge and meaning.”* *“It [tactile experience] has a reality and earthiness about it...”* added Kaye, also from Melbourne.

4.3.6 Making and re-making our worlds: learning as capacitation

‘... making works work is the museum’s major mission... Works work when, by stimulating inquisitive looking, sharpening perception, raising visual intelligence, widening

perspectives... they participate in the organization and reorganization of experience, in the making and re-making of our worlds.’ (Goodman, 1985, p.56)

Learning is a very large topic in the context of museums. The ‘pedagogical imperative has been a mainstay of museums since their inception’ (Trofanenko, 2011, p.481). Given this, I included a question in the PVS on the importance of learning. Melbourne participant, Nadia responded that learning *“is a by-product of experience. It doesn’t matter if I remember everything just that I am open to letting more into my world and my world expands.”* In this study, an expanding world indicates increased capacity or wellbeing, and learning is what Barad (2007) defines as a set of ‘practices of knowing’, which are ‘specific material engagements that participate in (re)configuring the world’ (p.91). In other words, contingent material entanglements that result in change. The constant improvisation, speculation and experimentation that learning requires, argues Richard Edwards (2010), relies on ‘emancipatory ignorance, invention, risk, otherness, interruption and the joint enacting of worlds and subjectivities’ (p.14). For Melbourne participant Grace, what is important is to *“have an informed, open-minded approach; to understand and be tolerant of others; to be able to make decisions/form opinions that take into account different viewpoints and evidence/information...”*. Victor from Nantes, added that learning is a means to *“renew oneself, to confront oneself with that which is different, to feel alive...”*. What we are doing in museums according to David Carr (2006), is dwelling in, and rearranging possibilities. Difference teaches he goes on to argue, and complexity invites and engages (Figure 19). Learners are always in motion towards unfamiliar possibilities and incipient events (Carr, 2006).



Figure 19. Difference teaches | a. Indigenous Australian, Melbourne | b. Māori, Wellington | c. Wooden head, Melbourne | d. Wooden figurehead, Nantes | e. Golden Sudanese head, Manchester

Learning or ‘specific material engagements’ that lead to change, have the capacity to *“spark a person to look into something they may not have known about therefore getting them out of the house, involved with others...”*, wrote Melbourne participant Kathy. For Andy in Wellington, the museum experience is *“about life, exchange with others, interaction, personal growth, improvement of your understanding of things, making progress with yourself.”* It also *“helps me understand who I am and understand others who inhabit the world with me,”* wrote Melbourne participant Edgar. Doris from Manchester added that learning *“keeps your mind*

and body active and makes you feel good. It can set you off on new paths at any time of life, paths along which you can meet new people, see new places, encounter other cultures.” These comments all lead to the conclusion that learning, or specific material engagements in museums that contribute to the (re)configuration of worlds are expansive, capacitating practices that foster wellbeing.

There is a prevailing assumption that the reason people go to museums, and what they do in museums, is largely about learning (Smith, 2015, p.461). However, what the responses to the PVS brought to light was that ‘learning’ was used as a catch-all category, a cliché for the entire, complex and entangled museum experience. Participants spoke about being stimulated, inspired, extended, affirmed, challenged, enriched and engaged. This led to personal satisfaction, renewal and being more informed, alert, open, tolerant and respectful of difference and diversity. What they were attesting to, is that learning in museums however one might define it, is capacitating, and that encounters with difference bring about change that is expansive for individuals and their worlds. Although people do learn in museums, the learning/education paradigm can obscure complex affective, imaginative and transgressive aspects and downplay visitors’ capacity to make use of museums to develop critical or political insights that surpass those presented by museum curators (Smith, 2015, p.478).

4.3.7 Engaging with contested and difficult histories: opening doors



Figure 20. The meeting of differences | a. Mind exhibition, Melbourne | b. Painting, Tony Fomison, Wellington | c. Indigenous wood carvings, Melbourne

One of the unexpected and striking discoveries of this study was the inclination for participants to seek, engage with, and appreciate engagement with contested, confronting and dissonant topics such as mental health, racism, slave trading and the rarely discussed physical, emotional and social impacts of war on individuals. I will elaborate on this finding in later chapters, however, from various comments and responses to the PVS, what people appreciated was the time to reflect on things that they normally do not either have time to reflect on and/or do not encounter. They found it enriching seeing things differently, questioning their own and society’s assumptions, being intellectually challenged, encountering the unexpected, and being led to the unanticipated. A museum can unsettle our assumptions and expectations (Carr, 2006), and we go to museums for exactly this experience. The depth and intensity of cognitive-

affective engagement that the more difficult or dissonant topics afford is greater and this increases the perception of richness, complexity and learning, and the concomitant sense of satisfaction as the comments below demonstrate. It speaks to the necessity for museums to embrace this complexity (Cameron, 2015). Furthermore, Cameron (2015) argues that, 'epistemologies based on facts and certain knowledge, such as positivist science, can no longer function in a world of complexity, uncertainty and competing worldviews' (p.348).

"It is the meeting of differences and the resulting reflection that is inspiring (Figure 20). The confrontation, if we accept it, leads us to open up, to question our assumptions, our prejudices..." Victor, PVS, Nantes

"I think that this (Mind Exhibition, Figure 20a) is one of the really good exhibits at the moment. You know you come out and you question, you think, have discussions, it opens up a few doors. Because... people don't want to talk about mental health." Kathy, Melbourne

"It's interesting (Tony Fomison, Figure 20b), it's all very deep and quite challenging art. And when I look at it, it gets to your heart. So, when I see something like this, I need a lot of time and... you know, I need recovery time afterwards. I need to go away and have quiet time." Helen, Wellington

"...it brings feelings, pleasure, knowledge and longings too. To see that Man is capable of the worst but also of the best; this is what we see in museums. It's intellectually stimulating." Aurélie PVS, Nantes

Visitors it would seem, are not the only ones keen to engage with dissonant and contested histories. To combat what he calls the persistence of the colonial mindset, curator Adam Szymczyk (2021) calls for vaults to be opened and stories of the objects and people they belong to, to be told. A sentiment that one staff member at Melbourne Museum agrees with saying, *"I would love to openly discuss controversial issues with the public. Things like the indigenous objects that we have in the collections that we shouldn't have and what we should do with them. We shouldn't worry about making decisions for 'ever' just about what is right now, not in ten or twenty years' time. Everything is changing so fast."* His comment accords with one of the Mission Statements in Museums Victoria's Annual Report of 2020-21: 'We exchange stories about culture, history and science and fearlessly discuss the big questions of life.'⁶⁰ Questions that Cameron (2015) calls 'topics of global importance that challenge, upset, intrigue and attract' (p.213). These challenging topics and difficult histories will be explored further in the next section and subsequent chapters.

⁶⁰ https://museums victoria.com.au/media/18583/museums_victoria_annual_report_of_operations_2020-21.pdf

4.4 The museum and the public sphere

'...the institution of the museum can provide enabling conditions for emerging citizenship practices and support their right to public space.' (Krasny, 2017, p.62)

A sense of one's place in the world and its future made a regular if unassuming appearance amongst the data. It manifested as curiosity about, awareness of, and interest in global issues and their impacts at a local level. This indicated a desire to understand, participate, belong, share and contribute not only as good citizens but as responsible and caring global citizens. Chris from Wellington wrote that participating and staying attuned to what is happening around you can make you *"feel... part of the stream of life..."*. Doris from Manchester added that it *"can give you new skills and opportunities in life, and a sense of achievement, and encourages you to look to the future."* In museums, we encounter 'thick atmospheres' (Pallasmaa, 2014c, p.29). These are intensities that tune us into events at both local and global levels (Dernikos et al., 2020; Stewart, 2007). Manchester participant Sylvia wrote that it is *"vitally important to keep finding out about new things and to maintain a lively interest in the world in which you are living."* Individuals only exist and continue to individuate in a symbiotic process with their subjective environment (Simondon, 2009). As this environment includes all that affects and might affect an individual, an understanding of that environment is integral to a person's potential to go beyond herself and increase capacity. This is why, as Robyn from Wellington noted, *"we need to keep learning, to keep up with what is happening around us."* It is in this way that we consolidate and extend our connections to other entities (Carr, 2006).

Access to museums and all they hold and represent was a high priority for participants. Manchester volunteer Colin wrote that *"a museum should be a window onto the world. People should be encouraged to visit museums which can be exciting, provocative and thought provoking, thus stimulating, or challenging previously held ideas."* Participants strongly felt that museums as a 'public good' and *"invaluable assets to our society"*, should be welcoming and accessible to all and belong to all. Colin believes that a museum *"belongs to its citizens and...should reflect the community in which it is based..."* Melbourne participant Grace, added that *"I really value a society that makes these buildings and resources accessible and welcoming to all of its citizens."* *"All people should be able to access the collections for learning, for fun, for research. Museums keep things in trust for all to see and experience. We have a collective responsibility to enable these objectives,"* affirmed Doris from Manchester. And John from Melbourne went so far as to state that *"any civil society worthy of that name must have public commons,"* such as museums.

Entangled with access is the notion of sharing, in which participation in collective life is implicit. What is being shared is knowledge, culture, stories, experience, time and collective memories. Naomi from Melbourne wrote that *"knowledge and culture must be shared and*

access available to all. No one group should own it and it certainly shouldn't be determined by wealth or status." Nantes participant Margot agreed that *"it's about sharing knowledge, making it available to the public, encouraging people to reflect and to feel, which deepens the reflection."* That feeling deepens reflection is an important point. Braidotti (2006b) argues that the 'self' is 'a play of complexity that encompasses all levels of one's multi-layered subjectivity, binding the cognitive to the emotional, the intellectual to the affective, and connecting them all to a socially embedded ethics of sustainability' (p.156). Put simply, there is no cognition without feeling, no isolated functions, only ongoing relations, entanglement, interconnection and interdependence.

A museum, stated Victor from Nantes, *"even the humblest one, is part of the memory of humankind, a place for rejuvenation... it must belong to the public..."*. Wellington participant Edgar added that *"even though I feel it has been somewhat dumbed down, I like the fact that it is so popular and so many people feel it belongs to them."* Museums embody or materialise parts of various collective memories and so by definition belong to those collectives. As Andy from Wellington wrote, *"a museum is us, the community that creates it."* According to Nantes participant Evelyne, a museum *"is a common good that we share, and it is part of the identity of the city. It engenders municipal pride. Everyone is equal and can come. It is not reserved for the elite."* One way of experiencing a museum is as 'a comforting identity-forming 'habit'' (Braidotti, 2006b, p.19), one that affirms the way collectives differentiate or define themselves. In the words of Wellington participant Edgar, *"...museums have the ability to confirm yourself and your identity."* Museums are many things to many people at many times, yet no matter the definition, participants agreed on their importance for society, communities and individuals, and identified a set of roles, characteristics and impacts. These included: democratic access, a sense of ownership and belonging; collective memories, sharing and shared knowledge; a reflection of the communities in which they are embedded and a window onto the world; an institution that encourages feeling and deepens reflection.

"I feel it is a mark of a civilized society that it values its past, and as such we should be prepared as a society to pay for museums, so they are free for everyone to enjoy." Leela, PVS, Melbourne

Societies in the words of philosopher Peter Sloterdijk (2016) are not homogeneous entities but 'restless and asymmetrical associations of pluralities of space and processes' (pp.53-54). He goes on to suggest that societies and people are of a 'far more fluid, hybrid, permeable and promiscuous constitution than their homogeneous names suggest' (2016, pp.53-54). This is also true of publics and the public sphere. Jennifer Barrett (2011) in her analysis of museums in the public sphere discusses the slipperiness and mutability of the term 'public' and how it is 'the process of forever attempting to be democratic' that characterises 'the public' (p.7). She suggests that if museums are truly in the public realm, the meanings they create are not fixed

and that as an institution, contemporary museums are always in transition as attempts are made to continually renew them (2011). In this study, what a museum is, which is both subjective and always in flux, is of much less concern than what it can do.

4.4.1 Building civic relationships: redressing past injustice

As many believe that museums should be defined as ‘polyphonic spaces for the advancement of social justice, democracy, and global well-being – as central agents in the development of a more just and equal society’ (Bechtler & Imhof, 2021, p.6), their role in redressing past injustice and building civic relationships is an important one. History is replete with injustice in a diversity of forms. Many of these persist and are pernicious, continuing to impact the wellbeing of individuals, families and other collectives living today.

A striking characteristic of Te Papa is the pervasiveness of the Māori culture. Te Papa considers itself a bi-cultural organisation and its policies and practices ensure the active involvement and participation of Māori people in the museum (Schorch, 2015). A Māori presence permeates the museum and is a very strong point of connection for participants and staff whose dialogue is peppered with Māori words. The museum acts as a dynamic meeting place where cultures actively connect, interact, collaborate and foster a greater awareness and understanding of each other. Although the majority of participants were pākehā - of white settler origins - they spoke with pride of *Te Marae*⁶¹, Māori words and meanings, Māori artists and leaders, and other aspects of the Māori culture. Karen for example explained the word ‘tūrangaweaweā’, *“it’s my favourite Māori word. It means ‘your standing place’; ‘weaweā’ are your legs and it’s where you feel at home in the world. It’s not necessarily where you’re born, it’s where... mine’s Wellington, it’s my place.”* (Figure 21a). Robyn explained that the Māori are great and gifted storytellers and natural orators. And for Chris who is Dutch-Māori, *“being Māori in New Zealand is [an] everyday, all the time [thing].”*



Figure 21. Wellington | a. My favourite Māori word: Tūrangawaewae | b. Hands on pounamu

⁶¹ The Māori meeting place discussed in a later chapter.

New Zealand or Aotearoa is a postcolonial settler nation. On display next to the *Mana Whenua* (People of the Land⁶²) section, is a facsimile of New Zealand's founding document, the Treaty of Waitangi, an agreement signed by the British Crown and a majority of Māori chiefs in 1840. It has a contentious history as Wellington participant Robyn explained: *"There're two different versions and that was the problem, the interpretation was different, and it's created all the problems we have... it was all around the word 'kāwanatanga'."* The chieftains who signed the Treaty did not understand that according to the British, they were signing away 'complete sovereignty' over their tribal lands. The translation into Māori led them to understand that although land rights would be transferred to the British Crown, the chieftains would retain 'unqualified exercise of their chieftainship'⁶³. The Treaty according to Chris, has been *"much honoured in the breach rather than the observance and a process was started by the Labour government in the 1980s to extend the mandate for the Waitangi Tribunal to hear claims back to 1840."* This is an ongoing process.

Located between *Te Marae* and *Mana Whenua*, is an enormous piece of greenstone or pounamu (Figure 21b). Like jade, this stone is treasured by the Māori for its strength, beauty and as a symbol of status and power. It is said to have healing properties, is entangled in myth and deemed to be sacred. Impossible to walk past without noticing/touching it, I wondered whether the pounamu had been strategically placed as a move towards healing the rift and mitigating the ongoing impacts of the Treaty. *"Come and touch the pounamu. You don't often see a piece of pounamu that big... You just need to put your hands on it,"* invited Chris, as did all participants who encountered it. The haptic experience of this object was unexpected; neither cold nor rigid, it was alive to the touch (it touched back), ancient yet ageless, indeterminate and curiously elusive. Julia explained that *"both my sons wear pounamu, they were given a piece for their 21st birthdays... pounamu is really sacred."* Chris elaborated, explaining that pounamu can embody 'mauri' or life force, the striving to persist (Bignall & Rigney, 2019). Other key Māori values of kinship, reciprocity, hospitality and respect for life all appeared in conversation with Chris as we meandered through the *Te Marae* and *Mana Whenua* sections. The contiguous *Te Marae*, *Mana Whenua* and Treaty areas resonated strongly, were highly affecting, and provoked much reflection and thoughtful discussion amongst participants.

The Nantes History Museum provides another example of a museum addressing past injustice in exposing what had previously been hidden. The museum includes an extensive permanent exhibition on the slave trade, a formative activity in the city's past as France's foremost slave trading port. Human rights, equity, social inclusion and citizenship are all priorities for the museum and this comes through very clearly in the exhibitions and in staff interviews. A staff member explained that the museum's approach is a critical one, deconstructing myths,

⁶² Although often thought to refer exclusively to the Māori people, it does include the Moriori people

⁶³ <https://teara.govt.nz/en/kawanatanga-maori-engagement-with-the-state/page-1>

questioning received narratives and confronting dissonant histories. *"It's ambitious...(and) we don't manage it all the time but we try,"* he says. *"Our approach is to confront difficult subjects... such as the slave trade, terror during the revolution, the two World Wars, the question of collaboration, the resistance, the deportation of the Jews etc."*

The original exhibition, 'The Shackles of Memory' which opened in 1992, was the first extensive European exhibition on the slave trade. One of the cultural mediators explained that *"we face these topics head on"* and that the exhibition is *"very emotional...some visitors feel guilty and don't want to enter those rooms as they are afraid of being lectured...(and others) like to go in and expand their knowledge."* In his view, it is essential to acknowledge the city's once hidden slave trading past and its consequences for today's society. This highly affecting exhibition has the capacity to unsettle viewers enough to instigate critical reflection and a reworking of accepted, more comfortable ways of viewing the city's past. I elaborate on this in chapter six.

4.4.2 Out and about: public programs

The city of Manchester has been collaborating, or more accurately, intra-acting with its older citizens since 2003 when it launched its *Valuing Older People* program. This was later re-branded as the *Age-Friendly Manchester* program after Manchester became the first UK city to join the WHO Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities in 2010. The museum, as one of the cultural institutions participating in this program, has been very much involved. Amongst its many programs, it has either co-designed and initiated or facilitated numerous programs specifically for older people. These programs have been collaborative and inclusive, involving a combination of older people, government, for-profit, social enterprises and third sector organisations. One staff member explained that the *"programs that we develop have to give people the passion that we feel, the experience that we have. We have a duty to share it with people and inspire them. You never totally crack it but as long as you keep going..."*. She went on to outline how collaborative work opens up possibilities. *"There's only so much we can do as individuals; we need to bring the outside in and get people helping us and supporting us, and then people will really care for the museum and want to nurture it and see it go forward."*

A staff member revealed that at the outset of the age-friendly work, the museum had targeted people over 50, but the work has become so embedded it is now just part of the overall adult offer. He went on to underline the importance of flexibility and the repeated and very clear messages from older people about wanting to be involved, and not wanting to be separated, stigmatised or identified as passive or 'in need'. A collaborator with the museum, confirmed that what *"older people wanted, was to be able to do things for themselves"*. The differing needs of visitors which may or may not be age related are very much top of mind with

museum staff. One staff member offered a personal example. *“In my family we have three generations over 50; my grandmother, parents, and one of my cousins had just turned 50...”*

The museum has a range of events, exhibitions and programs of varying scale, duration, type and audience, both inside the building and out in the community. Over the course of interviews with staff and collaborators, 18 events and programs came up in conversation all of which were collaborative and involved appreciable social and/or wellbeing components. The volunteer program is a significant and ongoing program that permeates many of the organisation’s activities. The off-site work includes volunteers and actively invites involvement from the community and other organisations. In neoliberal terms, it is crucial for building audiences, developing networks and marketing the museum whilst simultaneously furthering the museum’s wellbeing work. *Culture Shots* for example, was a week-long series of events taking culture into hospital environments and allowing staff, visitors and patients to discover how effective it can be in enhancing wellbeing. It was a way of showcasing this type of work, engaging with healthcare professionals, visitors, long-stay and day-care patients, of developing new relationships, and extending the arts on prescription work.

4.4.3 Public health: museum as part of the public health workforce

One staff member at Manchester Museum is very interested in exploring how the museum fits into the third or civic sector along with its potential to be *“more imaginative, more inclusive and more caring”*. He went on to outline the notion of exhibitions that *“aren’t just exhibitions”* but whole programs with social action embedded throughout. I asked about resourcing, and he explained that the museum has around 90 very committed, collaborative and extremely curious staff and over 100 volunteers and other collaborators, and that there is a great opportunity to bring in many, many others.

Speaking of the work that Manchester Museum had been doing with their ageing hub, a staff member disclosed that she had had a moment where she thought, *“actually the entire museum is part of the public health workforce, it just doesn’t quite understand itself in those terms. So, I think the opportunity is huge...”*. One case in point is that of volunteer Paul who explained that *“I’ve had lots of problems with mental health and nerves and panic and everything. And that’s why I’m here, this is helping me get back into social activities and it’s really brought me out of my shell you know. I still get nervous and that but I’m a million miles away from where I used to be. I wouldn’t be able to stand here and talk to you a few years back. I would never have come out of the house. It’s helped immensely, it really has.”*

4.4.4 Research: A Rubbish Night at the Museum

As a university museum, Manchester Museum has always been involved in research, but one staff member means to explore how that might look in the future. How the museum might

facilitate interdisciplinary research, find new ways to develop and do research differently and address inequities and the impacts of global megatrends. As he says, the museum is a conduit and in a terrific position to bring researchers, policy makers, residents, thinkers, activists and the general public together. *“I’ve become really interested in how we create the conditions”* for things to happen.

A Rubbish Night at the Museum, was a serendipitous event that grew from an exchange that this staff member had with an activist/researcher about rubbish collection in his street. The event involved a display of work by artists, photographers, researchers, companies, community and local citizens exploring rubbish, sustainable consumption and recycling in Manchester. It generated productive discussion amongst the 300+ attendees including residents, activists, waste professionals, landlords, environmentalists, researchers, policy makers and local councils. This example epitomises the museum as an agentive entity: the event functioned to build or bring into being a new civic public. *“What I loved was that it brought residents and all of these people together to build an agenda for social change within these communities,”* commented the staff member, who added that events such as these are *“...giving us a clear sense of how we build research capacity, partnerships and just embedding it... in everything we do.”*

4.4.5 Keepers and tellers of our stories

‘...the museum works actively toward building civil society through storytelling, dialogue, rehabilitation, and even reconciliation, transcending identities of race, gender, and nation. In this context, telling the many stories of and around collections takes on increasing significance. These become instruments by which we imbue the future with meaning and even generate it by comparing past and present...’ (Dercon, 2021, p.18)

“I feel very strongly that museums should be the keepers and tellers of our stories and should belong to the people.” Leela, PVS, Melbourne

It was abundantly clear that participants in this study had a strong preference for stories, which provided a means of connecting personally with artefacts. *“I particularly like stories of everyday lives; personal stories bring the people, places and objects to life. It is the narrative that is important to me,”* explained Evan from Melbourne. He went on to write that *“it’s the small things, the little family things [that have so much impact].”* Human beings are after all both storytellers and story-listeners. The phrase, ‘let me tell you a story...’ immediately engages our attention because we are hardwired to respond to stories. Kenyon and Randall (2001) note that stories are the ‘context and currency of our lives’ (p.35). We are forever telling, tailoring and editing stories for ourselves and others, it is how we make meaning of our lives and one of the ways that we manage our dynamic identities. It is also how we situate our memories (Carr, 2006) and weave together the past, present and future. And, in oral cultures

such as those of the Australian Aborigines and the Māori, the role of narrative is central in assembling reality and conveying meaning (Schorch, 2015). The following comments highlight the importance of story.

"Sometimes I feel we've looked in the storeroom and said 'ah, look we've got these objects... These are the objects museum-person, make a display', instead of going 'this is the story we want to tell, what objects do we need to tell the story?'" Leela, PVS, Melbourne

"I tend to come here every visit [WW1 Love & Sorrow]. I love the way this is set up where you can follow people's stories through the war and after. It really makes it personal." Debra, Melbourne

"I think that it's fabulous for any age group to have a place...where people can sit down [whale video] ...it's really interesting because it's not didactic, it's a story." Luke, Melbourne

"The stories, yeah, to me this is what I love about museums, the link to people and every time you come you learn something, or you see something that you hadn't seen before." Leela, Melbourne

"...now I want to find Melbourne Story before we run out of time. The Little Lon dig (Figure 22) - I love that, because to me it's what this museum should be about. It should be telling Victoria's history. So, this is fabulous." Leela, Melbourne

Stories or narrative are what Nietzsche (1983) refers to as myth. Its value lies in its capacity to open up alternative possibilities and different ways of existing, and to produce life-affirming attitudes (Mangion, 2003, p.99). Phar Lap⁶⁴ the race horse at Melbourne Museum for example is, as Debra declared, *"just [an] incredible story. A hero at a time when people needed something to feel good about during the Depression."* Kathy added that *"visitors I bring, they always want to see Phar Lap. He's quite iconic isn't he? Everyone knows Phar Lap."*



Figure 22. Melbourne | a. b. Little Lon, replica interior & exterior | c. Phar Lap

⁶⁴ <https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/articles/1628>

The great beauty of, and opportunity presented by cultural artefacts and exhibitions is in their potential to engage people through story at the level of complexity that suits the knowledge, skill and mood of the viewer. As the level of engagement increases, so too does the perception of richness and complexity. However, for this to occur, the viewer must first be engaged, surprised, excited, intrigued, fascinated, mystified... To incite this type of engagement requires both a compelling narrative and interpretation that is provocative (Tilden, 1977). Narrative and interpretation are what bring data and facts to life. They act as catalysts, around which assemblages of visitors, artefacts and atmospheres form, and personal meanings are made.

4.5 After affects: post visit sensations

At an individual level, what museums can do was reflected in the responses to a question on the PVS about how participants felt after a visit. The impacts or effects described by participants were consistent with their notions of the role and characteristics of museums as public institutions. They also accorded, and were to a high degree interchangeable with their responses to the question about the importance of learning. Chris from Wellington wrote that *"I feel more reflective and part of the stream of life..."*. In other words, museum visits gave him a sense of belonging to something greater than himself; the 'stream of life'. This is the connection to what Simondon calls preindividual being or potential, the 'not-yet' (Combes, 2013; Grosz 2017). Museum visitation is expansive, it takes us beyond ourselves, to become more, and so to increase capacity and wellbeing. Says Helen from Wellington, it *"broadens our interests and extends our knowledge; increases our social contacts; develops our sense of social and community responsibility. Provides opportunities to connect different aspects of knowledge."* In exposing us to different ways of being in the world, museums provide *"food for thought... different perspectives,"* said Melbourne participant Grace. And it is for different perspectives rather than different information, that we hunger according to Carr (2006). Naomi, also from Melbourne, added that *"I always discover something that triggers a positive thought about mankind and the development of the world, even the sad reality of extinct species, the tragedy of war, the inequality or social disadvantage of some...opening a door into a topic or area outside of my own experience."*

There were many expressions of general post visit wellbeing and it is quite possibly these after-affects of visiting that draw people back to the museum time and again. Gilles from Nantes wrote that *"...visiting museums even if it brings about contradictory feelings, generally gives me a certain serenity, a kind of wellbeing."* The 'contradictory feelings' here, being encounters with ambiguity, dissonance, uncertainty, inconsistency, and conflict. Encounters that stimulate curiosity, challenge us to find structure and order, and 'force us to think' (Deleuze, 1994, p.139). In a similar vein, Andy from Wellington outlines what is commonly known as mindfulness. For him, *"visiting a museum is like a sort of meditation, where you are able to be 'here and now', you just observe and elaborate, which restores you as a whole, and makes you*

feel fully focussed...". Adds Sylvia from Manchester, it "is energising to spend time in a quiet, still space with time to concentrate on the exhibits." For Wellington participant Amy, it is "the impact a live experience has on the senses, the stimulation and joy of the new and vibrant."

At a more prosaic level, Doris from Manchester affirms that *"a bit of time in a museum can cheer me up no end on a miserable day. It might even set me off on another adventure."* And, as Kathy from Melbourne notes, *"you never see anyone angry in museums."* There was also mention of vicarious enjoyment. Amy from Wellington describes, *"the enjoyment others are experiencing"* and Louise from Melbourne writes, *"it all amounts to lots of conversation, chatter and laughter. All of this makes me happy and adds to a day well spent."*

As these comments affirm, museum environments have particular agency which can be described as affective, heterogeneous and unpredictable. Yet that unpredictability is part of their charm, or as Carr (2006) so aptly puts it, 'we go to a museum to see what unfolds within us when we are there...' (p.16). He goes on to state that the 'gift of a museum for every user is an appreciation of complexity, a welcoming to the open door of the unknown, the possible, the possible-to-know and the impossible-to-know' (2006, p.16). It is this complexity, the quest for the unknown, for adventure, change, transformation and for an encounter with that which is different that impels us to visit museums, for that is what they offer. And says Wellington participant Andy, *"I normally leave the visit in the back of my mind for some time before I actually understand what it left me with..."*.

4.6 Complex milieus: fields of conditions with great potential

As we have seen, museums are highly complex milieus with great potential for capacitation. But museums are also institutions with a shadow side; a history of inequitable treatment of, amongst others, women, indigenous populations, ethnic and racial minorities, conquered peoples (Figure 23), subordinate classes and non-Western religions (Bennett, 2015; Preziosi, 2006). Esposito Yussif (2019) goes even further stating that museums were conceived 'as displays of exclusions, reducing complexity and diversity to a monolith' (p.250). She asks 'Who exhibits and who is exhibited?... Whose narratives are valorized at the expense of whose? Who is shown as a byproduct of violence and who is above that violence?' (2019, p.250) (Figure 23a, b). And philosopher Peter Sloterdijk (Sloterdijk & Whyte, 2014) has even gone so far as to describe museums as 'mere compilations, storage sites for cultural war booty, magnificent lodgings for the trophies of scientifically disguised looting, archives, treasure houses, stockyards for objects of bourgeois esteem' (p.443). Yet, a notable finding of this study which becomes clear in subsequent chapters, is that in spite of the modalities of power that museums might bring to bear with intent to educate, shape and 'enlighten' their visitors, visitor-artefact-museum assemblages, it turns out have 'minds of their own'. What visitors

experience, understand or learn is not always, and perhaps not often in alignment with the intent of curatorial staff or exhibition content (Smith, 2015, p.462).



Figure 23⁶⁵. Who exhibits and who is exhibited? | a. Poster, discrimination against women artists by Boston museums, Guerrilla Girls | b. Poster, diversity in European museums, Guerrilla Girls | c. The Devoid Museum, Mithu Sen

This chapter has examined different ways in which the four museums in this study are bountiful environments that foster engagement and the wellbeing of their publics. Yet the potential that abounds in this depth, detail and entangled complexity is easily lost through categorisation, conflation and simplification. The USA Visitor Services Association ‘Visitors Bill of Rights’ (Figure 24) is a very useful and comprehensive heuristic of key points discussed in this chapter. However, in its simplicity, it obscures the abundant richness of museums as fields of conditions for things to happen, much in the way that the term ‘learning’ obscures the reasons, motivations, sophistication and embodied outcomes of museum visitor experiences. The next three chapters unpack these ‘rights’, showcasing the richness and complexity that sit behind them.

The Visitor Bill of Rights

- 1 Comfort: Meet my basic needs
- 2 Orientation: Make it easy for me to find my way around
- 3 Belonging: Make me feel welcome
- 4 Enjoyment: I want to have fun!
- 5 Socializing: I came to spend time with my family and friends
- 6 Respect: Accept me for who I am and what I know
- 7 Communication: Help me to understand and let me talk too
- 8 Learning: I want to learn something new
- 9 Choice/control: Let me choose, give me some guidance
- 10 Challenge and Confidence: Give me a challenge, I know I can handle
- 11 Revitalisation: Help me to leave refreshed and restored

Figure 24: The Visitor Bill of Rights, (Rand, 2001, pp.13-14)

⁶⁵ Photos taken at the National Gallery of Victoria & the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne.

5. WALKING WITH BERIS IN MANCHESTER

5.1 Body-mind in motion

This chapter features the visit of one participant through Manchester Museum, with a view to examining the richness, complexity and capacitating potential of a single visit⁶⁶. It is also an attempt at capturing a sense of the rhythm of body-mind in motion; and of the dynamic trajectory through spacetime inherent to museum visitation. Experiences lead from one to another, each different, taking different pathways and unfolding in nonlinear and unpredictable ways (James, 1969). Narratives mutate, materialising in successive encounters (Manning, 2016), which is what makes them so enchanting and endlessly engaging. This chapter aims to trace affective flows and their wellbeing effects, and to share some of the rhythm, fluidity and diversity characteristic of all visits. Accounts from other participants have been included at relevant points to explore additional aspects, highlight particular views and/or emphasise the heterogeneity of visits.

5.2 One museum journey

Beris and I met in the temporary library, a small warm room upstairs in the northern museum building. It was cold, rainy, slushy and miserable outside. Not good dog-walking weather according to Beris who was clearly very close to her ‘moppet’, sweetheart and saviour. I felt at ease with her at once. We walked across the stairwell into the Numismatics gallery (Figure 25), now closed to the public as was this entire building while two new galleries were being added in a major renovation. It was dark and icy cold, and many of the artefacts had been removed but Beris described it as one of her favourite places:



Figure 25. a. Katanga Cross | b. Numismatics gallery | c. Ancient coin facsimile | d. Facsimile coins

“It’s just fascinating to see the different types of coins and the different money that people used over the centuries... It’s tactile... I like to spend a bit of time in here... I remember me

⁶⁶ Maps of the Manchester Museum visits of Beris and Colin can be found in Appendices 4a, 4b & 4c.

dad telling me about cowrie shells that were used as money...I didn't understand it then, but it's different cultures...Before they had money, they used objects and beads."

Beris was not alone in her affective attachment to numismatics. Volunteer, Colin explained that, *"I find this very sad now, this place. I've got fantastic memories in here... I love that word, numismatics... They used to have a curator of numismatics. He had some fantastic Roman coins... a gold coin from Julius Caesar, I mean...!"*

Although I had passed through this section, the coins and related artefacts were just objects in the museum landscape, until they caught Beris up and entangled her/us with childhood memories, other times, places, peoples and cultures, forming vibrant alternate worlds. Museum artefacts, spaces, and personal narratives disarmed, swept us up and whisked us off to the as-yet-unthought. I found myself 'in the middle, on the line of encounter between an internal world and the external world' (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p.52), mediated by bodily affects. It was an internal world of memories comprised of mingled sounds, smells, markets, jungles, deserts, ports, ships, shipwrecks, colourful clothing, jewellery and other exotic imaginaries, entangled with an external world of a cold, dim gallery space filled with ostensibly quiescent material artefacts.

My meanderings with Beris were an improvisational act connected with unstructured, associative thinking (Solnit, 2001). In museum visitation, as the many practices of perception, walking, speaking, remembering, imagining, sensing and feeling interfere with each other, 'things happen, beings, images, concepts, all...kinds of events' (Deleuze, 1989, p.280). This particular interference of practices continued throughout the visit and in fact all of the visits. Participants, researcher, staff, visitors, artefacts, spaces, atmospheres memories and affects collaborated in becoming-with (Haraway, 2016).

We dawdled on through the passageway towards the Egyptian Gallery attuning to each other, adjusting our steps to the other, creating a sympathetic synergy. On the wall was part of a plaster frieze (Figure 26). which brought to mind the Elgin Marbles along with a TV program on the ethics of returning artefacts to their places of origin. Documentary television was a great source of the eclectic information that was constantly being worked into narratives by the study's participants. This was particularly frequent with Beris.

"But apparently with the Elgin marbles, he [Earl of Elgin] did a lot of work over there and he did sort of buy them... Nowadays it's like somebody else pointed out, would you rather they were left to be blown up [like the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan]... If they are in a museum the world's got access to them...And if you can't get there, you can do a virtual tour of a museum, which I think is amazing."



Figure 26. a. Detail of plaster frieze and missing section / b. Plaster frieze

I asked Beris how she had become so knowledgeable, and she told me that she'd always been curious and fascinated by history, and that she'd been visiting the museum since she was very young, something she loves doing. Learning for her appeared to be a way of becoming-with, an active, co-constructed experience incorporating affects, emotions and experiences (Ambrose & Paine, 2012). Although her formal education was limited, her 'free choice learning' (2012, p.60) was extensive, ongoing and very present in her conversation.



Figure 27. a. Rose windows / b. Stairs between levels / c. Neo-Gothic windows

She remarked on how fond she was of the building with its nooks and crannies and other distinctive architectural features (Figure 27). *"Like those places where you've got little windows, it's fascinating. I think there's one (rose window) in Karen's office, I think she's really lucky"* (Figure 27a). Like Beris, I found the building charming. It had personality, history, character; and it was friendly. The past was very much present; it left traces, temporal traces that form part of the heritage or collective memory of a place that participants connect with, take on, are affected by, and adjust to their own requirements (Smith, 2020). There were nearly two centuries of lives, events and stories embedded in the worn wooden floors, the stone walls and the intricate windows, waiting patiently to be noticed and narrated. We 'seek historically dense settings because they connect us experientially and imaginatively with past life, and we feel safe and enriched to be part of that temporal continuum' (Pallasmaa, 2014b, p.241). The spaces were generous yet cosy; they exuded history, they spoke, they responded to presence, they affected. The old wooden floors were uneven in places, especially where rooms in different buildings had been connected, but in spite of this being generally

considered a defect, it added to the character and liveliness of the place. After all, who/what doesn't have character flaws.

"...it's basically a Victorian museum, so the museum itself is part of it as well as the object. The actual building itself you know. Yeah, a sense of history, a sense of atmosphere and a sense of people who have worked here in the past, who have learned here, studied here. You can almost see them, it's almost like they leave an imprint" Paul, volunteer

Beris had originally worked in a factory then moved on to sterilising instruments in a local hospital before becoming carer for her husband. She explained that she'd always been intrigued by how things work and had a passion for nature. She was *"...Manchester born and bred. I've always been very proud of Manchester."* These were all themes or characteristics that arose time and again, forming, I came to sense, a relatively stable, habitual core of 'self' around which the periphery was continually being reworked. Every single Mancunian participant was overtly proud of the city, its history and its heritage in spite of some questionable episodes, events and periods, and the consequences of its industrial heritage. Their affective attachment to the city and the museum was profound and nourishing, providing them with a strong sense of belonging, of understanding of their place in the world, self-esteem and wellbeing (Smith, 2020).

Civic pride and community identity were evidenced by most of the study participants. It presented as a sense of belonging and wellbeing, shared identity and active citizenship (Rentschler & Bridson, 2015). Colin was a case in point. His 'personal and collective memory narratives' (Mason et al., 2018, p. 126) about Manchester emerged, were reinforced and perhaps reworked as they interfaced or intra-acted with galleries and artefacts throughout the visit. *"It's because we're Mancunians... we were brought up with pride in Manchester."*

"I don't know if anybody's told you but, in that building, [pointing] that's where Ernest Rutherford split the atom. [And] that's the building that Alan Turing used to work in on the computers... Have you been to Chetham's Library? And did you sit at the table where Karl Marx and Frederic Engels used to talk? But all his [Marx's] ideas came from Manchester... [Chetham's has] one of the best music schools in the world but it's also the oldest public library in the English-speaking world... they're all child prodigies and come from all over the world..." Colin, volunteer

A source of pride and wealth on the one hand, Manchester's significant role in the Industrial Revolution also had enduring repercussions for both human and nonhuman inhabitants. The peppered moth (Figure 28) underwent a directional colour change (industrial melanism) in response to air pollution in Manchester during the Industrial Revolution. It later reverted to its original pale colour when the pollution abated. Proud Mancunian Colin was very aware of the

poverty, squalor and health impacts of Manchester's industrial heritage, particularly for his generation. His response to the high risks of respiratory disease was a 'capacitating' response. He took up running, an activity that additionally provides opportunities to travel the world as a competitor in the World Masters Games. The ability to transform potentially negative experiences into a positive, or to counter negativity with humour appeared to be a common characteristic of the Mancunian participants.

"The other thing is that Manchester was the home of pollution. There were 109 cotton mills in this area... Because let's face it your chances of getting bronchitis were 100%. Every year there used to be big fogs [and] smogs, even when we were at school... At school we used to put our handkerchiefs like this [over the mouth] and breathe in. And of course, it would just get black and you'd get a good smacking when you got home because your mother would say, 'what have you been doing with that handkerchief?' ... my brother, he died two years ago from lung cancer. And they said at the hospital that anyone of a certain age... if you grew up in Manchester, the chances of you getting lung cancer in your older age are pretty strong. So, I might be on the list... I do a lot of running and things and that helps. Two years ago, last November, we were in Perth, it was the World Masters Championships, it was wonderful." Colin, volunteer



Figure 28. Pollution & the peppered moth | a. Mobile of Peppered Moths | b. Floor inset of the Peppered Moth story | c. Display of Peppered Moths showing the transition from light to dark.

At the time of this account we were standing on the sky bridge linking two of the museum buildings and looking across at the building in which Rutherford had split the atom. As Colin narrated, he wove Manchester's history, his childhood experiences, family health, personal health prospects and life choices together. His choices are informed choices aimed at mitigating risk. They have led Colin to greater participation in community and to ever-evolving connections with an extensive and enriching global network of older sports people. These choices have significantly expanded and reconfigured Colin's world.

5.2.1 When species meet⁶⁷: the vivarium

Beris and I had just come through the security door which separated the temporarily closed area from the area open to the public. The temperature changed dramatically as we crossed the glassed-in sky bridge and entered the exuberant vivarium; another of her favourite places, one in which she volunteers on Thursday afternoons.

“I was watching a program last night, ‘Secret Life of a Zoo’ and it had the blue poison dart frogs and they were talking about mating them because they’re very endangered and I thought, well, they should ask at the Manchester museum you know because they do know a lot about them. It is one of the foremost places in the world for conservation of frogs and what have you. It’s world renowned” (Figure 29).

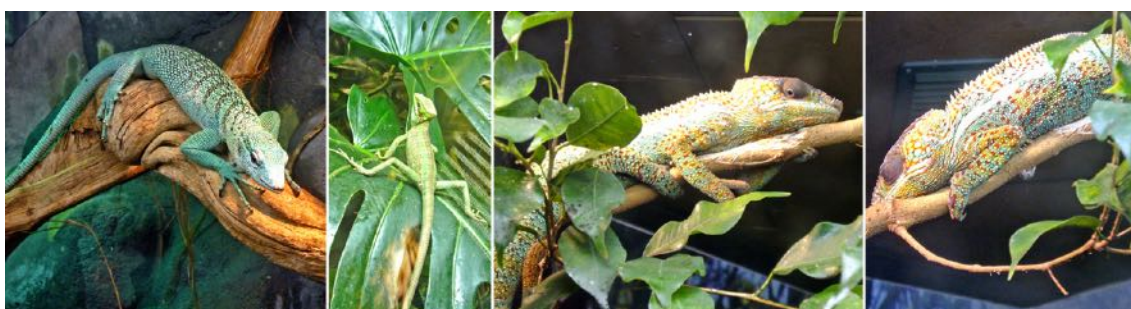


Figure 29. “World renowned” | a. Green tree monitor | b. Cone-headed lizard | c. Chameleon observing | d. Chameleon sleeping

The air in the vivarium was different, the smell was different, it sounded and felt very different, and it pulsed with vitality. Here was a space-place bursting with excessive, disorderly life, a synaesthetic mingling of textures, smells, sounds and colours (MacLure, 2013, p.177). There were multiple rare, exotic, endangered, living, breathing, eating, trilling, foraging, reproducing, ageing, dying species in a chaotic and affectively intense environment that both compelled and exuded sensory engagement. Although full of people, including one or more groups of schoolchildren, nearly everyone was huddled up close to a glass window of various enclosures, discussing, searching for, fascinated by, marvelling at and responsive to the colourful and camouflaged creatures in amongst the greenery. Unlike elsewhere in the museum, voices were muted as visitors talked at glass, wide-eyed and focussed on the occupants of these habitats. I observed many experiments in ‘interspecies signaling’ (Barad, 2012, p.207) transpiring between child and chameleon; grandparent, grandchild and frog; teenagers and lizard; teacher, students and salamander, and so on (Figure 30a).

I felt as though we’d entered a small pocket of rainforest with a creek or stream, a ‘safe’ pocket where anything dangerous was securely contained behind glass. The glass was both a

⁶⁷ Title of a book by Donna Haraway, 2008.

barrier and an opening, a separation and yet a passage or window into other worlds. These were the miniature worlds of other creatures (Figure 30); exotic, colourful, animated, mysterious, fascinating, fantastical, venomous, rich, and distinctly different. Standing just inside the entrance, we could hear the sound of dripping water and smell decaying vegetation, background to the chirruping of the frogs and the clamour of excited muted voices. Here amongst the soft greenery, humidity and warmth I felt my muscles unclench on that snowy January day in Manchester. It smelt and felt fresh, green, damp, tropical, peaceful, and was very much alive. I was immersed in, and relaxed into bodily sensation. This effect was remarked on by many of the participants.

“I love this corner, I feel really rested. It’s peaceful. I think that’s why people like to watch them because they look relaxed, so you are relaxing. Isn’t that one of the benefits of visiting a museum, it makes you feel good? It works with me anyway.” Tess, participant



Figure 30. *“They look so relaxed”* | a. Visitor signalling frogs | b. Green tree monitor | c. Vivarium habitats | d. Breeding habitats

The large and active vivarium is part of a global network committed to the conservation of amphibians and reptiles. It established captive breeding programs (Figure 30d) for critically endangered local and international species such as the beautiful and often highly colourful Costa Rican frogs. As part of this network, the vivarium also provides a diversity of connections outwards at a macro or global level, to other programs, institutions, information, cultures, species, nature and people. On this topic, volunteer Colin explained that *“... Matt who works here was telling me that they have so many centres around the world because these are all endangered. That’s the whole point of a vivarium. It’s not a zoo, it’s a university project... Say they had an earthquake in Manchester and this whole place disappeared, they have centres that can replace them.”*

Raising public awareness through its collection of reptiles and amphibians on display complements the vivarium’s conservation activities. Of note are its rare tropical frogs, some of which are on the brink of extinction. These are all part of the throng of species co-shaping each other ‘in layers of reciprocating complexity’ (Haraway, 2008, p.42), which perhaps explains our fascination and our biophilic tendencies. This is a living environment that ‘never ceases to

grow and flow' (Braidotti, 2006b, p.202). There is no linear pathway in the vivarium, we were free to engage with our surrounds at will. Past volunteer Doris commented that *"It's lovely though, having this in a museum. I think it's quite special, live creatures."*

Kevin, another volunteer, recounted that *"one lad came in with his grandmother and they were looking at the things on the table and he turned to his grandmother and said, can we go somewhere where things are not dead?"* For this 'lad', it was the world of the living that attracted him, that resonated and held his interest. He was perhaps manifesting the innate emotional affiliation that human beings have for other living organisms (Wilson, 1993) or searching for living 'models of existence' (Ernaux, 2017, p.107) in his quest to learn about different ways of being in the world.

Beris and I spent some time in the vivarium where I was introduced to many of the inhabitants. These were variously described as beautiful, fascinating, lovely, handsome, grumpy, active, amazing, shy, noisy and colourful. Beris spoke with affection, explaining how iguanas *"always make me think of monster films you used to see when you were a kid, or like prehistoric monsters. They were just lizards with bits stuck on them. I always felt sorry for them."* These surroundings brought forth highly affective bodily and narrative manifestations of her empathy, compassion and love of nature. She was very much attuned to the domain of living creatures, adopting or co-opting several of the vivarium's residents and other museum artefacts as 'pals', 'favourites' and 'nice ones', into her extended more-than-human museum family assemblage. In the museum environment with her 'pals', she was able to re-construct and enact particular social identities (Smith, 2020), identities such as 'nature lover', 'animal lover', 'caring empath', 'well-informed volunteer', 'companion', 'active community member' and so on.

"I love coming in here and I get to listen to all this as well... I'm really lucky, I think it's brilliant. I'm in two days a week and sometimes three and if there is anything else on, I usually volunteer to help with that, and I do other volunteer work..." Beris

After the death of her husband, Beris adjusted to her new circumstances by actively involving herself in volunteer work aligned to her personal interests. This work provides her with ongoing opportunities for diverse social connection, travel and access to a treasure trove of stories, objects, living beings, expertise and histories. It was a tribute to and affirmation of Beris's great capacity to navigate adversity and reassemble a rich, productive and meaningful life after the death of her spouse. As Cavell (1981) aptly states '(d)espair and a sense of loss are not static conditions, but goads to our labors' (p.70). A trauma such as the death of a spouse 'shatters the boundaries of the subject and blurs his or her sense of identity' (Braidotti, 2006b p.167). After such an event, the 'self' needs stabilisation as it readjusts to new

circumstances. The importance of the museum in this endeavour unfolded as we moved through the different spacetimes.

"I got into volunteer work... I was a fulltime carer for my husband, but he died quite suddenly a couple of years ago now. So, I found myself at a bit of a loose end and I thought, I'm not just going to sit there and wait for things to happen and people to come to me, I'm going to go... I've always liked visiting the museum." Beris

5.2.2 Touching encounters: getting your hands on some history

"And when you've got the animals out, the kids absolutely love them you know. They come up to them and start stroking them...they won't go away!" (Figure 31)" Paul, volunteer

'...in a breathtakingly intimate sense, touching, sensing, is what matter does, or rather what matter is: matter is condensations of response-ability. Touching is a matter of response.' (Barad, 2012, p.215)



Figure 31. "They start stroking them..." / a. Fox, handling table / b. Hare / c. Fossil rock, handling table

The handling tables provide an explicit tactile experience in museums. As past volunteer Doris explains, "... we have creatures out for the public to get up close and personal with. I'm sure that it's a great experience for them. I love talking to people at these handling tables." To touch something, claims Harman (2012), 'is to make contact with it even when remaining separate from it...' (p.98). And Manning (2009) argues that to 'touch is to activate relational movement-toward' (p.212), in other words, it is the desire to connect that motivates us to move towards something. So, these handling tables are zones of encounter, encounters amongst visitors, staff, volunteers, other species, artefacts, information and stories. They are places where anything might happen, where 'bodies, senses, and worlds recombine to create new events' (Manning, 2009, p.212). Places where artefacts have been liberated from display cases and disconnected from labels and authorised, institutional discourses, and are free to fully interact haptically and otherwise. Places where bodies can connect, touch and be touched, affect and be affected and where 'temporalities collide and merge' (Crang & Travlou, 2001, p.161) chaotically. Places where unexpected combinations and permutations spring to

life, change shape and generate new narratives, new meaning and new understanding as Paul and Doris explained.

"We used to have a stuffed fox (Figure 31a) here and someone broke its nose. Well you get kids; some are very dexterous you know, and they get hold of the thing and tweak it and..."

Robert, volunteer

"I have a hare (Figure 31b), a stuffed brown hare that I have on the table and it's quite big, it's really big, it was massive. And I remember a young child walking in, turning around and seeing it and he said, wow! Just seeing that was really..." Paul, volunteer

Touch has multiple definitions, some of which are now obsolete but nonetheless telling. The Oxford English Dictionary⁶⁸ defines touch as to: 'exercise the sense of touch; to explore examine, or interact through physical contact; to make deliberate physical contact with someone or something' (1c); 'produce an effect on by whatever means' (16b); 'affect (a person or his or her mind, heart, etc.) with a feeling, emotion etc' (28a); and 'be of significance or importance to; to affect; to have an impact on' (30). It is at handling tables that the entangled senses can immerse themselves in, become intensely attuned to, and embrace the materiality of texture, weight, temperature, humidity, density, shape, size, colour, proportion and dimension; where species can meet without barriers, where 'boundaries between self and other are blurred' (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2009, p.298), and potentialities arise. The 'things we touch and feel reassure us...they make the body feel at home' (Okri, 2014, p.198). Touch is reciprocal, whatever touches is also touched, it is a whole of body experience (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2009). As Barad (2012) maintains, touching is sensual and intimate, it brings alterity into close proximity; so 'much happens in a touch: an infinity of others – other beings, other spaces, other times – are aroused' (p.206).

Haptic zones such as the handling tables, are apparatuses that produce phenomena, spacetimes where/when 'boundaries, properties, and meanings are differentially enacted' (Barad, 2003, p.828), where both human and nonhuman bodies encounter, imbricate, constitute and re-constitute reality in iterative, performative intra-activity. These are spacetimes where/when subjects and materiality form, un-form, de-form, re-form, trans-form and per-form through ongoing material-discursive practices.

"See, the difference on the face when they [children] are actually handling them to when he's handling it and they're looking. Having been a teacher who is really interested in this interactive stuff with kids; I think it's really important" Anna, former volunteer

⁶⁸ <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/203877?rskey=nYTgz7&result=2#eid>

“...what I loved about it was talking to people who came into the museum. And they loved to touch real objects because it seems unusual to them and to actually get your hands on some history was fantastic. And they always had things to chat about; they could tell you things, you could tell them stuff; it’s a great exchange” Doris, former volunteer

Getting one’s hands on some history as Doris puts it, is also a way of experientially connecting with past life, feeling ‘safe and enriched... part of the temporal continuum’ (Pallasmaa, 2014b, p.241). It affirms a sense of belonging to something that is greater, steadfast, enduring; something that is multiple and communal. Touching real objects, getting one’s hands on some history, absorbing it, transforming it, re-configuring it and responding to it affirm the sense of self by opening to difference in an ‘ongoing ebb and flow of agency’ (Barad, 2003, p.817; 2012, p.214).

Handling tables facilitate encounters between fingers, a hand, hands and an object; encounters that can be electric, that involve the whole body and provide access to latent stories embedded in the object. Touching objects also has the capacity to heal. ‘I asked my fingers what they liked, which parts of the object they wanted to touch, and I listened when they answered. I think it was the first time in over a decade that my mind and my body were reunited’ (Osborne-Crowley, 2019, p.100). In the case of a caregiver to a dying person, Dumm (2008) suggests that she goes towards the ‘dying person to touch that person while he is still touchable, while that person is still capable of experiencing the comfort a touch may bring...’ (p.132), and that we grieve because a person is no longer touchable. Museums as institutions are, amongst other things, places of connection, where people come, seeking the reciprocity of touch; to be touched and to touch in turn.

5.2.3 Volunteer becoming

Manchester Museum has an active and enthusiastic volunteer program with a team of over 100 volunteers. There is a variety of ways to be involved including staffing the handling tables, the care and conservation of collections and other audience specific programs both within the museum and out and about in the community. Benefits outlined on the museum website include learning about the collections and world cultures; gaining new skills; making friends and meeting people from near and far; sharing personal passion and enthusiasm; being part of a friendly and supportive team; and access to events and training exclusive to volunteers. The majority of participants in this study were current or former volunteers and were as passionate about the program as Beris.

“I think I’ve been very lucky coming here because since I’ve been here, I’ve been on two trips abroad; cultural exchanges with the museum... We had six people and two went over to work for three weeks in Budapest in the museum of fine arts, working with volunteers there.

And three sets of two people went over with a member of staff and then their volunteers came over here. It was an absolutely fantastic project... So, yes, it was a lovely project because you are relating to people from quite a different culture really and yet with so many things in common... it's a really good thing to do, to learn about other cultures in their place" Doris, former volunteer

Beris takes her volunteer work seriously, studying prior to manning the handling tables so that she doesn't *"look like an idiot when talking about"* artefacts. But also, ensuring that she gives accurate information, 'especially to the children'. The opportunities for connection at this museum as a volunteer are multiple: with a diversity of visitors, artefacts and other living species on the handling tables; with curators and experts in different sections; with other museums, their staff and collections on exchange; and with other volunteers and staff. The volunteers are a highly diverse and supportive cohort, interacting with warmth, good will and much humour. Humour is 'an art of pure events' (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p.68), it is generative and divergent and opens up possibilities. And laughter is collective, implying complicity and belonging, and fostering elasticity of mind and body (Bergson, 1911, p.5a, 9a). The following exchanges occurred at handling tables located throughout the museum.

Kevin: *"They say that most humans have 4% Neanderthal in them and when I was doing the handling table, I used to lean on the table like that on my knuckles and, Colin across the table would say, there you go, there's your 4%."*

Staff member: *"Two million years old from Australia (iron sample). Doris (pointing to me) And less old from Australia."*

Colin: *"You can't get good volunteers anymore, can you?"* Staff member: *"Oh, it's a degenerating world, it is!"* Colin: *"Terrible!" (All laughing).*

Kevin: *"It's funny because on the handling table... we had just the legs of a shabti and it got the nickname of Arthur – 'half-a' shabti you see! I got a Christmas card this week from Mick who I used to do the table with, and he said, don't forget Arthur! So, we've still not forgotten."* (Figure 32a).

Kevin: *"But the funny side; this man came up to the table... He said, 'I think that I was a pharaoh in a previous life...' Well, there's a five-thousand-year gap in the timeline... yet he seems to think he recognises a lot of the things... but we never get the Egyptian street cleaner, it's always the pharaoh that comes in you know!"* (Figure 32b).



Figure 32. a. Shabtis | b. “We never get the Egyptian street cleaner,” sarcophagus | c. Leaping tiger

Beris’s volunteer work gives her joy, a sense of purpose, value and meaning. In her words: *“It really does, it makes my day, it’s an interest for me and I like talking to people. And if I know something, I like to pass it on. You know like when you get little children and they come here, and they see a lizard and they’ve never been that close to one before because we don’t have many over here because it’s too cold. And it’s just the fascination on their faces and I think if I can make them feel like I did when I first came here and saw the tiger (Figure 32c) leaping up like that and how amazed I was. I’d like to pass that same sort of thing on to them... it’s just fascinating and I like giving any knowledge I’ve got, passing it on to them [children] and I’m learning from them as well. That’s why I do volunteering really. It keeps me busy as well. [And you’ve got a readymade family.] Yeah, I have, it’s a lovely community. I didn’t realise that they had so many activities, you can go on visiting days to other places and it’s really great to get that chance. And I’ve made some good friends whilst I’ve been here.”*

Beris, in describing the ‘fascination on their faces’ as children encounter something that ‘forces them to think’ (Deleuze 1994, p.139) ‘and by extension learn’ (Mulcahy, 2019, p.96), in the form of a lizard, is describing an affective encounter. An encounter that is grasped in this instance through the shared, contagious intensities of fascination, wonder and awe. It is an encounter that had positive visceral resonance for Beris recalling her own childhood meeting with the leaping tiger, an enthralling and inspiring interplay of sensations, thoughts and feelings that she felt strongly enough about to want to share (Slaby, 2016).

The Manchester Gallery was Beris’s first experience as a volunteer with the museum. This was fortuitous as she feels at home there and remembers it with pleasure. The museum is very much a shared environment where knowledge and stories emerge in interaction with artefacts, spaces, visitors, staff and volunteers.

“When I first started volunteering here, I was on the Manchester gallery which was brilliant for me because I love Manchester, so I like talking about it... But it’s great to find out how much other people know ... as well... I like telling the story of Maharajah [elephant] and how he came to be in Manchester. People just find it fascinating. Also... about Belle Vue Zoo. I’ve done an outreach [program] about Belle Vue Zoo, another thing that used to fascinate me

as a kid. We used to go there a lot... you could see zebras in cages. And the cage, from what I can remember, didn't seem much bigger than that archway, and the poor things pacing up and down. And it's like, that is so sad, but we didn't know any different then." Beris

5.2.4 Ambiguous affects

We strolled from the vivarium through into the Living Worlds gallery, populated by task-lit display cabinets teeming with taxidermy animals from previous centuries. The irony of the name was not lost on me, and although there were no living inhabitants in this gallery, it was nevertheless remarkably lively. The space, on level two of three levels, is dominated by the huge skeleton of a baby sperm whale suspended below skylights in the large atrium (Figure 33). At the other end of the gallery is a handsome staircase leading to the floors above and below. The railings are decorative cast iron with dark polished wooden banisters.



Figure 33. Skeleton of baby sperm whale

For volunteer Robert, this lovely old Victorian gallery had unexpected associations, providing an alternative and surprising angle on the design of museums. He explained that the *"architect of this first part of the museum was the same architect as designed Manchester Prison, known as Strangeways... This... was very familiar to me because I'd been in Strangeways so many times [as a defence lawyer] so the design of the building... is just like a wing of a gaol.... Galleries; prison galleries and museum galleries, just the same."* The unexpected irruption of the prison into the museum was evocative of surveillance and control. A sobering and thought-provoking reminder of our current context where surveillance tends to be digital and thus, ambiguously far less obtrusive.

As we left the vivarium, Beris said, *“we’ll just have a wander through the natural history part. This is somewhere I always visit.”* Aware of ethical issues, she assured me that the taxidermy animals had all been in the collections or were donated and none of them were recent. The gallery was an archival space containing a multitude of eras, bringing many pasts into the present, in a captivating and eclectic cavalcade of embodied and capricious matter and memory. The beauty of this gallery was its ambiguity and multiplicity, encouraging interpretive scope (Edensor, 2005, p.831). Arranged in a seemingly orderly manner, the artefacts were simultaneously and intentionally juxtaposed randomly; unruly, temporally ambiguous and highly affective. Tess commented that *“It’s confusing though. Why would they put a bat there, things that don’t belong to the same family?... I always used to think that a rabbit was a rodent. But apparently, they are leporids, they’re not rodents.”* Boundaries are blurred, inviting conjecture, speculation and affording ‘a wide range of encounters’ (Edensor, 2005, p.833). Although not alive, the artefacts were all once living bodily entities and still very much capable of generating effects and participating in complex and dynamic intra-actions.

“It amazes me that if you are so interested in animals and birds, that you’d want to kill them.” Sylvia, participant

“He [Buffalo Bill] took people on hunting trips just to kill bison - because they could.” Kevin, volunteer

“The glorious twelfth [August: start of hunting season]. Not very glorious for the grouse is it! (Figure 34).” Beris, volunteer

“...what I don’t agree with is when I read things like people going on pheasant shoots and they actually bury the carcasses. They take the breasts out because they can sell them, and they bury the rest (Figure 34d).” Tess, participant



Figure 34. a. Duck shooting | b. Bird wings | c. Great Northern Diver | d. Pheasant

The human propensity to shoot birds and animals (Figure 34) *“just for the heck of it”* was strongly regretted by many participants and speaks to Spinoza’s ethics of shared responsibility, even for acts not perpetrated by ourselves, but by dint of belonging to a group, a community (Braidotti, 2006b; Gatens & Lloyd, 1999). Without pause Beris began outlining the diverse and

particular mating habits and other information about capercaillies, puffins, fish, bitterns, harpy eagles, kakapos and quetzals as we encountered them in successive display cabinets. By way of speculation, I suggest that this shift was a means of disengaging, shutting down the complex, contested and uncomfortable topic of the ethics of hunting, much mentioned by participants. The shift exemplified a mix of feeling and cognition, which enables people to ‘address, re-assess, avoid, qualify, explain away, prevaricate about or flat out ignore what makes them uncomfortable’ (Smith, 2020, p.69).

The affects generated in these galleries oscillated; becoming positive, negative, neutral, and ambiguous or indeterminate sympoietically with perception, memory and imagination (Haraway, 2016). That is, they had many possible registers and intensities, were not clearly defined, and were open to ‘variations and fluctuations, changes of position and perspective’ (Grosz, 2005, p.98). Ambiguity or uncertainty has the power to stimulate and sustain curiosity (Pallasmaa, 2009, p.111). Curiosity, the drive for perceptual or cognitive stimulation and challenging interactions with the world, is intrinsic to human life, and is positively associated with wellbeing (Kashdan & Steger, 2007; Kidd & Hayden, 2015; Lydon-Staley et al., 2020). Olgiati (Olgiati & Breitschmid, 2019) gives an account of the similar notion of contradiction or inconsistency as a ‘fissure’ or crack that instigates ever-new attempts at comprehension through creative imagination.

One such instance of creative imagination materialised with Kevin while walking through the Living Worlds gallery. On seeing a starfish, Kevin leapt associatively to an octopus (Figure 35), recalling his bypass surgery and a post-operative conversation with medical staff:

“They said, ‘we did it with an octopus.’ An octopus! He said it’s not a real octopus, it’s something that has eight grips on it, and it keeps your heart open while we’re doing it. And they do it while it’s still beating. Now they’ve got another one called, what’s it called now? Oh, starfish and it’s a machine, but it’s got so many points on it and it just keeps the heart high enough to do the operation.” Kevin, volunteer



Figure 35. a. Octopus / b. Cushion-star / c. Detail of sun-star / d. Sun-star

In his narrative, nature, health and technology formed an alliance, foregrounding the way in which capacity is extended and humans become more-than-human, in human-technology assemblages. It was also another way of absorbing, processing and folding a traumatic event into his personal ongoing narrative of becoming. The process of remembering according to Bergson (1990), Deleuze and Guattari (1987) is imaginative. It is a creative reworking of past experiences with the present context that is forward-looking (Grosz, 2017).

Ambiguity, indeterminacy and inconsistency all provide conditions that open to possibility, that allow divergence, deviation, experimentation and transformation (Barad, 2012, p.208). These are conditions in which lizards might transform into prehistoric monsters, taxidermy animals become pals or sources of discomfort, a museum gallery is likened to a prison gallery, and an octopus is a piece of medical technology used in open heart surgery. Divergence and experimentation in these instances were capacitating, they were identity and knowledge affirming and they reinforced a sense of belonging.

5.2.5 Living worlds: a flux of intensities

Traveller, there is no path
Paths are made by walking.
By walking you make a path
And turning, you look back
At a way you will never tread again.
(Machado, 1917)

Beris and I spent some time roving through the Living Worlds gallery. This peripatetic walking together enabled us to become attuned to each other, it opened 'up space for dialogue where embodied knowledge, experience and memories could be shared' (Springgay & Truman, 2017, p.7). In the act of walking, we are in process, in 'immanent cause-effect relation' (Manning, 2016, p.18). Our conversation and thinking aligned with our movement. It was rhizomic and nomadic in character, open to encounters, to heterogeneity, to difference, to adventure. We discussed nature and its designs, the sperm whale skeleton (Figure 36a) and the plesiosaurs; ancient creatures with flippers. She reasoned that they have not changed much because the original design was good. Then looking at a cabinet with the organs of a frog, she commented that "*even the tiny little frogs have got...all that work inside, it's brilliant*". The frog led to fish (Figure 36c) and the story of her foray into fishing with her husband on the River Severn. Then a lovely russet fox caught her eye. It was a fluid, fluent and flowing improvisation, non-linear, highly unpredictable and unchoreographed. The stories ran into each other, overlapping, assembling contingently from perceptions, involuntary memories, revelations, sensations and reflections to create subject affirming narratives (Edensor, 2005). This flux of intensities made possible the particular thoughts, feelings, potentialities and resonances that were actualised in

the assemblages that formed throughout the visit (Stewart, 2007). We were in constant motion, physical, cognitive and emotional; we were encountering, engaging, conversing, thinking and thus becoming together (Dumm, 2008). Physical embodied movement through spacetime is process. It's a flow, a journey, a narrative, contingent entanglement, thinking/feeling-in-motion, intra-action. There was a sense of anticipation, a willingness to explore, an openness to connect and discover what might emerge in motion, together.



Figure 36. a. Sperm whale skeleton | b. Ape skulls & skeletons | c. Chub | d. Lemur

This gallery was very rich in familiarities, memories and stories for Beris. By this time, we had become quite attuned to and comfortable with each other. *“Too human”* apes, lemurs and bush babies with *“big eyes that sort of look like a human baby”*, an agouti with *“a nice shiny coat”*, an impala that was not (an impala), an *“amazing”* hunting dog from a *“female dominated society, which is nice,”* *“cute”* red pandas and an armadillo were effortlessly engaged in the flow of affective assemblages and narrative (Figure 37). Then, *“one of my favourites is around the corner; pussy cats! Look I’ve got my boots on [leopard patterned boots] ... I’ve had several cats; I’ve not got one at the moment, but they are fascinating animals.”*



Figure 37. a. Agouti | b. Impala | c. Felines | d. *“Everybody’s favourite”, the armadillo*

The source of much of Beris’s knowledge was documentary nature programs. She referred to eleven different programs throughout the visit. This habit of watching documentary programs that she shared with her husband, was reterritorialised after his death, drafted into her new role as volunteer at the museum and contributing to her capacity to ‘persist, thrive, change and grow in the face of a world that is itself subject to endless and often random change’ (Grosz, 2013, p.221). Her interest in and great affinity with nature was a refrain that ran

throughout the visit, defining her 'inner nature' (Braidotti, 2006b, p.149). It was familiar nature close to home that resonated most strongly and generated the most affective memories and stories; foxes, hedgehogs, squirrels, badgers, budgerigars and frogs along with local flora.

"Foxes fascinate me. I live in a sheltered housing complex... It's on an old church grounds and we've got quite a bit of ground around us. And we've got a couple of foxes that play about at the back. We did have quite a few hedgehogs as well..." Beris

From foxes, we proceeded to the housing complex, foxes again and then hedgehogs in one seamless flow. There were no awkward or uncomfortable breaks in this visit, or in any of them for that matter. Beris had organised the rescue of a hedgehog at the behest of a neighbour's upset grandchild. It had been dehydrated according to the hedgehog rescue lady. From this anecdote we travelled back in time to when she used to live on a council estate with a disused overgrown WW2 airstrip and I learnt of her stint as a nature notes writer.

"I used to love walking over there because you could see all sorts, mainly flowers and wildlife and what have you. And through a mutual friend - a local reporter from a local newspaper wanted somebody to write Nature Notes⁶⁹, so I ended up doing that for a couple of years. That was interesting doing that because you learn more as well..." Beris

Beris's husband was remembered often during the visit. His inclusion was positive and generative. It was a way for Beris, 'immersed in webs of complex interaction, negotiation and transformation' (Braidotti 2006b, p.154), to make sense of, and understand his death and their shared life in a different way, one that would continue to include him in her future. Though irretrievably absent, he was insistently present, embodied in narrative, forming part of these museum assemblages, keeping her/us company throughout the visit (Dumm, 2008).

"I did a bit of fishing at one time with my husband; freshwater fishing and I caught... Shropshire... it's beautiful, the River Severn - and I caught a 10lb carp..." Beris

"Well, it's what myself and my husband always used to say; if we ever won the lottery... he'd just want to live in Ireland because he loved going fishing over there. So, he'd have a fishery and I'd have an animal sanctuary and I'd not turn anything away..." Beris

"Myself and my husband both did the same thing. If there was anything like that [violence or cruelty], we'd change the channels..." Beris

⁶⁹ Local knowledge is place-based consciousness that endows the world with meaning (Escobar, 2001, p.153).

Later she told me about her last cat, a very bad-tempered Manx cat which she loved anyway. *“She never forgave me because we moved from a house to a one-bedroom flat on the first floor so obviously I couldn’t let her out. She was getting older too, so I thought she would like it, but she never forgave me.”* Beris and her husband subsequently moved to a ground floor flat to accommodate her husband’s back problems. This also meant that she could have a dog, evidently something she had wanted to do. Harry, her dog is a very big part of her life. He is her constant companion both at home and abroad, and he repeatedly made an appearance in conversation. Joy and companionship are strong incentives for affective familial entanglements with companion animals (Haraway, 2008). And this brings us back to the topic of touch; touch is ‘inseparable from life itself’ (Chretien, 2004, p.85) and to touch another living being is to stay in touch with, or connected to life.

“The best thing I ever did was getting Harry. He’s a little cracker... Some people can’t understand why you want to have an animal, but they give you so much and all they want is a roof over their head and somewhere warm. So loving, and it doesn’t matter how bad you’re feeling when you’ve got to get up, because you’ve got to get out and take the dog for a walk and look after your pets whatever they are, they keep you active.” Beris

We’d now reached the shooting diaries and the sawfish cabinet (Figure 38a, b). Beris explained that the sawfish would use a sweeping motion with its ‘saw’ to lift small creatures such as crabs off the bottom of their habitat. Next, we marvelled at the improbable naturally occurring, geometrically shaped crystals in a series of cabinets against the atrium railing. Another example of how museum exhibits so effortlessly engage, touch, affect visitors.



Figure 38. a. Shooting diaries | b. Sawfish noses | c. Botanical models | d. Crystals

“I like this sort of thing, this fascinates me. It’s the shapes they grow into, like the quartz crystal and everything (Figure 38d). It’s amazing. That’s why I like geology... I was looking at something earlier and they were properly square like that, but that’s how they grow... The colours are just amazing, and look at the flat edges on that. It’s like one of the exhibits that I show people on the geology table, a piece of agate and it’s got quartz inside, and people say, ‘wow, how does that happen?’ I’ve read that it’s like a bubble of gas that’s formed and then when it’s cooled down and the gas is dissipated and [it’s] the bacteria that’s left behind

that cause the crystals to grow. And it's because of the bacteria that's there in the first place... I thought that was a tooth [laughs]. It's the same shape; it reminds me that I must call my dentist" (Figure 39a). Beris

"Plants are favourite things (Figure 38c). I just love looking at them and finding out about them. I took some photos in Heaton Park which is the main place I take Harry for a walk. You know the fungi, the red toadstool, the dangerous one, it was just there, and it looked like the model they have in the objects store, just beautiful you know." Beris



Figure 39. a. Tooth-shaped crystal / b. Basket-star / c. Argonaut egg-case / d. Hornbill

From here we moved on to displays of sea creatures, coral, sponges, and shells (Figure 39b, c). Amongst the displays were a horseshoe crab and the fantastical basket star (Figure 39b). Visual associations with pies, bread and cookies transported us to a country kitchen redolent with the aromas of home baking. But it was a more recognisable cushion-star (Figure 35b) that recalled a piece of craftwork that Beris had just completed. The very tactile practice of plush work connects to and sustains the world of the Amish peoples in Pennsylvania, and is another satisfying activity in Beris's evolving life.

"It's amazing to think that it's [basket-star Figure 39b] a living or has been a living thing. And I think that [coral] looks like a pie or a piece of bread. It's been scored. And that one is like a chocolate chip. I do a bit of crafting and the other lady who comes to our group once a fortnight had us doing Amish plush work. You know the Amish community in Pennsylvania - it's really good and the thing that I've done really reminds me of a starfish and it's like that, it's the same shape as that... It's like doing satin stitch and when you've finished you cut it and it opens up and it's that shape and it's brilliant. I'll make it into a pincushion when I get around to it. I'm really glad I finished it. I only finished it last night, so it's quite apt, it just reminds me of it." Beris

Throughout the visit I felt that Beris was very much affirming her essence 'as joy, through encounters and minglings with other bodies, entities, beings and forces' (Braidotti, 2006b, p.163). After the loss of her husband, Beris proactively sought new connections, fending off potential loneliness by creating friends and family at the museum and other places. Loneliness

is complex yet fundamental to the experience of being human. According to Hannah Arendt (1979) loneliness is ‘the common ground for terror’ and when one is lonely one loses the capacity to experience, as ‘the experience of the materially and sensually given world depends upon... being in contact with other(s)...’ (p.475). She goes on to say that what ‘makes loneliness so unbearable is the loss of one’s own self’ and that self and ‘world, capacity for thought and experience are lost at the same time’ (1979, p.477). In the conditions afforded by the museum, Beris was able to re-affirm her ‘self’, connecting materially and sensually to human and non-human. A hornbill we were looking at brought to mind a happy and validating childhood memory (Figure 39d). *“I remember drawing one of those when I was a kid, and I can’t draw but I copied it. It was brilliant; I think I got a star for that or something, it was very good, it’s the only good drawing I’ve ever done. I don’t know what I did with it, I probably lost it like you do when you’re a kid.”*

5.2.6 Animal engagements: skin and bones

As much as she loved many of the entities and artefacts with which we’d so far engaged, Beris’s true favourites in the museum were waiting for us in the Manchester Gallery and she was keen to introduce me to them. *“Let’s go and see Maude (Figure 40), she is absolutely beautiful and the job they’ve done on her is incredible. The eyes are brilliant.”*

We headed back towards the cold building, taking the lift to the ground floor. The pace quickened, as the temperature dropped. We passed through the Archaeology section where Beris told of how eccentric archaeologist, Flinders Petrie, would wander about on site stark naked in the heat of the Egyptian summer. But her heart was set on getting to the Manchester Gallery. There was a sudden palpable change in affective intensity as we crossed the threshold and were drawn inexorably towards majestic Maude, the glorious honey-coloured tigon, her eyes gleaming with intelligence and life. She had a similar effect on all of the participants.



Figure 40. Stunning princess / a. b. c. Maude the tigon

“Hello Maude, how are you! She is fabulous, look at those eyes. She’s stunning. To think it was only done a few years ago because they only found it recently... apparently it was threadbare, so they had to put it in what they said was a bit of an unnatural pose, but I think she looks quite comfy. She looks quite like that [photo of her alive]. I would’ve loved to

have seen her. She was in the zoo with her brother. I think she looks very calm ... You're stunning aren't you princess!" Beris

Maude's father was a tiger and her mother a lion. She and her brother Kliou, born in 1932 in Dresden, lived at Belle Vue Zoo in Manchester. This closed in 1977. When she died, the zoo presented her skin to the Manchester Museum where it was recently rediscovered rolled up in a drawer. She went on display again in 2015, 65 years after her death and has been a great favourite with staff, volunteers and visitors alike.

"The curator had been looking in the basement, in the stores and he found this. They thought it was a carpet, a rug and they opened it up and there this Tigon was. So, this is a modern piece of taxidermy" Colin, volunteer

"It's been rolled up in a drawer for 45 years that. Seriously! It came from the zoo, Belle Vue Zoo and it was on display but it went out of favour, so they de-stuffed it, rolled it up and put it in a drawer and when the new curator came, he was going through and opened the drawer and it was looking at him, so he had it re-stuffed and put on display" Kevin, volunteer

Maude is very much back in favour and is a tribute to the capacities of modern taxidermy. She elicits great affection and empathy, materialises memories and deconstructs boundaries and binaries; living, non-living, past, present, animate, inanimate, human and non-human. *"She's fantastic!" "Oh, she's a beauty!" "She's amazing!"* She is a ghost from the past, embodying intersecting temporalities, traces of entanglements, ethical conundrums and colliding histories. She is familiar, strange, mysterious and ambiguous. But never mind what she is, it is what she does that counts. I was not immune to her magnetic force. The svelte form, rich warm colour and penetrating eyes generated a potent affective intensity. I could feel those eyes on me, following me around the room. Kindly eyes it must be said. For some participants like volunteer Robert, Maude elicited fond memories of a dearly beloved, departed companion in a flow of joyful, corporeal forces and intensities.

"This reminds me of my dog. This is a tigon. And I've got a photograph of my dog - he died this time last year, he couldn't manage anymore. Nobody wanted him. At the kennels they said he was a stray, but I don't believe them. He was about a year and a half, oh yeah, young. I saw this beautiful dog in the cage in the cells, and he was quiet and dignified and a wonderful looking dog, crossed with an Akita. A really big boned animal, all beige. I went home and spoke to my wife, then slept on it. And I woke up the following morning and said, I'll have to go back, it's a wonderful dog, beautiful yellow eyes and all. At the kennels, I asked to look at him, and the kennel maids went to get him, and this time he was completely different. The day before, he sat still in his cage. And this time because he was

going to be given a dad, he started jumping up and down [laughing]. They said, 'do you want to walk him around?' So, I was walking him around like this [miming]. Then they said, 'shall we put him back in the cage?' And I said, 'no, I'll have him'. And the girls in the office were thinking, 'silly old fool, bringing a dog like that home'. Anyway, I had him for nine years and he was a wonderful animal." Robert, volunteer

Here, engaging with the affective materiality of Maude provoked Robert to reflect on his lifelong habit of pet ownership that had its origins with his parents. *"My mum and dad before they were married, in their respective houses they had dogs. Then when they got married, they continued to have dogs. And now I've had dogs and that's it, we were just brought up with them."* It was also an affirmation of his empathy with animals. In telling the story, he was intuitively 'becoming dog', making meaning by connecting to, enacting and merging his and the dog's bodily responses and folding in a conjectured or perhaps expected response from the 'girls in the office'. There was a bittersweet exuberance as the memory flooded forth, overflowing from his body in affective intensity and movement.

However, despite her exotic beauty and capacity to engage, there is also something disquieting and discordant about Maude. This dis-quiet, this mild dis-comfort creates a pause, a space for some disturbing reflections to emerge. *"And the story is a bit... She died. Yeah, but it came from Dresden, this idea of experimenting, mixing species. It smacks of Nazism to me"* explained Colin. Sensing potential danger in this line of enquiry, and not wanting to pursue this thought in depth or perhaps with me in this moment, Colin, created a rupture by introducing humour, taking the conversation off on a tangent. *"Talking of which, I went to see 'The Producers'. Have you seen it? I was nearly crying [with laughter] at times. When Hitler comes on - it's all gig. I think Mel Brooks tried to offend every conceivable minority group."*

A baby mammoth had been scheduled to arrive from Russia for an exhibition I was told. However, at the last minute it was not allowed out of the country. Kevin explained that because it was a baby with all of its internal organs intact, a group of scientists was planning to extract DNA in an attempt to recreate a mammoth. He had ethical concerns about this idea. *"Like Maude, you don't know if what they're doing is right or not... Tignons are born sterile so they can't reproduce. So, they're born, they live, they die and that's it. Yeah, well all the tignons and the other way around, the ligers, they breed them. Just before last Christmas in Germany, they bred six pure white tignons but that's it, they'll live, and they'll die. Just to prove they could still do it; but it's just not..."*. 'Ethical', 'moral', 'natural' and 'right' were some of the words that came to mind. Genetic engineering, a fraught topic, was entangled with vague and uncomfortable recollections of stories about Nazi experiments during the second world war. Not a direction I really wanted to follow up on either, certainly not right then. As the old maps say 'here there be monsters' and many of them lurking in the shadow side of museums with

their histories of dubious politics and ethics, appropriation, colonialism and racism to name just a few!



Figure 41. “Manchester’s most famous elephant” | a. b. c. d. Maharajah, the Asian elephant

So, how did we get from the tigon to the mammoth? The other dominant presence in the room was Maharajah, “Manchester’s most famous elephant” (Figure 41). He is in fact a skeleton, the skeleton of a young Asian elephant whose claim to fame was his 200 mile walk in 1872 from Edinburgh where he was bought from a circus by Belle Vue Zoo, to Manchester. There were variations on what has become an iconic odyssey but in essence, *“It’s an amazing story. He used to live in Edinburgh and Belle Vue zoo bought him in 1872. They were going to bring him down on a train in a carriage. But he wouldn’t get on the train, he smashed the carriage up, so him and his keeper...walked the 200 miles from Edinburgh to Manchester in 10 days. That’s 20 miles a day. Pretty good going that. I shouldn’t imagine that it would’ve been too much for an elephant, but for the keeper to keep up with him...”* marvelled volunteer Paul.

There are a number of stories relating to Maharajah and his walk. Stories of courage, enterprise, character and community. Paul recounted one of them: *“he came to a toll gate when he was coming down from Edinburgh and the toll master wouldn’t let him through because he said, I don’t know how much to charge for an elephant, which is quite funny. But they must’ve come to some sort of agreement on the price because he ended up at Manchester zoo.”* Kevin followed up with another. *“I was showing Colin and he said that tusk has been vandalised. What happened when he died was, they left him in a field to decompose so they could get to the bones. So, to make sure they got it the right way around, they put the letter ‘R’. They could’ve put it underneath. Because I said there’s a letter ‘R’ on there and he thought it was vandalised. And I said no, that’s just so they won’t get it the wrong way around. It’s like having wellingtons with ‘left’ and ‘right’ written on them. I used to go to school with this lad and he’d come to school every day with his wellingtons on the wrong foot.”*

He also - here I am, caught up in the stream of affecting stories, writing as though Maharajah was a living entity not a skeleton - elicited a great deal of reflection around elephants as a species. During my time with Manchester Museum participants, I learnt that:

"He's a small elephant, an Asian one. I've never seen an African elephant. He died from pneumonia, it got him in the end." Beris

"When they got him here, he only lived for about 10 years, he died in 1882. He was only 18 when he died which is a shame. They live into their 50s. But, they're just amazing animals and when I was on the Manchester table, I talked to a few people who actually worked with elephants, they told me about how they've got their own personalities and if they don't like you, they don't like you. Well, I heard somewhere that there are only three animals apart from man that can recognise themselves in a mirror and that's the great apes, dolphins and elephants. Well, that's what I was told, and they mourn their dead and everything. It's amazing. Sometimes it's not nice the way animals get treated, and humans as well." Paul, volunteer

Like Maude, Maharajah despite not having *"an ounce of meat on him"* was dearly beloved. They are both Mancunian icons embodying much about the city and its residents both tacit and explicit. They are also both participants in what Haraway (2016) calls 'unexpected collaborations and combinations' (p.4), in 'becoming capable, with each other', in 'learning to be truly present' (2016, p.1) as living entities 'entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings' (2016, p.1). This manifested in the pride, affection and enthusiasm with which residents spoke of them. Maude and Maharajah are enmeshed with Manchester and its residents, and thus part of its many volatile collaborations, combinations and meanings.

"He's fabulous isn't he. I love the way little kids come up and say, 'wow it's a mammoth'. And you say, 'sorry to disappoint you, but...' Yeah, he's one of my pals" Beris

"I'm quite fond of Maharajah you know... And it's just with me spending so long here I almost feel that I knew Maharajah" Paul, volunteer

To all intents and purposes, we have been discussing an old stuffed tigon skin and the skeleton of a small elephant. However, both Maude and Maharajah are so very much more. They are both personalities, living interactive entities, 'pals', 'favourites', icons and representative of aspects of Manchester's history. As affective entities, they were eminently open to different registers, intensities, variations and fluctuations, able to generate joy, admiration, affection and pride on the one hand, and doubt, uncertainty, discord and repulsion on the other. Although responses to Maude and Maharajah were overwhelmingly positive, Colin, Kevin, Beris and Paul were uncomfortably aware of inadvertent cruelty, dubious ethics and questionable motivations associated with them. And in fact, amongst the cohort, there was an awareness, questioning and intermittent mention of animal rights, the historical practices of appropriation, dominant Eurocentric mindsets and the ethics of possession and display of First

Nations artefacts. As these are complex, extensive, and contested topics, it is quite possible that participants felt that a research project was not the appropriate context within which to pursue them.

5.3 Postscript: movement moved is never twice the same

At the end of our museum visit, Beris and I moved back into the warmth of the library for the semi-structured interview. I was surprised at how well one could get to know a complete stranger such as Beris in a two-hour visit, and the level of trust and confidence that had developed. Margulis calls it ‘the intimacy of strangers’ (as cited in Haraway, 2016, p.60), the becoming-with during a museum visit and Slaby (2016) describes the establishment of ‘an immersive sphere of relatedness’ that is ‘jointly lived-through’ (p.9). I found that I could quite happily have spent additional time with any of the participants in this study. Each visit was very distinct and had its own rhythm and pace which sometimes changed from gallery to gallery. As Manning (2016) claims, ‘movement-moved is never twice the same: it is always altered by the ecologies that create this singular field of relation, and that influence how it will unfold this time.’ (p.19). Participants were curious and open, curious about the research and me, and open to what might occur in this ‘safe’ museum space. I also found them very much ‘propelled by the desire to express and actualize (their) *potentia*’ (Braidotti, 2006b, p.179). After each visit, I found myself feeling inspired and energised. Part of being comfortable about the research visits was knowing that they were being recorded so I could fully participate in and enjoy the interaction without feeling that I had to try and remember details or take notes.

The majority of the participants in this cohort, were active or former volunteers at the museum. It was very difficult to select one amongst the participants for this chapter. What tipped the scales in Beris’s favour was the combination of the recent loss of her husband, limited formal education yet extensive ‘free choice learning’ and knowledge, and a high degree of curiosity, proactive attitude and creative imagination. She came to the museum at a time of sudden and significant change in her life and was, on paper, at risk of social isolation. In addition she did not fit the standard museum visitor profile of prosperous, well-educated professional (APPGAHW, 2017, p.30).

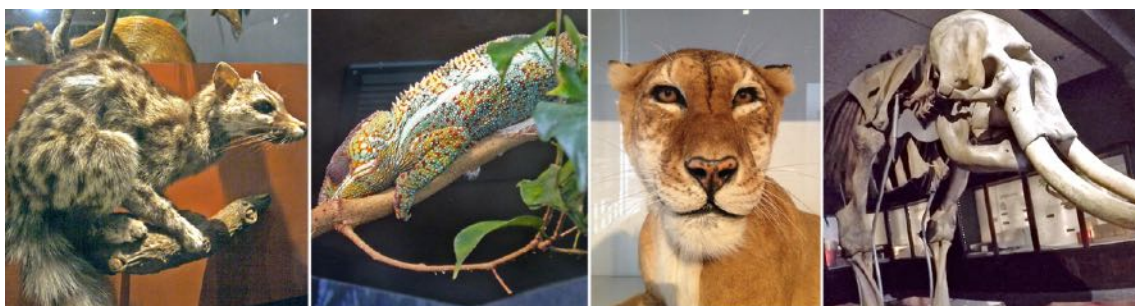


Figure 42. Some of Beris’s more-than-human museum family members | a. Ocelot | b. Chameleon | c. Maude | d. Maharajah

In this chapter, I have outlined a range of ways in which the museum milieu in intra-action with individuals is capacitating. The rich and diverse groupings of spaces, artefacts, narratives and atmospheres that formed during the visit with Beris, afforded her access to a swarm of memories that were creatively reconfigured in the present, and were testament to a full and vibrant life. This process facilitated the positive materialisation of her husband and a reworking of her understanding of their relationship, life together and his death. Through the museum she has re-created a more-than-human family (Figure 43), thus mitigating potential social isolation and loneliness and providing her with a sense of belonging, purpose and meaning in her work as a volunteer.

This chapter also demonstrates that the heterogeneous and open worlds of museums, which director and curator Chris Dercon (2021) has described as the 'last public refuges offering this potential for self-determined action' (p.13), afford opportunities for capacitation for a diverse array of individuals. The chapter largely attended to the visit of one person, the flow of affective assemblages that formed around artefacts, displays, perceptions, memories and reflections. What emerged in the undertaking was that there were particular themes, narratives and exhibitions that were decidedly resonant, engaging and enabling for the majority of the cohort, such as Maude and Maharajah, the vivarium and the Living Worlds Gallery. This notion of resonant themes is the focus of the next chapter located in Nantes.

6. RESONANT ASSEMBLAGES IN NANTES

6.1 Nantes History Museum, Château of the Dukes of Brittany

In each of the museums I noticed that there were exhibitions, sections or themes towards which most of the participants in the cohort gravitated, ones that had a seemingly irresistible, almost magnetic pull and were especially meaningful for them. These were not only, as might be expected, the affirming and pleasurable ones, but were foremost those of a more confronting and dissonant nature. Of course, the messages, values and meanings that visitors create with-in museums will always be interpreted and understood differently due to their different backgrounds (Tunbridge & Ashworth, 1996, p.21), and as a consequence will have different intensities and effects. Yet it appears from the data, that positive emotions such as pleasure, although welcome, are not the primary goal of museum visitors. It was the confronting and dissonant subjects that held a particular fascination.

The aim of this chapter is to investigate the appeal and productive capacity of assemblages formed with resonant exhibitions, sections and themes. These were both harmonious and dissonant. Assemblages are, as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) posit, 'a genetic condition of the emergence of capacities for action' (McCullagh, 2019, p.144), otherwise known as wellbeing - the core concern of this study. Under examination are particular periods in history, events and activities such as war and slave trading; historical figures, monuments and products such as Duchesse Anne, her château and iconic biscuits; elements such as water, and intangibles such as atmospheres. Notably slippery were the pervasive, endemic and persistent presences such as Duchesse Anne, the Château and water, all of which seemed to be everywhere at once and in the case of water, nowhere at all. In the writing I have attempted to retain the experiential essence of the visits, their sensory, atemporal, affective and processual qualities.

6.2 Credits and debits measured in human lives!

The museum is very proud of its critical, questioning approach: an approach that has the curatorial team deconstructing myths and decoding discourses to get at what lies beneath. Says a staff member, *"we confront difficult subjects, neither attempting to avoid nor mitigate their realities, but rather tackling them with an open mind. The slave trade and the second world war for example... What interests us are exhibitions that have an added dimension, that go beyond accepted mainstream discourses..."* The team is keen to *"...encourage the visitor to question and reflect on what she is seeing or being told; to change her viewpoint, to see things in different ways. We always try to provide visitors with opportunities for critical engagement."* He was referring to what Olgiati (Olgiati & Breitschmid, 2019) describes as "cultural added

value” – that (which) makes people think, and thus brings movement to a society’ (p.137), opening up to new possibilities and different potential ways of knowing (Lenz Taguchi, 2016).

Nantes’ slave trading era was both formative and significant and its presence is still pervasive. During the 18th century, Nantes was known as France’s foremost slave trading port. Slave trade or ‘foul traffic’ was what generated a large part of the historical wealth of Nantes still visible in the many mansions belonging to slave trading families (Figure 43c). All participants in Nantes gravitated towards this section.

“You must have seen it already in Nantes; the wealth of the city in the 18th century was the product of slave trading.” Evelyne, participant

“... the great fortunes of Nantes are based on the traffic in slaves, the shipowners. Have you visited the city and seen the magnificent old buildings and mansions? It’s not so straightforward, but... it starts in Africa. ...You can’t talk about this city without invoking slavery.” Aurélie, participant



Figure 43. a. Slave ship cargo | b. Poster for the slave trade exhibition 1985 | c. Mansions, Nantes

Slave trading was conducted as part of what is known as triangular trade, or commerce amongst three ports or regions. In the case of Nantes, its ships left port loaded with fabrics, trinkets, weapons and other goods which were traded for slaves on the West Coast of Africa. These slaves were then shipped to and sold very profitably in the French Antilles from whence sugar was brought (Figure 43a). Nantes was also responsible for the fit-out of many of France’s slave trading ships even after slave trading became illegal in France in 1815.

“Nantes was a major port in the triangular trade... This is what generated the wealth of Nantes, much like other ports in England.” Gilles, participant

Standing in the middle of room eight, Evelyne was explaining various artefacts until she noticed a small unassuming poster next to the door leading to the following section. The poster had a magnetic effect on her, and I wondered what was about to unfold as we headed its way. The poster it turned out was the “famous poster on slavery” from 1985 (Figure 43b). It

was promoting a conference on slave trading and slavery at the University of Nantes. The conference was attended by a large group of renowned international historians and eventually led to the formation, in 1991, of an association called 'The Shackles of Memory' (*Les Anneaux de la Mémoire*) by a group of interested citizens. The aims of the association were to acknowledge, raise awareness about, and come to terms with the dark yet formative period of slave trading in the city's history. The association, with the support of the City of Nantes and the collaboration of the Museum, held a widely acclaimed and popular international exhibition of the same name at the Museum from 1992-1994. *"This was the first major European exhibition on the slave trade"* explained a staff member. Evelyne, highly animated and fully engaged, stated that:

"In my memory, this is one of the most extraordinary exhibitions I have ever seen, because it was so courageous, because it questioned many things; the wealth of the city, its source etcetera. Moreover, the people who engaged in slave trading at the time, they are still around. That is, the families still live in Nantes. And they agreed to be named and take responsibility for what their families did." Evelyne, participant

At the time, it was perceived as a risk to hold this exhibition given that Nantes had, for nearly two centuries kept its slave trading past under wraps, despite it being the source of the city's prosperity. Yet, 'few things are more eloquent than a massive silence' (Connerton, 2008, p.67) and/or collective amnesia (Waterton, 2014, p.23). Participant Clémence remarked that, *"...what struck me was... above all a past that we hardly spoke of anywhere - we knew it but... And all of a sudden there were a lot of undeniable facts - accounts, photos and an acknowledgment of what had occurred."* The exhibition was confronting, provocative, unsettling; it contested and transformed previously sanctioned and sanitised narratives and collective memories along with civic and personal identities. It also made the Nantais strange to themselves in a visceral stomach-churning way, strangely inhuman and mercenary. In 2012, a memorial was unveiled in Nantes to affirm slavery as a crime against humanity and to commemorate and support ongoing resistance to all forms of slavery and enslavement. It was not, as Mayor at the time Jean-Marc Ayrault stated, 'just another act of contrition, but a genuine call' to remember the past and 'fight against all forms of slavery and denial of human rights.'⁷⁰ Whilst visiting this section, it was clear that participants were feeling what LaCapra (2001) calls 'empathic unsettlement' a dynamic, disconcerting yet productive tension, in which the viewer feels for another whilst being aware of 'a distinction between one's own perceptions and the experience of the other' (J. Bennett, 2005, p.8; Hite, 2015, p.39).

"Nantes has for many years, almost two centuries, completely hidden its past. The relative wealth of the city is strongly linked to its slave trading past. It was one of the major French

⁷⁰ <https://www.gsd.harvard.edu/2012/04/memorial-by-krzysztof-wodiczko-and-julian-bonder-mdess-96-to/>

ports. It was the most important port in France ... after Liverpool..." Clémence & Laurent, participants

Admiring the courage of the City of Nantes and the families whose wealth and prosperity derived from the slave trade and who willingly acknowledged their part in it, Evelyne outlined why she found it so moving. She described the horror, fascination, appreciation, and also pride in her city and its capacity to embrace this unsavoury era, part of 'its baggage of blood, sweat and tears' (Braidotti, 2006b, p.165). Deleuze (2000) alleges that 'what is essential is outside of thought, in what forces us to think' (p.95). In this case, the combined intensity of circulating affects, and the materiality of the exhibition were catalysts for critical reflection, engulfing visitors, forcing them to engage and deliberate over the ethical implications of the slave trade. This was not an exhibition that elicited a distant and disinterested acknowledgement on the part of the citizens of Nantes, but one that compelled both a visceral and cognitive realisation of their own connection with this practice (J. Bennett, 2005, p.82).

"And it was magnificent - magnificent in the sense that everyone went to see this exhibition. It was very well curated, very moving. There were ship captains' logs and the stories they told about their lives. There were many deaths because there was a big discrepancy between the number of slaves they took in Africa and those who arrived alive in the United States. So many deaths! It really impacted the city... it was significant." Evelyne, participant

Children, along with all the schools, attended the exhibition, and amongst them, Evelyne's own young children who were moved to ask many questions. The overriding emotion, she remembers was one of shock. It is one thing to hear talk of something and quite another to come face to face with the details of daily life in the slave trade. As Ahmed (2010) explains, '(w)e are moved by things. And in being moved, we make things' (p.33). In this instance, make visible what was previously invisible. The exhibition jolted visitors, thrusting them 'involuntarily into a mode of critical inquiry' (J. Bennett, 2005, p.11). Discomfort and unease flowed freely from and through bodies, spaces and narratives as participants came to understand their complicity, albeit tenuous, in this 'traffic'.

"The children came, all the schools came. I had children who were small at the time. They asked a lot of questions; it had really been a shock. I think it was a real shock to everyone. Because we had heard about it, of course; the slaves, but it's not the same. I think Nantes was really brave. They did not always do all the right things but with this story..." Evelyne, participant

Participant Yvonne, remembers the exhibition as very moving, poignant, but also disturbing. She recalls a reconstruction of the hull of a slave trader including rows of chained slaves. She

also remembers as a citizen of Nantes, being somewhat ashamed; ashamed of the idea of exchanging the life of a 'person of colour' for merchandise. Shame and pride were entangled in this exhibition. Pride at the city's courage in confronting its unsavoury past and shame at a 'humanitarian atrocity of massive proportions' (Cubitt et al., 2011, p.3). According to Walter Benjamin (1992), '[s]hame is not only shame in the presence of others, but can also be shame one feels for them' (p.125). This was certainly the case here as participants felt shame both in my presence and their own, along with shame for their ancestors. Shame can at times compel us to closely examine how we live and be the force that catalyses an 'ethics of the everyday' (Probyn, 2004, p.346). Furthermore, shame is always both public and private, social and impersonal, and makes us intimate with ourselves (2004).

"There was an exhibition a long time ago which was great - on the slave trade and the fact that Nantes participated greatly. It was called 'The Shackles of Memory'. Very, very poignant, very intense. They had even reconstructed a boat hold with models of chained slaves, it was so moving. And it is true that as citizens of Nantes, we were not very proud. It's true that to trade people of colour for goods and then exploit them is immoral."

Yvonne, participant



Figure 44. a. Slave trade, Room 13 | b. Slave trade ship, the Marie S raphique (Angelic Mary)

The museum's permanent display incorporates many aspects of the complexity, wealth and horror of this period and its multiple and diverse outcomes and impacts on the people and history of Nantes and the region. The poster in Room 11 (Figure 43b), was only the herald of more intense and confronting displays farther along. Room 13, *A Slave Trading Capital* was the room with the most confronting material pertaining to slave trading (Figure 44).

"What's interesting about reconstructing a room like this, is that they've made everything out of wood as if you were on the deck of a ship, and then there's the smell...I think that we realise more here where the floor creaks - on ships everything creaks! There's always lots of noises ..." Laurent, participant

"It's impressive this room; oppressive! It's the wood, you can almost imagine that you are in the hold of a ship. You can see the neck chains too." Carole, participant

The floors, walls and low ceiling of this room were lined with dark grey-brown wooden planks. The floorboards creaked, it was unclear whether this was intentional or not, and there was a certain woody smell that added to the oppressive ambience. No one had noticed if the floors in other parts of the museum creaked; it was only here that one was conscious of it. The materiality of this room made the atmosphere both explicit, apparent and almost tangible, drawing attention and heightening sensitivity to the psychosocial content (Eliasson, 2014). Room 13 was one of those rooms that you walk into and immediately *feel* the atmosphere, that 'overarching, perceptual, sensory and emotive impression of a space, setting, or social situation' (Brennan, 2004, p.1; Pallasmaa, 2014c, p.20). Spaces are filled with atmospheres, says Böhme (2014b), 'they emanate from things, constellations of things and persons' (p.43). The embodied violence in the artefacts, the stories and the surrounds, was a palpable and unsettling presence.

In public spaces, there is always an element of intentionality and that is certainly the case in a museum. Spaces and places invite and suggest activities and atmospheres guide the imagination (Pallasmaa, 2014c). As Eliasson (2014) contends 'intentions... inevitably embody an ethical stance, a suggestion about how to act and interact with others' (p.93). The atmosphere in Room 13 has been moulded to actively and emphatically invite the visitor to empathise and to imagine the unimaginable and inhuman lived reality of a slave; to transgress the boundaries of 'Eurocentric collective memories' (Crang & Travlou, 2001, p.164) and accepted narratives. Empathy or affective attunement 'facilitates an imaginative and productive shift in perspective, an expansion of awareness to encompass the 'other'' (Mason et al., 2018, p.126). This was what Laurent was referring to when he commented that "*I think we realise more here where the floor creaks.*" At the time, slave trading was considered merely a business, one that sought a good return on investment. For many participants, an encounter with the 'otherness' of slaves and slave trading produced an 'affective jolt', 'a shock to thought', precipitating astonishment, revelation, recognition, horror, despair, shame, amazement and critical engagement (Amin & Thrift, 2013; J. Bennett, 2005; Massumi, 2002; Pedwell, 2017). This type of confronting exhibition offers 'a concrete instance for thinking about extreme conditions and moral choices' (Williams, 2007, p.142).

*"The astonishing thing is that it was purely about trade; **they** kept accounts, profits and losses (Figure 45c). The shipowners had the boats, but it was wealthy families who put money into companies that financed the boat, and which relied on the boat to make a profit on the way back with a full accounting. It's clear that for **them** it was just business."*

Laurent, participant

"Yes, but when you look at the other side, it's absolutely horrifying (Figure 45)." Clémence,
participant

*"But this also means that in Africa they were willing to sell their own people. This is what is so shocking to imagine. They were traded for tobacco, brandy, guns, silks, handkerchiefs... And yes, **they** were making a lot of money that way. And **they** didn't think any more about...! **They** were making money, end of story. It's atrocious."* Evelyne, participant



Figure 45. a. Arrangement of slaves as cargo | b. Neck chain | c. Ledger from slave trading accounts

"It was in Zanzibar that we saw a prison - no, not the prison but where the slaves were packed in before leaving. It was a dreadful place. Benches or, I don't know what to call them - in granite, stone - they were chained on top of each other. They couldn't even stand up, it was horrifying [trembling]. The ambient heat made you shiver ..." Clémence, participant

Unexpected memories of a visit to a waiting room in Zanzibar arose for Clémence in the encounter with a very graphic diagram of how slaves were packed into a slave trader (Figure 45a). Memories enriched the narrative, imbuing the experience with a profound and disturbing visceral quality. Horror manifested as an intensity generated by an encounter with and attunement to the imaginary of the lived, embodied experience of slaves callously stacked and chained prior to embarkation. In remembering, Clémence was returned to an involuntary and perverse bodily response made in the cloying ambience of a hot climate, one that is suggestive of 'having-the-other-in-one's-skin' (Thiele, 2014, p.212). The atrocities of the past were re-animated, erupting, shivering into the present. These memories might be characterised as forms of 'knowing that transforms the self who knows' (Bartky, 2018, p.179) that impel 'toward movement, toward thought and extension' (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010, p.1).

"This boat was called 'Father of the Family', frankly it is not well-named... And the 'Angelic Mary'! ...They were travelling at the bottom of the hold – just awful. This is what we know from the logbooks. There were so many deaths before they got there. It's so awful to imagine that excessive loss of life; credits and debits measured in human lives. It's terrible! It's not surprising that there were so many deaths. We were amazed that there were actually people who managed to arrive alive." Evelyne, participant

Two of the slave trading ships were bewilderingly and inappropriately named, 'Father of the Family' and 'Angelic Mary', accentuating the disconnect between name and purpose and

enhancing the horror, leaving an impression. The ship logbooks recorded the number of slaves loaded and the deaths, an inventory of inhumanity, or so it seems today. Evelyne, very much affected by the hidden implications of the inventory; able to imagine, empathise, extrapolate and articulate critical awareness. Her openness to experience beyond the personal fomented an expansion of 'sympathetic imagination' (J. Bennett, 2005, p.9). It was an active bodily engagement with a forgotten past, one necessary for a broader, deeper and more ethical understanding of the 'historical forces that have brought [the mixed races who live in Nantes] ... together' (Cubitt et al., 2011, p.3) and which are constitutive of the city as it is today.

Throughout their visits Evelyne, Carole and Yvonne made variable use of pronouns when commenting on the slave trade. On the one hand both owning and acknowledging the shared responsibility for past atrocities whilst affirming a sense of belonging to this confronting yet shared collective narrative. And on the other, creating distance between themselves and the inhumanities of the time. There seemed to be no hard and fast rule in terms of choice of pronoun, no correlation with the level of atrocity or with the proximal artefact (Figure 45). Perhaps a manifestation of what Foster (1996) calls the 'psychic shock' (p.166) of trauma; an oscillation between 'direct unmediated affective experience and an absence of affect,' or numbness. What was evident was that in encounters with slave trading, visitors were impelled to acknowledge, re-examine and reconfigure their understandings of the past and the atrocities on which the city's subsequent wealth was founded and in doing so, to rework their own sense of self and identity.

"It was pretty terrible when you look at the conditions under which we transported people... The inhumanity of it didn't even cross their minds. They were making money!" Evelyne, participant

"For me this is completely incomprehensible. I don't understand how we could..." Carole, participant

"And it is true that as citizens of Nantes, we were not very proud" Yvonne, participant

Inconsistencies and tensions in the history of Nantes, like all cities, were not lost on Gilles. The city according to him was *"quite anti-establishment which is paradoxical given that it generated so much misery amongst the black population, slaves and the working class."* A wealthy city, whose wealth had its foundations in the slave trade, it has also been very liberal in the past. While contemplating a painting by Jules Grandjouan, Gilles went on to comment, *"Wealth! All those extremely rich people everywhere and there is the army defending the rich and there is the misery"* (Figure 46). But slave trading was not the only source of misery in Nantes. War too has been highly generative of misery.



Figure 46. a. b. Painting by Jules Grandjouan: 'Shame on those who don't revolt against social injustice.'

6.3 The strong living presence of so many wars

There was not a single participant at this museum who did not mention war or wars, on multiple occasions during the visit. *"There were so many wars,"* said Gilles. The two World Wars, the many battles during the Hundred Years War, the Vendée War, the French Revolution... *"Nantes was bombarded during the war (WWII); there were many deaths, so the war still has a strong living presence here,"* explained one staff member. Notwithstanding, not all participants ventured into the section on the two World Wars, perhaps not wanting to relive the horrors.



Figure 47. a. Painting: the Fifty Hostages | b. Room 26, WWII | c. 'The bread we ate in April 1942'

Nantes and its citizens have been scarred both physically and psychologically by both World Wars, but more particularly the second World War, when it was an important centre of resistance. The embodied presence of war haunts the city and its inhabitants in the form of diverse narratives, affective memories, conflicted emotions and material remains. Two events, the Fifty Hostages (Figure 47a) and the bombings of September 1943 which largely destroyed the city centre, have come to be representative of this period, reducing what was an era of difficult and discordant conflict and complexity to a more simplistic and perhaps more palatable narrative. The physical exhibition spaces containing the two World War displays exude unease and anxiety with their confined spaces, dark walls, floors and ceilings, gloomy lighting and grim task-lit artefacts displayed in a deliberately uncluttered manner (Figures 47b & 48). These artefacts are the material remains of 'destruction and violation', discharging affects that 'linger, like a hangover in the aftermath of war' (Navaro-Yashin, 2009, p.5). Yet it is this section of the museum according to staff, that is one of the most compelling for older

people and their families, many of whom either actively participated or had family members participate in these events.



Figure 48. Room 26, World War II. Image: Museum of the History of Nantes.

With the 2013 exhibition *En Guerre(s)* (At War), the museum aimed to present some of the lived and very personal experiences of the city's inhabitants during the wars and how these events shaped Nantes and its citizens physically and otherwise. This exhibition evolved into the permanent exhibition now on display. Artefacts and stories derive in large part from the community. The people who lived through these periods, and their families, were invited to the museum to share their stories and objects. The curators collected, domesticated and arranged these affect-rich artefacts and stories into a public exhibition to be shared by all. Today there are over a thousand artefacts, some of which are very ordinary, everyday objects such as *"a piece of bread wrapped and labelled as 'the bread we ate in April 1942' (Figure 47c), that had been put aside by a mother... She wanted to be able to explain the extent of the hardships they suffered during those years to her daughter,"* explained a staff member. The humble eloquence of this small piece of bread from 1942 'engenders an immediate and emotional connection' (Little & Watson, 2015, p.196) to the deprivation experienced by the mother. It is a powerful and engaging communication device; evocative and brimming with affect. It is also an example of what Deleuze (2000) calls an 'encountered sign' (p.101), one that is simultaneously and contrarily felt and sensed, that agitates and compels critical cognitive engagement. It is powerful as it engages at every level; emotional, psychological and sensorial (J. Bennett, 2005, p.36).

Ahmed (2010) tells us that the affective or sensory experience of an object includes what is around it and behind it; 'the conditions of its arrival' (p.33). The use of artefacts and stories belonging largely to the community gives the exhibition a particularly personal, compelling and affective character. It is both exhibition and memorial of great significance for the citizens of Nantes, reinforcing its solidarity and the collective memory narrative. It 'makes it possible to honour the memories of those who suffered and died' (Witcomb, 2013b, p.160) during the wars, through the conservation, curation and display of objects that belonged to them and their families. This exhibition conveys the impact on and experience of war for individuals and the community at large. For many locals, encountering their own and their family's artefacts in the museum is validating recognition and acknowledgement of wartime experiences. These encounters elicit memories of trauma, incarceration, terror, despair, hunger, illness and death but also of kindness, compassion, hope and friendship; the complex, intense and often overwhelming experiences of life during war. Yet these encounters in the present day, at the museum and often with the reassuring presence of family members, also provide a means of reconnecting with the past and the spacetime to rethink, reframe and understand what happened, differently.

When this exhibition opened many family groups comprising two, three and sometimes four generations visited. They included people in their 80's and 90's, people who had mobility and other functional constraints and who were profoundly moved by what they rediscovered in the presence of their families. *"We witnessed an amazing phenomenon; the exhibition unleashed a capacity within families to talk about the war. Coming to this exhibition gave them a way of telling their personal stories, their lived experiences of the traumas of war,"* explained a staff member. The materiality of this exhibition opened up new ways of engaging in a 'non-normative or liberating manner' (Eliasson, 2014, p.96). Asked whether visitors were traumatised by the exhibition, the same staff member revealed that *"(p)eople were moved to tears, women more so than men, who often remained withdrawn... These were exceptional moments for us as staff members to witness."* In spite of the intense emotions in circulation, staff members felt that the net effect of sharing these stories and spaces was to strengthen family bonds, open up lines of communication and intensify pride and respect.

Marianne Hirsch (2012) outlines a very similar situation in which Claude Lanzmann's film on the Holocaust '*Shoah*', unleashed an open discussion of 'acts of survival, the deaths of...parents, siblings, and first spouses, the pain, anger and melancholy they had suppressed for too many years' (p.9) amongst her husband's family. She goes on to reveal that the film authorised 'acts of witness' and that suddenly these people felt that their stories were legitimate, that they would be listened to and acknowledged (2012). In Nantes, the public display in their museum of such personal artefacts was likely the indication of legitimacy and acknowledgement that unleashed traumatic stories and memories within families.

The affects generated and discharged by this exhibition moved through individual bodies, families and communities in Nantes and elsewhere, and continued to circulate in disorderly and unanticipated ways (Navaro-Yashin, 2009). Sometimes uniting by virtue of shared lived experience and sometimes unsettling, rupturing a fragile or disengaged complacency, or exposing unprocessed trauma. The exhibition provided an interface, a permeable 'membrane which is constantly making relative outsides and insides communicate or exchange, putting them in contact with each other, extending them, and referring them to each other' (Deleuze, 1989, p.207). Artefacts, atmospheres and people in the present intra-act with memories, affects, visceral responses and hauntings resistant to cognitive processing from alternate spatio-temporal realities. In visitors these induce critical reflection and perhaps transformation through an 'assault on... [the] senses, emotions, and bodies' (J. Bennett, 2005, p.64).

On entering the room displaying first World War artefacts, Gilles became uncharacteristically silent and absorbed. He had explained earlier that he originally come to Nantes for work on completing his military service. He was visibly very moved. With one hand to his chin and the other arm wrapped around himself, he enclosed and detached himself from his surroundings as he focussed on the artefacts directly in front of him, perhaps unsettled by a 'swarm of memories thought long-forgotten' (Gross, 1985, p.373). Involuntary affective connection is what allows the circumvention of 'conventional thought...(movement) into darker regions... and ultimately... toward deeper truth' (J. Bennett, 2005, p.37). A black and white photo showed a door with a sign saying, '*Service du Logement a des Sinistrés*' (Figure 49a). He explained that '*sinistrés*' were "war victims; the wounded, ill, those without accommodation etcetera."



Figure 49. a. WWII accommodation sign | b. Poster of LU products | c. Poster by Mucha for LU biscuits

Gilles suddenly suggested that we go in search of different times. "*It's not very cheerful here.*" He did not wish to linger in this area which certainly had a distinct atmosphere. It was a space 'with a mood', an emotionally felt space (Böhme, 2014a, p.96). Spaces 'give rise to distinct experiences - experiences that themselves enliven our imagination in a distinct way...' (Olgati & Breitschmid, 2019, p.58). It was clear that Gilles' imagination had strayed to a time/place in which he did not wish to dwell.

Laurent, Clémence and I had been visiting the museum together for an hour and a half. We'd deliberated over a vast and diverse array of topics and were very comfortable as an ensemble wending our way through the maze of spaces, perusing artefacts and exchanging stories and opinions. The most recent discussion was about the distinction between art deco and art nouveau in the presence of a collection of colourful LU biscuit advertising posters and other paraphernalia of the era (Figure 49b, c). We were now approaching the section on Nantes during the two World Wars. The ambience changed suddenly from one of hope, optimism, colour, brightness and energy to a grey, rather desolate flatness. The spaces in this area were narrow, dim, dreary and seemed to close in on us. A combination of artefacts, stories, lighting and spaces creating a heightened multisensory experience. Our sense of the character of a space is generated by our embodied experience of it and is 'perceived in a diffuse and peripheral manner...' (Pallasmaa, 2014c, p.19). The dreariness was pervasive and intensified the overall experience of this section.

Both Laurent and Clémence had grandfathers who'd served during the First World War. Laurent's grandfather had completed two years of his military service just prior to the outbreak of the First World War and spent another four years in the army once the War began. He was posted to Berlin and managed to survive but like many other returned soldiers, couldn't bear to talk about it. Clémence's grandfather had left only his Zouave uniform with the family.

"I didn't know much because when people go to war, they don't want to talk about it. But actually [the museum] was able to explain that given the embroidery he had on the sleeve of that [Zouave] uniform, he was a sniper. We absolutely did not know this. He passed away a very long time ago. But it's a shame to lose important things like this in life" Clémence, participant

With the arrival of Afro-American troops (Figure 50a) from across the Atlantic during the first world war, came a new style of music, syncopated ragtime, or early jazz. The first European jazz concert took place in 1918 in Nantes. *"These are the Americans [black soldiers] from the war of 14-18. In fact, they brought us jazz... They were not considered as sub-human at all in France, so for them it was wonderful because we French welcomed them. They brought us music and a lot of other things. When they returned home, it was traumatic because of course..."* Margot couldn't bring herself to finish the sentence, lapsing into silence, then changing the subject. A number of participants were highly appreciative of the Afro-American soldiers for bringing so much ongoing pleasure in the form of jazz, but it was only Margot who went further, comparing their welcome in France to the very distressing racial discrimination perpetrated upon them in their home country. Yet again the experience of 'empathic unsettlement' (La Capra, 2001) was evident; an affective, respectful and critical awareness of the experiences of these Afro-American soldiers, experiences she knows are not her own. The

sudden subsequent change of subject came in the form of a photo of ‘The White Angels’ (Figure 50b), nurses at the bedsides of the wounded, which brought up yet another contentious topic, alcoholism; *“to raise the morale of the troops during the war, they encouraged them to drink, which resulted in alcoholism in many cases.”* Margot revealed another little known, deleterious and continuing impact of war; one that had ongoing ramifications not only for the soldiers themselves but for their families and communities.



Figure 50. a. Afro-American soldiers, WW1 | b. White Angels, WW1 | c. Photo of Laurent's father

Making our way downstairs towards the second world war section, I was about to discover what Clémence and Laurent were referring to earlier when they had spoken rather cryptically about Laurent's 'family place'. *“There are sections of the museum that resonate with the personal stories of the visitors, and it is in these moments that things begin to happen,”* explained a staff member. Laurent's father had been in the resistance. *“He's there in that photo,”* pointed out Clémence (Figure 50c). *“My father was requisitioned during the war by the Compulsory Labour Service. He was going to be sent to Germany. He refused so had to go into hiding and was hidden by people from the resistance... And that's my aunt,”* continued Laurent.

The remains of a pair of old broken glasses (Figure 51b), a battered brown suitcase and items of clothing that had seen better days sat alone, bereft in the task lighting, suffused with life, meaning, a past and an atmosphere. They were a direct and very personal connection to memories, stories, lives and history. *“And those are his glasses and suitcase from when he was deported,”* explained Clémence. At the age of 18, Laurent's father had risen through the ranks of the resistance fairly quickly until he was captured and imprisoned in a concentration camp. Laurent added, *“That's what's left of his glasses anyway. He was as blind as a bat, but using the broken glasses, he could see a little bit. My aunt was his liaison officer... My father died in a car accident in 1969... I gave the museum everything from that period; mostly objects connected to his deportation. That's one of his revolvers that he'd kept.”* The broken glasses and the suitcase were on the one hand such ordinary everyday items, yet for Laurent these were brimming with affect and meaning. He vacillated between withdrawn and informative, interjecting when he felt the need to elaborate yet on the whole remaining somewhat apart, leaving Clémence to recount the story.



Figure 51. a. Concentration camp clothing | b. "...what's left of his glasses" | c. Shell casing vases

The Germans had tortured Laurent's aunt for information on his father's whereabouts. She was deported prior to him and was convinced until after the War, that her betrayal was the cause of his capture and deportation. However, this was not the case. A group of young women from Nantes staged a performance in 2015 based on her life during the war. It was called *'De tant d'horreurs mon coeur devint immense'* (So many horrors; my heart is brimming over). *"It was incredibly moving, I struggled to hold back the tears. A very beautiful performance about the life of two young women from Nantes"* explained Clémence. According to Laurent, his aunt *"was very beautiful, a magnificent woman"* who lived until the age of 94 and spent much of her time visiting schools, presenting at conferences and attending other war-related events. She considered it an obligation; an obligation to remember and to share her memories as a way of paying tribute to all those who had not survived, and to those who like her, had endured the war, and perhaps as a way of fostering intergenerational understanding. Moreover, sharing traumatic memories presents multiple possibilities of coming to know, understand and process those experiences in different ways. *"She was wonderful. Although losing her sight, she was highly articulate and for her it was a duty; to remember and to share those memories was her duty,"* explained Clémence.

The citizens of Nantes have inherited a 'traumatic family and community history' (J. Bennett, 2005, p.146). Hirsch (2012) coined the term 'postmemory' (p.5) to describe how traumatic experiences are transmitted so deeply and affectively to subsequent generations that they seem to be their own memories. The children of those who experienced the 'personal, collective and cultural trauma' of the war have been impacted and shaped by this trauma, as have their children and their children's children. Hirsch goes on to argue that '[p]ostmemory's connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection and creation' (2012, p.5).

On visiting this section with them for the first time, Clémence's young granddaughter Lila cried *"oh, what luck to have your father in the museum!"*. Lila was responding to the institutional authority of museums, the fact that having one's family artefacts in a museum is validating. Clémence countered by saying, *"not really because he was deported."* Lila, Clémence went on to explain, had a moment of unsettling revelation as the import of what she'd said connected

with its implications. She'd heard about the war often, as her other grandmother had been deported when a young girl, but it wasn't quite real to her. Lila's convoluted mental journey as she reflected out loud, manifested in a jumble of remarks and questions. Places, times, events and people all co-existed for her in a tangled mass. She struggled to make sense of why Laurent's father, who had subsequently died in a car accident, was there in the museum. Yet, the fact that his photo and belongings were in the museum meant that visiting this section was both enthralling and a compulsion. These objects were personal, important, imbued with meaning, even if Lila wasn't entirely clear about the chronology or the details. They had a strong affective pull for her.

The continuities, discontinuities, gaps in knowledge, ambiguities, mysteries, fears and other affects were generative of imaginative and thoughtful family conversations. Conversations that had the potential to transform traumatic memories through social interaction, and that strengthened affective bonds and the sense of belonging. As Clémence commented earlier, this *"is what happens when there is a personal or family connection to what we see in a museum; it becomes more important, more compelling and more touching."* The museum, and in particular this exhibition provides a spacetime that facilitates intergenerational encounters with personal and collective memories. In the case of Laurent, Clémence and Lila, these encounters also mediated and deepened 'a form of emotional connection with absent family members' (Smith, 2020, p.243). They connected with, examined, elaborated on and re-organised family stories in different ways and from different viewpoints. And in doing so affirmed, legitimised and consolidated family and individual identities and transmitted family values and a strong sense of belonging to this place, this history, and this community.

The dissonant themes of slave trading and war, both steeped in violent and untimely death, suffering, despair and inhumanity, were confronting and unpalatable, yet strangely compelling for participants. The themes had a magnetic attraction, inciting reflection, introspection, re-appraisal and adaptation. In the case of slave trading, the conflicting emotions of horror, shame and pride oscillated back and forth, at once distancing, questioning and affirming. War elicited expressions of collective solidarity and belonging, shock, anxiety and intense unease. Some part of the intensity of these emotions was undoubtedly due to the very close personal nature of the artefacts and stories in this section. Barad (2012) speculates as to whether it takes an encounter with 'the inhuman within us before com-passion – suffering together with, participating with, feeling with, being moved by – can be lived' (p.216). It is perhaps in some measure, this experience that we seek in confronting and dissonant themes. It could equally well be that we seek an encounter with death that is not our own⁷¹. An encounter which simultaneously affords contemplation of the notion of mortality at arm's length and heightens the sense of corporeal materiality, of being alive. Death is, according to the Australian

⁷¹ Seaton's (1996) notion of 'thanatourism' or travel motivated by the desire for encounters with death.

Museum, 'often hidden, sanitised and orderly'⁷² and there are few places where one might legitimately and 'safely' encounter it. In previous centuries, as Kellehear (2007) argues, most people 'were constantly exposed to death and dying' (p.252), yet in today's world, it is rarely discussed or encountered, but very much feared.

By way of contrast, the following highly captivating themes tend towards the pleasurable, inspiring, upbeat and positive, and were less cognitively challenging. They generated uplifting, life-affirming feelings and reflections for the most part; ones that had a relaxing reassuring effect, rendering visitors more expansive, permeable, forthcoming and open to the new, different and unexpected.

6.4 The smell of baking biscuits: a municipal icon

"When I was a child, my grandparents lived on the other side of the factory, and we could smell the biscuits baking. LU is a great source of pride for Nantes and the Nantais."

Laurent, participant



Figure 52. a. LU Petit Beurre biscuit | b. Model of LU tower | c. LU mosaic poster | d. LU biscuit moulds

For participant Laurent, LU, the LeFèvre Utile biscuit company, has deep associations with his childhood, his grandparents and particular locations. Various facets of the iconic LU biscuit company such as the biscuit moulds, merchandise, posters, packaging and the towers are proudly displayed in multiple rooms throughout the museum and were regularly, pleasurably, enthusiastically and knowledgeably elaborated on by participants (Figure 52). Wrote Clémence on the Post Visit Survey (PVS), *"an object that has been used is more 'alive'... thinking...of the biscuit moulds."*

The LU biscuit company was founded in 1850 and is emblematic of this industrial port city. As Evelyne noted, *"the biscuits make sense because they were made to take on the boats since one couldn't take fresh bread..."* She went on to clarify that *"there have been several well-known brands of biscuits. LU of course and BN (Biscuiterie Nantaise) too. All connected to the fact that one needed food to take on the boats."* Originally a staple food of sailors, ship biscuit,

⁷² <https://australian.museum/about/history/exhibitions/death-the-last-taboo/>

sea biscuit or hard tack has a fundamental connection to the maritime industry that has been so central to the economy of Nantes. The biscuits of LU and BN, although a far cry from ship biscuit, are also enmeshed with the triangular trade. *"Sugar was not cultivated locally but was all imported from the West Indies at the time,"* explained Gilles. In stating this, he raised into plain view the ethics of sugar's origins; that which brings sweetness to countless lives, has a cruel and bitter past littered with countless deaths. I had noticed that Gilles with his snippets of information, was adept at attuning to the invisible, the implicit, articulating what was generally left unsaid.

The most famous of LU's biscuits is the Petit-Beurre, intended for children but consumed by all (Figure 52a). Rectangular in shape it has *"small teeth all around. The four corners [of the Petit-Beurre] are the four seasons, the short edge has seven teeth for the days of the week, and the long edge has twelve for the months of the year,"* was how Yvonne remembered it. She was referring to the original biscuit moulds in the glass cabinets in front of us. In fact, the official story is four seasons (corners), 52 weeks (teeth) and 24 hours (holes), all blocks of chronological time that in childhood seem endless. Yvonne went on to say proudly that she has travelled widely around the world and these biscuits are to be found everywhere, *"everyone knows LU biscuits"*. LU biscuits have proliferated rhizomatically across the globe, a testament to the company's marketing department and highly congruent as the product of a port city with seafaring origins. Ports exist after all, as 'passages to elsewhere' (Lingis, 2015, p.173).

For Aurèlie, it was the love story at the heart of the LU biscuit company that captured her imagination. Jean-Romain LeFèvre, a pâtissier married his sweetheart Pauline-Isabelle Utile and together they bought the patisserie for which he worked and transformed it into the now famous biscuit manufacturing business. The quality of the product coupled with innovative packaging, and an understanding of the importance of merchandising that involved well-known Art Deco artists such as Alphonse Mucha, were a winning combination. *"Oh, there is a magnificent mosaic of one of the LU advertising posters,"* exclaimed Margot exuberantly (Figure 52c). Prior to WW1, the organisation grew from 14 workers to employ around 500 men and women in a new factory recognisable by its two lighthouse-like branded towers.

LU biscuits in their many material forms (moulds, packaging, merchandising, posters, biscuits, photos, towers...) are what Kathleen Stewart (2015) calls a compositional node from which 'lines of contact radiate out in a prismatic structure of etchings and refrains' (p.19). Space stretches away from the museum and the 'magnificent mosaic' to the original factory with its twin towers, beyond the factory where Laurent's grandparents once lived and off again to distant places around the globe (2015). Time changes tense from present to past to future and back again, speeding up, slowing down, and looping back to other eras, from a love story through multiple childhoods, visceral memories of the smell of baking biscuits, hours of the day, weeks of the year and the four seasons, before landing back in the present with the pride

of the Nantais. This tangle of elements moves rhizomatically in a proliferation of changing directions, 'singly and in clumps and (opens) onto other things' (Stewart, 2015, p.21).

The brand and its products are part of the 'seething mass of cultural elements' (Edensor, 2020, p.vii) constitutive of the municipal identity of Nantes. Objects such as LU biscuits contribute to a diverse array of social relations, connecting generations, life stages, countries, objects and periods in history. Imbricated with these biscuits are the slave trade, maritime industry, economy of the city, multiple generations, artists, manufacturing, marketing, design and so on. They are 'loaded' with municipal, regional and national significance (2020). Yet, what makes them so compelling is their domesticity, their 'everydayness', their strong associations with childhood and innocence, and their sensory appeal, all of which give them great capacity to attract, to connect with, and to affect individuals in very intimate, pleasurable and nourishing ways. It is at the level of the ordinary, the everyday that we maintain and sustain our connections to each other (Dumm, 2008). With regard to the ordinary and everyday, Victor, a citizen of Nantes, wrote on the PVS, *"I like what has touched the existence of ordinary people for what it reveals about their lives."* And, Kaye from Melbourne added that *"I find that I'm more touched by how things affect ordinary people."*

6.5 The Duchesse Anne and her château

As we walked from the cloak room across the foyer, through the shop towards the museum entrance, Evelyne explained that the museum, located in the Château of Anne of Brittany (Figure 53a) is very much an emblem of the city. *"It's true that for us the Château is simultaneously the Château of the Dukes of Brittany, but it's also very much connected to Anne of Brittany... She is a very important historical figure for us in this region... Here we generally call it the Château of Duchesse Anne rather than the Château of the Dukes."* Entering the darkness of Room two, Anne's room, where a video (Figure 53c) plays on the back wall, one's eye is caught by a glass display case with task lighting directed onto a beautiful golden heart-shaped casket, said to contain the heart of Anne of Brittany (Figure 53b). It is a copy according to Margot, the real heart being *"located in the Dobrée Museum in Nantes."* Born in the Château and heiress to the Duchy of Brittany, Anne was a much sought-after matrimonial prize. Thrice married, she was twice queen consort of France and fought hard throughout her lifetime to safeguard Brittany's autonomy. Unsurprisingly she is a national, regional and municipal icon, and a figure of great pride and interest to all participants. Although the focus of this one room, Anne reappears or rather permeates the museum, as a highly affective real and ethereal presence in the form of portraits, sculptures, books, postcards, videos, interactive devices, maps, memories, narratives, atmospheres and the building itself.



Figure 53. a. Anne of Brittany | b. Anne's heart | c. Video of Anne's story projected onto the stone wall of Room two, Anne's room

The Duchesse and her Château are what Edensor (2002) calls flexible symbols, 'constellation(s) around which cultural elements cohere,' part of the 'huge cultural matrix which provides innumerable points of connection, [and] nodal points' (p.vii) that constitute collective identity. As symbols, Anne and her Château are eternally open to context, elaboration and imaginative reconstruction (Cubitt, 1998, p.3). They mix with other absent and present entities such as 'atmospheres, affects, virtual memories and hauntings' (Stewart, 2015, p.21), swirling with and through the currents, eddies and pools of time, space and matter, connecting, conversing, assembling, disaggregating and moving on, leaving in their wake a flotilla of openings and new potentialities. This is exemplified in the anecdotes that follow.

Victor was fascinated by this period of history and history in general. He explained in great detail how women living at the time of Anne of Brittany were pawns in the pursuit of power, and were often married between the ages of 12 and 15 years. "*Françoise of Dinan, a cousin of François the 1st and Anne's governess, was kidnapped at the age of 12 because she was coveted and also because she was rich.*" He spoke eloquently of the entanglement of the Château, Anne and her antecedents, the city, the river, the museum, and regional and national history. Participants imaginatively connected, disconnected and reconnected all of these elements and many more in creative expressions of their particular versions of the many interconnected, intersecting and diffracting stories. Stories that as Margot wrote, are "*an essential link between past, present and future. The past illuminating the present.*"

The Château (Figure 54) itself has a long, complex and sedimented history, having been built on top of an earlier 11th century building, then extended, amended and reconstructed by various dukes over multiple centuries. And of course, most recently renovated to house the current museum. Yvonne proudly made clear to me that "*the château is one of Nantes' key attractions, not the only one, but one that attracts so many visitors. It's the most emblematic monument of Nantes.*" It functions as an iconic site, a site of congregation, an immersive nexus of great historical depth that literally brings the past to life. Yet for all that, it is also its own entity with a definite atmosphere. Visitors enter and are immediately enveloped, swept up and enfolded into its materiality, its ambience, its lively spatio-temporal connectivity. Direct

experiential contact such as this affords what Cecil & Cecil (2007) call ‘insideness’, a form of tacit knowledge or embodied understanding of place that cannot be realised in any other way (p.241). As Carole commented, in the Château, *“one is imbued with the peaceful atmosphere steeped in history.”*



Figure 54. a. Inside the Château walls | b. Fortified window detail | c. On the ramparts | d. ‘Old stone’

Like the Duchesse, the Château materialised regularly in conversation and in a multitude of forms other than the building; maps, models, videos, interactives, books, paintings, photos, atmospheres, narratives and so on. The sensory experience of it is intense and pervasive as was partly outlined in an earlier chapter, where participants spoke of the embodiment of history in the walls of the Château, the ‘smell of history,’ the ‘sensation of stone and wood’, and the ‘associated historical imaginary’. Laurent, Yvonne and Clémence were captivated by the monumental fireplace, speculating on how the Château might have been configured, how it functioned and was inhabited in Anne’s era. Aurélie disclosed that *“there is a small door that intrigues me... Were people smaller at the time or...?”* She went on to acknowledge that she was particularly taken by the rather solemn resonance in the Château, a sonority which she attributed to the materials and spatial volumes but which likely also encompasses traces of the many embodied voices, lives, events and times.

The Château was at once a ubiquitous, enveloping material and immaterial presence and a distinct force, and as such, did not always register at a conscious level (Anderson, 2009). This made it difficult to determine the full array of its effects. However, participant responses attested to its powerful capacity to touch, to affect, to arouse and intensify meaning, the senses and the imagination, effectuating an ‘opening to possibilities, straying... out of bounds...diverging and touching down again’ (Barad, 2012, p.208). There was also a reassuring sense of being unassailably cocooned in that which endures, is constant, abiding and eternal, and thus of being part of the temporal continuum and of belonging.

6.6 Water, water everywhere

“It [water] dominates here, this is a region defined by water even inland. It is a land of water, there is a multitude of streams and small rivers that flow in all directions. And there’s the Loire, the Erdre... Water is very, very present” Aurélie, participant

Water is an element that strongly resonated with all participants. Water in Nantes is so very much more than a substance, it is a connector, an identifier, an enduring presence, an essence; it manifests as rivers, their tributaries, canals, a means of transport and trade, a source of food and natural beauty, and the lifeblood of the region. Municipal and regional identity narratives are defined by water. Water permeates layers of history, connects places, times, artefacts, people and events. Poetically put, '(p)eople, rivers, time, and space pop with significance' (Stewart, 2015, p.20). Water is a dynamic and cohesive system, a 'mode of resonance among disparate forces' (Grosz, 2012, p.41).



Figure 55. Model of the ancient walled city of Nantes

"This [model of Nantes, Figure 55] explains a little of how it once looked with the Loire everywhere, water everywhere. It was full of islands ... there are not many left now but there were bridges that allowed you to go north and south of the Loire... It's good to see how it was before, it helps to understand how the city is; it explains a lot about how to live in the city. It's a city with an ancient past." Evelyne, participant

Here, Evelyne is assembling and being assembled. She is at a point where thought, matter, history and substance converge (Buchanan & Lambert, 2005), where the past erupts into the present, facilitating an understanding of the city and how to live in it. Evelyne is corroborating the centrality of water, the city's antiquity, its history and its ancestry and in so doing, affirming her own association with it. Contemplating a painting (Figure 56c) later, she describes the region with great feeling, as one of the most beautiful areas in France; the section from Nantes following the river north towards other Châteaux of the Loire.

"...there is a very special light; the atmosphere really is unique. There are roads that run alongside the Loire for kilometres. The section between Nantes and Tours is similar, there's consistency; it is truly very beautiful. And it was also very active in the past with trade; boats from all over carried a range of goods to the port of Nantes. I love it; there's a particular atmosphere. I love that section there (in the painting). The Loire is a very special river, it's a river with islands, with so many things - it's just beautiful, very beautiful to see. It's wild too. It's hard to explain, but it's very special." Evelyne, participant

"It's very beautiful, there are reeds everywhere, flocks of birds... You can take a boat from Nantes to St Nazaire; there's a very distinctive ecosystem, rare bird species... I really love it."
 Carole, participant



Figure 56. a. b. d. Maps of the Loire river and islands of Nantes | c. Painting: upper reaches of the Loire

Struggling to find words that do justice to what she feels, Evelyne nevertheless evokes the odours of earth, grass and decomposing vegetation that the river emits, unleashing feelings, emotions, recollections and other bodily responses. She is in a state of 'seemingly absent-minded floating attention or a fluid sensibility' (Braidotti, 2006b, p.146) that intensifies her capacity to feel, sense and process. She is on a journey, immersed in a heightened state of perception-memory-imagination, collating snippets of sensation from the past into an atemporal yet coherent and highly evocative stream of consciousness in the present. Thought has become sensation or affect (Arsic, 2005). She has surrendered, moved beyond her 'limited self' to 'a complex of multiple connections, sensations, perceptions and imaginings' (Braidotti, 2006b, p.178). Simondon describes participation for an individual as 'the fact of being an element in a greater individuation', of entering into a 'problematic larger than its own being' wherein the individual opens up to potentials and to becoming more than itself (Grosz, 2017, p.186). Participation requires the individual to relinquish a degree of self-containment, to become more permeable, more fluid, and so enter into new relations, a different kind of becoming (Grosz, 2017). As Merleau-Ponty (1964) puts it, the 'world is all around me... I live in it from the inside: I am immersed in it' (p.164). Immersion can provide a temporary escape from the containment, limitations, regulations and habits of collective existence (Grosz, 2017). It can lift the spirits and impart a sense of transcendence that is often lacking in everyday life (Brookner, 1998).

Connection to nature manifests in an appreciation of the quality of the light, the atmosphere and the ambiance, to the river islands and savage beauty. Paintings, maps, photos and other artefacts lift the spirits, evoke the sound of the water surging past. A timeless swirl of sensations, thoughts, images and memories. And boats; boats that keep appearing materially, in conversation, in image, in narrative and in myriad materials, forms and dimensions (Figure 57c). Boats embody history, functional design, communal festivities and the alluring world of buccaneers and pirates (Figure 57d). Ships are heterotopias par excellence says Foucault

(1984), and in 'civilizations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates' (p.9).

"This boat is very unusual, it is typical of the boats that navigated the Loire...There are some sections that are not very deep, but this one would manage it." Victor, participant

"It's [festival of jazz and boats] on the waterfront and many different types of boats like these come to Nantes; simple, unsophisticated boats." Evelyne, participant

"... lanterns, buccaneers; I love it (Figure 57d)! They evoke such glamorous fantasies, yet the reality was much more sinister and possibly bleaker than we could imagine." Carole, participant



Figure 57. a. Eel spear | b. Embroidery | c. Loire river boat | d. Buccaneer chest, lantern & boat model

Perception and memory function in tandem in a continuous and rhythmic, generative feedback loop, claims Bergson (1990). Without memory, perception has no meaning and without perception there is no memory. Perception is what 'propels us toward the present, the real, to space, objects, matter... while memory is that which impels us toward consciousness, to the past and to duration' (Grosz, 2005, p.97). Following Bergson, Grosz (2005) defines duration as experiential, non-linear time rather than chronological time. And it is this type of time that we are immersed in at the museum. In space, we perceive objects which generate memories that we reconfigure or transform in the present context to create something new each time. The pleasurable memory of sailors' earrings is one such instance. An iron eel spear (Figure 57a) was the artefact and stimulus that brought forth the childhood memory of the Loire, the sailors who fished it for a living and their fascinating earrings. For Evelyne as a young child, the earrings were an identifying feature of the sailors living along the Loire.

"This [spear] is used to fish for eels. When I was little, I really liked those earrings because the sailors who fished and lived on the Loire all had earrings. They were their earrings; for men, not for women." Evelyne, participant

All encounters are transformations of the past in the present. Our scope of action enlarges contends Bergson (1990), according to the number and distance of the points in space with

which we connect at any encounter. This explains why encounters are so important to our capacity to act. In three short sentences describing an encounter with the eel spear, Evelyne had connected eel fishing, a moment in her childhood, earrings and the sailors who wore them. She evoked the livelihood and lifestyle of the sailor-fishermen who lived along the Loire at that period in history, and the very pleasing earrings that were a gender-specific identifying feature. The essence of that eel spear, touched, opened out and transformed into a vibrant and resonant imaginary in process; one that continued to expand, redolent with sensation and open-ended. During an event, we cannot know an object in its entirety, we know it only 'as an edging into experience' (Manning, 2016, p.48). As such, the experience of an object like the eel spear, is never finite nor contained by the parameters of either the object or subject itself (2016).

"These are everyday objects... It was the men who embroidered in Brittany, not the women. It is very, very beautiful this embroidery (Figure 57b)." Evelyne, participant

Water, waterways, the ocean and its tides characterise the city and its history. It is the common thread, the ever-present and sometimes invisible connective refrain around which life in the city revolves at one level or another. *"But it's interesting because in Nantes there is still a lot of water; there's the Loire. There are many rivers, they're here under the bitumen. The Erdre; here in the centre,"* explained Evelyne. This thread is 'highly generative [of] interconnections which mix and match, mingle and multiply possibilities of expansion and growth' (Braidotti, 2006b, p.171). The fluctuating tides and connection to the nearby Atlantic provide a breath of fresh salty air, the promise of adventure, an opening out onto the world. An expansive world, rich with a passing parade of potentialities, coming and going like boats on the river. Providing a 'proliferation of enlivening connections with the world...' (Lorraine, 2005, p.163).

"What I also like is the relationship that we have with the sea (Figure 59b). Even here in Nantes, the Loire has tides. As I passed...moments ago the water was very high. I love this relationship we have with the ocean. I have the impression that it is an opening onto the world. We're here close to the estuary that opens out to the world. I really feel it. The Atlantic is not very far away, so even in Nantes we get the sea air. As soon as I distance myself, the air is not the same... The reality is that here in Nantes, you will always see a boat, the water..." Aurélie, participant



Figure 58. a. b. c. Marquetry map of the Loire river and its tributaries inset into the floor of room 10

There was no actual water amongst the museum exhibits, yet it was ever-present. Water took the form of maps, paintings, illustrations, photos, videos, models, marquetry (Figure 58), bridges, interactives (Figure 59c), artefacts including a multitude of boats and ships, and the trades, commodities, people and livelihoods associated with them. These materialisations of water demonstrate the ‘strange ability of ordinary, man-made items to exceed their status as objects and to manifest traces of independence or aliveness, constituting the outside of our own experience’ (Bennett, 2010, p.xvi). Water was also very present in history and the stories from medieval times, through the slave trading era and into the present.



Figure 59. a. Still from the video ‘City Portrait’ by Pierrick Sorin | b. “The relationship we have with the sea,” seagoing sailing ship | c. “An opening onto the world,” interactive screen & associated painting

One artistic materialisation that encapsulates the importance of water and the river to Nantes, is the short film, ‘City Portrait’ on a loop by artist Pierrick Sorin⁷³ in the last room (Figure 59a). It shows an atemporal flotilla of animated boats drifting by on the Loire, each humorously and concurrently enacting key events in the history of the city from ancient times to 2015. The humour, multiple changing viewpoints and dynamic nature of the film go well beyond what a linear flow of events from a single perspective might represent (J. Bennett, 2005, p.73). Objects, scenes and configurations are in a state of continual flux, of continual becoming as they are reordered, and change direction and proximity. The two constants are the flowing river and Sorin who plays every character (with a few exceptions) no matter the age, gender, role or era. A highly fitting and moving finale to the chronological visit that humorously plays havoc with linearity and beautifully sums up the content of the museum.

⁷³ <https://vimeo.com/140073118>

6.7 Postscript

Themes and the assemblages that formed around them rather than individual visits were the focus of this chapter, and the resonant themes, subjects and exhibitions outlined were, I found, generative of collective memories that sustain a community identity which in turn facilitates cultural cohesion and the continuity of its social life (Trofanenko, 2011). These themes were also co-opted in the ongoing process of individuation as participants 'domesticated and tamed, adopted and adapted' (Edensor, 2002, p.34) cultural elements. Affects were manifested as narratives, memories, emotions and feelings. Dissonant histories evoked empathy, curiosity, horror, confusion, fear, pride, guilt, shame and inadequacy, all of which disturb, disrupt and jolt us out of habitual responses and 'force us to think' (Deleuze, 2000, p.95). On Deleuze's view, thinking is 'confrontation with chaos... allowing more of what is *not* ourselves to transform what we take ourselves to be' (Colebrook, 2010, p.4), or stated differently, the incorporation of 'otherness' (Edensor, 2002, p.34). It is in incorporating otherness, that we adapt habits, expand our worlds, foster resilience and are able to connect with more, and more of what is different.

The exhibitions, sections and themes that were so resonant, seemed to loosely fall into two groups. Those that were confronting, challenging and ethically thought-provoking, and those that were congenial, affirming and productive of positive sensations. Within these resonant assemblages, participants were simultaneously sustaining the comforting rhythms of the familiar and harmonious, whilst also confronting the new, launching forth and hazarding improvisation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Without exception, each participant in all museums, took me to both types, and it is these two types that form the focus of the next chapter. I stress here that these are not binary types but complex continua. In any of the assemblages that formed, there was always a diverse and embrangled array of intersecting, overlapping and diffracting effects and affects.

7. THE CONSONANT AND DISSONANT IN MELBOURNE AND WELLINGTON

7.1 Sensing bodily responses

What this chapter brings into focus are the assemblages and affects that form with-in the two types of content identified in the previous chapter, the dissonant and the consonant. Firstly though, let me stress again that these types are not static binaries, but are paradoxically complicated by the inclusion of the other. Each, to use Marx's words, is 'pregnant with its contrary'⁷⁴. As such, both types of histories are capable of instigating flickers, nudges or niggles, and also 'gut punches' or harsh 'visceral jolts' (Dernikos et al., 2020, p.3) that open onto the alterity with which matter is suffused (Barad, 2012). How they are encountered and interpreted is subject to the different memories, 'backgrounds, experiences, interests, and agendas' (Message & Witcomb, 2015, p.xxxvi) of participants. What I have loosely defined as dissonant content is either explicitly or implicitly saturated in violence, death, suffering, discrimination and inhumanity and tends to be simultaneously confronting and discordant, yet fascinating and productive. Consonant content, on the other hand tends to inspire, evoking wonder and affection, and is for the most part reassuring, affirming, uplifting and expansive.

Participants lingered in both consonant and dissonant sections, delighting in cognitive challenges and bodily sensations. Nature and art produced wonder and inspiration, whilst encounters with violence, death and inhumanity were absorbing, fascinating, horrifying and perturbing. There was what seemed to be, an unconscious movement back and forth between these types of content that was energising, expansive and ultimately capacitating. Body language underpinned remarks and accounts. Muscle tension, stance, posture, gestures and facial expressions along with pace, pitch, rhythm, timbre and tone of voice, spoke eloquently of circulating affects. As I have explained in the methods chapter, much of the collective bodily responses occurring in intra-active posthuman sociomaterial assemblages are intuited in the moment, rather than consciously identified. In the accounts that follow, I have endeavoured to provide a sense of the affective resonances, attunement, embodied responses, rhythms, atmospheres and intensities of these encounters.

The consonant content under investigation includes municipal and national icons, art and nature, and dissonant themes include war and colonisation. Unlike the previous chapter the selected exhibition accounts are not necessarily those that most participants chose, however, they are representative of the intensity of affective engagement with-in particular types of

⁷⁴ Speech at the anniversary of the People's Paper, 1856
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1856/04/14.htm>

content. Some of these have previously been discussed, but will now be further examined through data from Melbourne Museum and Te Papa in Wellington with a view to clarifying the contribution they make to wellbeing.

7.2 Consonant, affirming content: *Te Marae*, contemporary art, nature

Consonant artefacts, themes or histories here, are largely harmonious and sustaining histories. They are histories that are compatible with what we already know, think or feel, and so are affirming and engender a sense of wellbeing, belonging, ease and comfort. This does not mean that they are not thought provoking, but rather that the manner in which they engage, incite and open up is through affects such as curiosity, wonder, inspiration and imagination rather than discomfort or disruption. One might say, the carrot rather than the stick. Through affirmation and immersion in positive, expansive sensation, consonant histories encourage relaxation, porosity and openness to the new and different. Potency of sensation, inspiration, awe, ambiguity, unexpected juxtapositions, inconsistency and contradiction are provocative. What seems to be important, as the following examples highlight, is the intensity of bodily engagement, a ‘dwelling in sensation’ (Dernikos et al., 2020, p.4).

7.2.1 *The magic of Te Marae at Te Papa Tongarewa*

“I’d like to go up here and show you one of my favourite things. I’ve attended quite a few talks up here in the marae, which is just dazzling, it’s just gorgeous. I just think that this is so beautiful. I find it beautiful because I love colour and the way light plays on things. And I’m not wedded to the traditional because I just think things move and change.” Joyce, participant



Figure 60. Wellington | a. Stained glass window | b. c. d. Details of *Te Marae*

Functioning as a nexus between Māori and non-Māori or pākehā, is *Te Marae* with its unusual allure, its capacity to attract, connect and affect in an intense and positive manner. A marae is a traditional Māori public forum and sacred meeting place and although, to all intents and purposes, hidden away on the top floor of the museum, this marae’s presence can be felt throughout the building once you realise what it is that you are sensing.

Every participant either took me or attempted to take me to *Te Marae*, a well-loved and frequented area. It was closed for functions and filming on two occasions. Participants were tremendously proud of it. Not typical, nor by any means traditional, this marae had apparently caused some controversy – in the media at any rate – when it opened with the museum 20 years ago. It is a contemporary, light-filled and unexpectedly colourful interpretation of a traditional marae with all of its symbology, and a living intra-active exhibition that showcases Māori culture. Brightly coloured, it is covered in multi-layered sculptures of curved, shaped and twisted plywood (Figure 60b, c, d). In stark contrast to the heavier, darker and more earthy traditional marae, it is very distinctive and has a strong magnetic force, attracting, captivating and holding the attention and imagination of visitors from many cultures and walks of life. Opposite *Te Marae*, stained glass windows open onto a deck that looks out across the waterfront; quite a ‘magical experience.’ (Figure 60a). The Māori tribes or ‘iwi’ take turns as tribe and thus co-curator ‘in residence’ in *Mana Whenua*, the ‘People of the Land’ exhibition space next door, and as hosts and custodians of *Te Marae*. Both Julia and Edgar, like Joyce were highly appreciative of *Te Marae*:

“And when I first saw it, I thought ‘this ain’t gonna work’ because it’s so different, so modern. But it has been really well liked and appreciated... So, it’s become very much a welcoming space. And it’s kind of broken down some barriers. I think if you always keep something traditional without opening it up to new ideas or allowing people’s thoughts to progress, it stifles creativity. This sort of thing really opens up creativity, it allows you to think outside the square and do something quite different. And to have it accepted is wow! It should encourage other people to do the same...” Julia, participant

“So, this is the place that I like up here which was quite controversial when the building was first opened. I like the modern take and the materials that it’s constructed with. So, yeah, I actually really like it. It’s like taking your culture forward a step. I don’t think there’s anything like this in New Zealand at all.” Edgar, participant

Like all former colonies, New Zealand has a history fraught with conflict, aggression and dispossession. The lands of the traditional custodians were appropriated when colonial powers established dominion over the country. Spaces like *Te Marae* and *Mana Whenua* acknowledge, recognise, embrace and move towards mitigating the impact of, and overcoming the barriers created by these difficult histories. An integral part of Wellington life, *Te Marae* pays tribute to the bicultural nature of New Zealand and is used for many purposes and seems to accommodate them all with aplomb: poetry readings, lectures, dance performances, book launches, conference openings, official and traditional ceremonies, and rites of passage. It is truly a space that is alive, brimming with energy, purpose, movement, pride and a sense of belonging. As a staff member said, *“It’s not just something from the past but something that’s continually evolving.”* Curiously, *Te Marae* doesn’t feel like part of a museum, it is very much

its own entity. Looking up, that long flight of austere stone stairs carries you into the clouds (Figure 61), or so it seems, aligning beautifully with the Māori name for New Zealand, Aotearoa, land of the long white cloud.



Figure 61. Wellington | a. b. Corridor & stairs leading to Te Marae | c. View of the harbour at the top

I was fortunate to visit *Te Marae* with Chris, a member of one of the Māori tribes. Arriving at the top of that long and daunting flight of stairs, both of us were surreptitiously puffing, looking out across the panoramic view of the harbour whilst pausing to recover our breath (Figure 61c). *“It’s always a great kick walking up here and seeing the harbour from this vantage point.”* He was right, the view is spectacular even on this slightly overcast day. He walked on, I followed. We entered the big, light, open, airy main space. Chris was walking into familiar, home territory. For me, it was entirely new.

Blue-eyed and tanned, Chris has Dutch and Māori ancestry and the racial features of both. It’s the clear blue eyes and direct, assessing, yet friendly gaze that are startling, and just a tiny bit intimidating! There is also an underlying warmth. His tribal land, his ‘spiritual home’, which although far to the south, made its appearance. *“I was born in Oamaru, about 2.5 hours’ drive south of Christchurch. It’s where one of the Matahui marae is, Waihao, it’s on a river called the Waihao just north of the Waitaki river... The land is such an anchor. I’ve been living here [Wellington] for 50 years but every time I go back to the South Island, it’s like going home.”* Here he paused and in the space between, I was caught up in an imaginary of his tribal land; untamed, unpopulated hills, unruly vegetation, big spaces and open skies, bird calls, water gushing over boulders and flowing away in a big wide stream. In the Māori view of existence, like many indigenous cultures, everything is interconnected and ‘*Mauri*, or striving to persevere in being, is the animating force of all being and becoming’ (Bignall & Rigney, 2019, p.162). This is what Spinoza termed *conatus*. The capacity of a river for example, to maintain and support life, is what determines its *mauri* (2019).

I ask how Chris feels about how this marae has been interpreted. *“It doesn’t bother me as this isn’t a traditional marae, a stand-alone building on a marae site, it’s a ceremonial place and I think it does it well. And it’s still got the ancestors, just interpreted in a different way. Because in traditional meeting houses, the vertical wooden posts around the house represent your*

ancestors and the carvings represent who they were, who their children were. I don't think anyone I know of objects to it." The space that incorporates *Te Marae* is, as Chris observes, a ceremonial place, a place of encounter and connection teeming with history, story, ancestors, symbols, affects and intensities. Its colour, strength, vital energy, subtlety and an underlying warmth were irresistible and made for rich, immersive and sensory encounters. The space was always warm; colour and light stream in through the stained-glass window on one side, and colour, shape, dimension and vitality come forward to greet you from the other.

Having only just met, we were getting to know one another, feeling each other out, deciding whether we share any interests, if we can trust. As it happened, we share an interest in the environment and mixed racial heritage, just not the same races. These stood us in good stead as a starting point. Each was a little intrigued by the other, hyper alert to body language, tone of voice and a multitude of other nuances. We matched pace, rhythm and trajectory, responding to our surrounds and each other. Walking with someone 'is a powerful way of communicating about experiences; one can become 'attuned' to another, connect in a lived embodied way with the feelings and corporeality of another. Walking with another opens up a space for dialogue where embodied knowledge, experience and memories can be shared' (O'Neill & Hubbard, 2011, n.p.).

We talked about trust and relationships between Māori and non-Māori. *"Yes, it's very much relationship that is at the core of connectedness. Often, Māori can seem quite standoffish. They don't come and talk to you but if you talk to them, you start to build the connection. It's important not to see that as arrogance or not wanting to connect. Often it's just that you haven't yet found a bridge of common interest...It's about seeking out who you are – whether you can be trusted. Once trust is gained, it's fine."* 'Kinship, reciprocity, hospitality and respect for life are key Māori values' (Bignall & Rigney, 2019, p.162) and this was crystal clear in all that Chris conveyed. I felt fortunate to be sharing these insights which afforded a bridge into a different worldview: one where plants, animals, the climate, atmospheres and ancestral presences and spirits are sentient and agentic (Todd, 2016, p.16). Crossing boundaries like this, 'forces participants to take a fresh look at their longstanding practices and assumptions and can be a source of deep learning' (Tsui & Law, 2007, p.1290), reflection, connection and transformation.

We also talked about being Māori in New Zealand. *"That's why I'm here and that's why I support my Māori culture because that is part of who I am, the main part because even though I'm Dutch, it's not an everyday thing. Whereas being Māori in New Zealand is! Every day, all the time!"* Chris is comfortable here in *Te Marae*. It is a home away from his spiritual, ancestral and everyday homes, or perhaps all homes interwoven in this one place. *"I've been here many times and of course for the three years that we [the tribe] were in residence I was probably here once a month. We were the hosts during that time, so welcomed other tribes*

and dignitaries from overseas here.” Te Marae is an intense and subjective nexus entangling Māori and European cultures, tribe, country, overseas dignitaries, ancestors, a colonial history, a breached treaty, subsequent negotiations, a legal process, and recompense. It is a place teeming with affect, ‘haunted by many different spirits’ (De Certeau, 1984, p.108), a rich turbulent brew of history, culture, emotion, meaning and memories. Te Marae is a mysterious contradiction, at once forcefully compelling, fierce, exciting, dynamic and otherworldly, yet also welcoming, inclusive, nurturing, peaceful and full of promise. Promise of what, I could not say, but it is an intense and charismatic entity; an assemblage with a very strong presence, one that discharges powerful ‘emotive energies’ (Navaro-Yashin, 2009, p.1).



Figure 62. Wellington | a. b. Treaty area | c. Detail of Treaty, image by Neerav Bhatt

Implicit in *Te Marae* is New Zealand’s colonial history and the much contested Treaty of Waitangi. The Treaty (Figure 62) signed in 1840, made New Zealand part of the British Empire and the Māori people, British subjects. However, the terms of the agreement were interpreted or understood quite differently, and as Chris pointed out, *“it has been much honoured in the breach rather than the observance and a process was started by the Labour government in the 1980s to extend the mandate for the Waitangi tribunal to hear claims back to 1840... They bought our land for a pittance, but they said ‘oh, we’ll provide hospitals and schools, and you can have your reserves’. None of which was done. We estimated that the loss over the years between then and now was \$XXX. We had some good advice and some of the tribal elders were quite firm, and this had been going on for a long time. So, these sorts of places are special.”* He was referring to places of positive bi-cultural intra-action such as *Te Marae*.

Te Marae has a capacity to systematically elicit connection and affection amongst participants from diverse backgrounds. It is simultaneously expansive, positive and consonant, and an embodiment of dissonant history. Moving into this space inspires reflection, ‘thinking in the act’ as Manning (2016) would say, summoning ‘intensities toward a coming-to-expression, a thinking directly imbued with rhythm, with feeling’ (p.24). *Te Marae* is a complex layering and embodiment of symbology, myth, legend, history, past, present and future. Its vitality and effervescence are due in part to the energy, admiration and goodwill that people bring to it. *“I really like the place right at the top... I think it’s beautiful. I love it. It’s one of my favourite places,”* affirmed participant Amy as we headed towards the stairway leading to *Te Marae*.

Entities such as *Te Marae* afford shared meaning, deeper understanding and often, unexpected and transformative conversations.

7.2.2 The joy of contemporary art at Te Papa Tongarewa



Figure 63. Wellington | a. b. c. *Indra's Bow* by Tiffany Singh

"Oh, wow, that's fabulous!" Amy and I are on the top floor in the contemporary art section and have just encountered *Indra's Bow* by artist Tiffany Singh (Figure 63). It's a collection of natural substances with healing properties such as herbs, spices, grains, minerals and gemstones. Singh explains that the work looks into *"the way that we are so connected to the environment around us and how that fundamentally defines our wellbeing."*⁷⁵ Suspended from the ceiling by coloured ribbons, small glass globes contain the substances and are arranged by colour to form a gigantic rainbow backlit with natural light from the large horizontal frosted windows behind it. The olfactory element precedes the visual, we had smelt the spices before we saw the rainbow. This work in its simultaneous rendering of the olfactory in colour, texture and form, was a materialisation of 'the action of invisible forces on the body' (Deleuze, 2003, p.41). The perceptions produced were rich and complex, embracing memories, emotions, associations and a strong sense of embodiment.

"That's joyous! What's in all of those glasses, they look like flowers? We were just talking about the senses. Very powerful." Joyous seemed the right word to describe this work, which heightened the senses, forcing us into a greater awareness of our bodies through the intensity of sensation. *"Definitely Indian spices aren't they. Now we're moving towards a different colour. Oh, it was hot up there and it's getting to be..."* Nostrils flare as we sniff the air, dawdling alongside the rainbow towards the cool end. Although it seems like a contradiction in terms, the aromas of the spices are both strong, heady and exotic, yet fleeting, ephemeral and fugitive. *"Isn't it funny, that's a rainbow up there which I recognise walking the other way! I enjoyed the hot end more than I enjoyed the cold end... I just feel more comfortable along there [warm end]. It's happier - it's just in my head but this end is not so lively. I suppose it's a good idea - when we go out, we'll be on top of the world."* Amy went on to describe some personal associations that she and her sister had with particular colours.

⁷⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T3zPjtzZ11s>

We walk on through the optical illusion room and watch a young boy interacting with a black and white kaleidoscope video. A childhood memory and a little bit of magic appears. *“See that boy’s enjoying that isn’t he? ... it’s wonderful because it’s so fresh and new! I remember my dad made me a kaleidoscope when I was little, and I thought it was magic. I have the idea that it is just never the same because everything is moving, and it just carries on forever until you turn it off. Actually, if you watch that for too long, you get a bit dizzy. That’s fabulous isn’t it, the way that your eye makes it look like a wheel turning around.”*

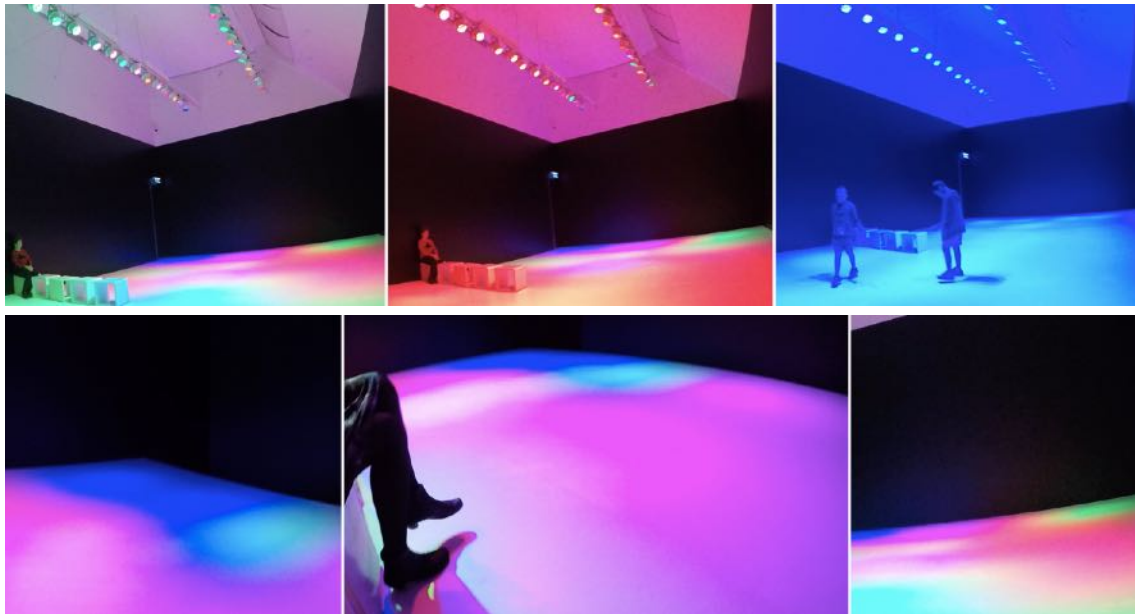


Figure 64. Wellington | a. b. c. d. e. f. *Total Internal Reflection* by Tiffany Singh

We next enter an immersive installation. The TePapa website⁷⁶ explains that artist Tiffany Singh ‘believes engaging with the arts can improve physical and mental health. She intends *Total internal reflection* to be an expression of our collective wellbeing through colour.’ The spacious room radiates a soft cool Antarctic blue with patches of green, mauve and magenta as we enter (Figure 64). Colour-code notwithstanding, the ambient temperature is agreeable as is the quality of the slightly luminescent light. *“Look, you can get the headsets for that. It’s like an ice-skating rink isn’t it. Oh, it’s gorgeous, it’s like being in a rainbow. Can we sit down for a little while?”* This installation had lured Amy with its siren song of pure colour, pure light and a sense of wellbeing. The space was sparsely furnished with a group of mobile stools over to one side and a small number of other visitors. There were headsets promising the experience of hearing colour in the form of seven healing soundscapes linked to the seven chakras or main energy centres of the body.

⁷⁶ <https://www.tepapa.govt.nz/visit/exhibitions/toi-art/tiffany-singh-indras-bow-total-internal-reflection>

"You feel as if you shouldn't be walking across a rainbow don't you!" It is the purity and liveliness of the colour/light that gives this impression; one shrinks at the thought of sully or damaging it in any way. She steps gingerly across to the stools choosing a colour in response to my query. *"The purple pink, that would be lovely. It's like looking through red cellophane."* The light has a tangible, bodily presence and is difficult to describe. The room is sodden, it's an ocean of ethereal, yet colour-saturated light. I want to say that we are immersed in colour, breathing in light and drifting along in gentle currents of a warm living space. It is a relaxing, almost mesmerising and even meditative experience. Our bodies cast diffuse and at times, multiple and differently coloured shadows, and although you can choose a colour, the light has its own life, breathing in, from one or many colours and out, to many or one other. *"It's a beautiful green, isn't it? At this time of the year, all the new spring growth is that colour especially in Melbourne. My daughter lives in Preston and I love catching the bus in. It's such a lovely drive. I just enjoy the trees. It's wonderful and so simple isn't it! Connecting it up - what a lovely idea."* The colour becomes entangled with the season, and seasonal rhythms, other places and family members, the experience of catching a bus and enjoying a drive along green tree-lined streets in a different city and a different country. All producing positive enjoyment and appreciation.

There is a rich story behind this multi-sensory, therapeutic light installation that connects Buddhist ideas, Hindu Sanskrit texts, the chakras, the different energies and healing power of colour, and colour theory. The installation responds to the colour selections of visitors, so is a collaborative work in a constant state of flux. Installation, environment, artist and visitor merge in a dynamic and ongoing process of creation. Back in our living ocean of colour, we were experiencing a vibrant magenta that connected to other natural phenomena. *"Oh, we're on fire. It's like a lovely sunset. I'd certainly like to bring my granddaughter along to this."* We discuss our perceptions of the temperature of colours, and by this time I am not at all convinced that it's possible to separate out the senses, certainly not in this installation. It is a whole of body, multi-sensory, multi-intensity encounter generating perceptions, memories, reflections, connections and altered bodily states. *"Yes, yes. I can never understand why people paint bedrooms blue when they're on the cold side of the house. It reminds me of Easter eggs, that pink. When I was a little girl, we only had Easter eggs that were made of sweet solid stuff, not chocolate, and they were that pink."*

"I think that those creative people...are inspirational," continued Amy. *"They lift you out of 'you' and that's what I like... and normally in everyday life, even if you have a good life, you never get that experience."* In this one short encounter with *Total Internal Reflection*, we had touched on all the senses – individually and together. It was an experience of pure sensation where, as Deleuze (2003) might say there is no self/other distinction, self and world are being produced in sensation. The function of art according to Deleuze (2003), is to render visible the invisible forces which are 'nothing other than the forces of the future' (p.61). By 'forces of the

future', he is referring to potential or that which is real but not yet actualised, what Bogue (2019) describes as the 'amorphous potentialities of chaos' (p.280). Works of art for Deleuze (2003), are 'beings of sensation' in their own right, made up of intensities, forces and rhythms that have the capacity to take us out of ourselves, out of our organised or habituated, socialised bodies, to make us feel and feel differently.

Once outside the installation our conversation moves on to what we enjoy or find stimulating in museums. *"I've lost interest in the Impressionists as I've been around the world to see them. Now that I'm older I don't need to see them anymore. I really like modern things; that wonderful thing that we saw; the spice rainbow... That's what excites me now. I did art history at university, so I know a lot about art, and I don't really want to look at art of other times anymore. I want to be stimulated and excited by stuff at this age. I used to be stimulated and excited by art from other periods but now I want to be stimulated and excited in a different way. This section [contemporary art] has got everything that I told you I liked at the beginning. It's got colours and movement and the light and even perfume. It appeals to every sense doesn't it."* Amy was, I believe, referring to the heightened sense of 'being alive' that only intense sensory experience can produce, much as nature does in the Forest Gallery.

7.2.3 A living temperate rainforest at Melbourne Museum



Figure 65. Melbourne | a. b. c. d. Forest Gallery

The Forest Gallery is a large open-air living temperate rainforest environment replete with a selection of native birdlife, insects, reptiles and amphibians (Figure 65). It connects to the Milarri Garden Trail which showcases plants that are predominantly indigenous to Victoria and significant to Aboriginal Australians of the Southeast. Entering through an airlock off the concourse, comprising two sets of automatic glass doors, one is immediately aware of an earthy smell, a certain dankness and humidity, the natural filtered light of a forest, birdcalls and the sounds of running water and leaves rustling in the breeze. It is so unexpected in a museum to find oneself suddenly out of doors and wallowing in nature. Just being there breathing that oxygen-rich air slows one down, it feels so healthy, so green, so restorative. Melbourne participant, Kaye, explained that this *"...museum has all this living stuff. Aaaahhhh isn't that nice [taking a deep breath]. The temperature doesn't matter that much if there is*

airflow, shade and greenery. I always like looking through this [gap in the rocks with falling water]. I like looking at all the green even if I can't find whatever [creature] I'm looking for."

"Because we're an urban society, you can easily disconnect from nature whereas something like this in a real urban setting... you don't feel that you are in an urban setting...I just find this really peaceful. And I just love the sound," mused participant Naomi. Qualitative evidence suggests that humans are innately drawn to and appreciative of nature and natural forms (Kellert et al., 2011). With over 50% of humankind now living in urban environments and many working in technology mediated roles, it has become increasingly difficult to maintain a connection with nature (Louv, 2008; Wilson, 1984). Research indicates many health and wellbeing benefits of connecting with nature including reduced stress, an enhanced sense of wellbeing, improved productivity, memory, concentration and immunity and increased life expectancy (James et al., 2016; Kellert & Wilson, 1993; Li & Bell, 2018; Ryan et al., 2014). And Richard Louv (2008) in the introduction to his seminal work on nature-deficit disorder, outlines the 'necessity of contact with nature for healthy child - and adult - development' (n.p.).

Says participant Luke, *"I think this is terribly important because water and ferns are relaxing. I think I associate it with Mother Nature and nurture and the fertility of the soil, and the volcanic soil of our ranges."* Luke's sentiments were echoed by Kathy. *"Now this is nice. Now who would think that in the middle of the city that you'd have this? ...Here you can touch the plants. You shouldn't but I do. For visitors that's really good. This feels real... Look, three skinks out sunning themselves on the stones. When you're in something like this you tune in to seeing what's around, what's different."* Kathy noticed that in this setting her senses became more acute, more attuned, that there was the impression of it being real rather than contrived, perhaps due to the unpredictability of nature, the fact that *"animals aren't programmed robots"* as Kaye noted, and that nature is 'eternally strange and surprising' (Giggs, 2020, p.137). Nature sensations 'comprise embodied dimensions of wellbeing, of feeling well' (Coffey, 2020, p.75). Nature provides a space/place/moment of pure 'being', a sense of timelessness, of immersion in the life force, and of peace. Anxieties, troubles and the setbacks of everyday life fade into insignificance.

Kathy's comments affirm architect David Chipperfield's (2021) statement that museums have the power to make 'us look at things we might otherwise overlook' (p.74). Part of that power is connected to being in non-linear, experiential time; timeless time that allows one to relax and to see different things differently. This was very much the case in the Forest Gallery and on the Milarri Garden trail where postures changed as muscles relaxed, deep breaths were taken, and participants lingered, allowing themselves time to really look around and to 'smell the roses', so to speak (Figure 66a, b). As we drifted along the trail, Luke commented that, *"...this is just a nice relaxing little bit of landscape. I'm glad you like it. Isn't a narrow gully something special to all of us. There are things here that impinge on our instincts, I think."*



Figure 66. Melbourne | a. Milarri Garden Trail | b. Turtle pond, Milarri Garden Trail | c. Children spotting turtles, Forest Gallery | d. Skink, Forest Gallery

Meandering through the forest, the flora and fauna triggered reflections, stories and memories including indigenous conceptions of plants and their uses. The participants' collective nature knowledge was astounding and affirming for them to share. They even surprised themselves at times with details they had not previously noticed, and their own knowledge about a particular subject, as the comments below affirm.

"Yes, it is a wet sclerophyll forest, a temperate one... [window onto turtles, Figure 66b]. We've got a few creeks going through Manningham that flow into the Yarra, so we sometimes see a platypus. We did see them late in the afternoon at some stage." John, participant

"Didn't hear the low part of that whip bird. It's usually male and female answering each other [whipbird calls, native quail runs by]. It's great to hear a real one. I thought that it was probably someone pressing a button [smiles]." Sara, participant

"This is just beautiful to me. Look at how many different shades of green... it's that sort of thing that grabs me. We planted 16 different species of eucalypts because of the diversity of leaves. You've got red stems and very green leaves and blue, you've got some circular, some apple shaped and some elongated. There's such diversity and that's why we have so many. The beauty of these...the sheoaks (Figure 66a)." Luke, participant

"That's a yabby or a river cray. Our farm had a huge dam and we used to go yabbing. My son used to go out yabbing. When I think about it now, we shouldn't eat the poor things. Didn't even think about it then..." Louise, participant

"It's lovely! ... [stick insects, Figure 67b]. We've been reading a book at home, the kids and I, about the Lord Howe Island Stick insect. I've had to read it again and again cos my youngest has been getting into it. It's an incredible story how they've been brought back from extinction. They thought they were extinct, and they found 30 of them on this rocky outcrop off the coast of the island and they were the last ones because they'd been wiped out on the

mainland by black rats. They were trying to get rid of the mice and the rats and then release the stick insects back.” Debra, participant



Figure 67. Melbourne | a. Bowerbird | b. Stick Insects | c. d. Black Saturday Chimney memorial

Towards the top of the Forest Gallery, stands a solitary brick chimney near a group of tall timber poles. The chimney is a commemorative marker of the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires in Victoria, some of the worst in Australia (Figure 67c, d). We have a conflicted relationship with fire in Australia. On the one hand, fires periodically and cyclically rage out of control and cause loss of life and a great deal of damage. And on the other hand, for certain species, fire is essential for the germination of their seeds and ultimately their survival. The original custodians of the land have been using fire as a tool to increase productivity and manage forests for tens of thousands of years (Pascoe, 2019). To clear the land or conserve it? That is a question that many a landowner must resolve for herself according to the variables in play. This memorial is also a reminder that although for the most part we regard nature as benign, restorative, nourishing and bounteous, she can also be ferocious, violent, destructive, and deleterious to life. For several participants the memorial activated some very personal memories connected to the event.

“This is Black Saturday. Isn’t that beautiful! I should have brought my camera. It’s really important that you’ve got somewhere in Melbourne that commemorates things like that. I don’t think I’ll ever forget that day. The mother of my best friend from university was buried that day, so I was trying to get across Melbourne on the train and it was like 100 degrees and the trains were breaking down and then when I got out at Malvern where the funeral parlour was, all you could see was just thick, thick smoke all over Melbourne. It was a terrible day, terrible day... My husband’s cousin was at Kinglake. They checked the water levels in the dam, which were down. When I rang them, she said ‘look, we’ve soaked the house down’, but she said they were listening to ABC Lifeline, and she said ‘we’ll do whatever they say!’” Naomi, participant

“Ah, [reading] ‘the area with the tall timber poles represents clearing and burning’...It was called progress, but it was not of course. It was a real craft wood chopping. Must have been

a very hard and dangerous life. No such thing as rotary saws back then [19th century].” John, participant

I was intrigued by John’s anecdote above where he seemed to vacillate between admiration for the craft of wood chopping in the 19th century and acknowledgement of the irreparable damage that the logging industry has done to Australia’s native forests ‘in the name of progress’. This phenomenon of oscillation was present in many remarks and conversations throughout the study. Participants conducted dialectical monologues out loud, presenting conflicting views on ethical issues, human rights, slave trading, war, climate change, genetic engineering, progress and other unresolved and unresolvable matters. It was a form of reflection, a personal examination from multiple perspectives similar to viewing an artefact from many different angles in order to form a synthesis. The synthesis in this case being an articulation of viewpoints for further examination, or perhaps a display of awareness or knowledge about a topic rather than a quest for resolution. John’s reference to ‘progress’ brought to mind Walter Benjamin’s (1970) apt description of progress as a ‘storm that propels into the future beyond the pile of debris that is the wreckage of the past’ (p.258).



Figure 68. Melbourne | a. c. Forest Gallery | b. Between the Forest Gallery & Milarri Garden Trail

The Forest Gallery is an unusual inclusion in a major museum and quite a differentiator as John, Noah and Evan observed. But the Forest Gallery and Milarri Garden Trail are more than just differentiators. As showcases of the native vegetation of both Victoria and Australia, they function as regional and national icons, as evidenced by several comments on identity. There is also a connection with Indigenous Australians, although unless one consults the website, it is a well-hidden piece of information as is the Trail itself.

“This is very, very good! It’s gives definition, identity, something like that... Yes, it’s good the way they’ve done this isn’t it? I think it’s very unique.” John, participant

“This is always an attractive area to start because it’s unusual. I rather like to see trees in the building. I remember when they built this, and they said that there would be an indoor forest it was a strange idea for a major museum, so this is always interesting to look at.”

Noah, participant

"I think this is a fantastic part of the museum. They've got this in the middle of a modern structure. I think it's marvellous... I don't think that I've been to another museum that has anything like this associated with it." Evan, participant

"Where I go most frequently is the aboriginal garden [Milarri, Figure 66a, b]. I absolutely love it. I find I learn something new every time about plants and.... I find that I build on my history of Australia and its indigenous people... It's the last little remnant space we have for indigenous plants... I just can't get over how many really interesting plants there are...I've got a book written by two aboriginal women and it's about how they use plants for medicine, food all of that... It's amazing." Naomi, participant

The Forest Gallery affords a much-appreciated 'breath of fresh air', an unexpected and dramatic experience of the living world of indigenous flora and fauna in the middle of a major museum. An ideal place to regroup, reinvigorate and relax unlike what follows.

7.3 Dissonant or confronting content: colonisation and war

Dissonant or difficult heritage is contested and associated with uncomfortable, disturbing, contentious and traumatic histories such as war, colonialism and racism (Witcomb, 2013; 2015). Although museums have traditionally tended to present detached and objective narratives, this is far from the case in the following exhibitions. Here, curators have taken the more intentionally engaged and open-ended approach of embedding lived experience in difficult histories. The next sections examine the heterogeneity, intensity and generativity of the assemblages that formed with-in these more personalised accounts of the confronting and contested narratives of colonisation, racism and war.



Figure 69. Melbourne | Interactive display, Bunjilaka

7.3.1 Colonisation at Melbourne Museum: First Peoples, Bunjilaka

It was here in *First Peoples* (Figures 69 & 70) that I couldn't help contrasting Melbourne Museum with Te Papa. At Te Papa, there is a very strong Māori presence that permeates the entire museum. It is a vibrant, living, interactive, dynamic and entangled presence. Despite Aboriginal narrators telling some of the stories via audio and video and the inclusion of recent and personal stories, the indigenous presence at Melbourne Museum is very much contained in the north-eastern corner of the museum. It feels historical and passive rather than alive and active. The development of *First Peoples* was in fact a collaboration between the museum and First Nations people but there is no outward sign of their ongoing involvement. The Māori presence at Te Papa on the other hand has a more positive, living, moving-forward-together focus not evident here. "I think this is an interesting area. When it was established, it was made clear that it would be curated by local indigenous people and that's quite distinctive," explained Noah.

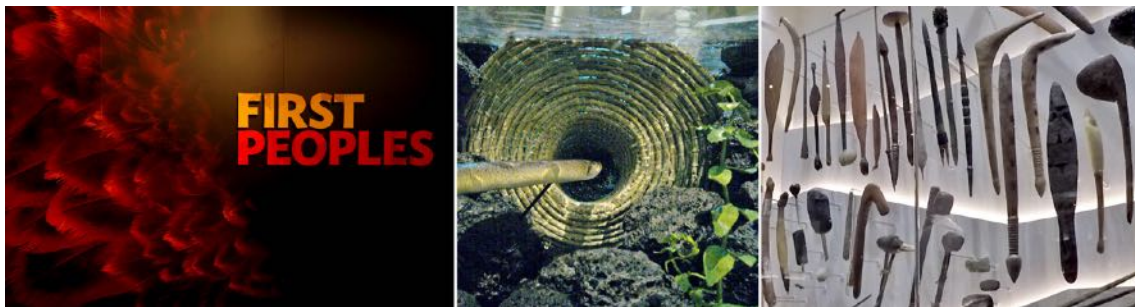


Figure 70. Melbourne | a. *First Peoples* Bunjilaka | b. Eel trap | c. Indigenous implements

James Clifford took up Mary Louise Pratt's (2008) notion of museum as contact zone, 'the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separate come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations' (p.8). What is key to this definition is the notion of ongoing relations, that 'contact zones are constituted through reciprocal movements of people, not just of objects, messages, commodities and money' (Clifford, 1997, p.195). *Te Marae* was clearly a contact zone, but what was unclear in Melbourne was whether there were ongoing relations in *First Peoples*. The stories in *First Peoples* speak of struggle, loss, injustice and inequity, yet also very subtly implicit is a profound sense of continuity, connection (1997, p.193) and the survival or persistence of this ancient living culture over millennia.

Like the Māori, Aboriginal Australians have a 'process-oriented ontology...which registers an intimate and ontological connection of humanity with the ecological health of the environment that sustains life-forms and diversifies creative potential through rich networks of interconnectivity' (Bignall & Rigney, 2019 p.159). In this ontology flora, fauna, atmospheres, climate, landscape, and ancestral spirits are sentient agentive entities (Todd, 2016, p.16). For Aboriginal Australians, existence is a collective affair entangling human and nonhuman, thus

there is a profound interdependence between the wellbeing of 'Country' and the wellbeing of all that lives on/in/with it (Suchet-Pearson et al., 2013).

The multimedia work incorporating a kinetic sculpture of Bunjil the eagle, an ancestor spirit, was a favourite artefact (Figure 71a, b, c). The cries of the eagle catch your attention and the voice narrating a creation story draws you into this dark and mysterious yet restful room. It takes a moment for your eyes to adjust and when they do, you realise there is very welcome seating against the wall. The diffuse evolving rainbow colours and the beautiful languid movements of the kinetic sculpture are mesmerising, calming and relaxing; a moving meditation and a good place to pause and listen to a Dreamtime story. *"It's beautiful, really beautiful... makes you feel like you're out in the bush...so beautiful, it touches the soul!"* said Kathy, truly affected. Luke was enthralled, exhilarated and brimming with enthusiasm and admiration. *"This is brilliant...absolutely inspirational...absolutely amazing. I'm looking at the layers and layers of improvisation. It makes so many modern sculptures look tame."*



Figure 71. Melbourne | a. b. c. Kinetic Bunjil sculpture | d. Possum cloak

The Yorta Yorta possum cloak (Figure 71d), a beautiful artefact is one of only a handful that still exist from the 19th century. Cloaks were traditionally multi-purpose, providing warmth and protection from the elements, mapping Country, and telling the wearer's stories. As a connection to Country, totem and clan, they were part of the wearer's identity and grew over time. Cloak and Country were one, and being enfolded in a cloak was symbolically being enfolded in Country. *"See I love this; I love this cloak. It is such a precious thing... you can see how it would've kept people alive."* Participant Leela and I were both fascinated by the cloak and deliberated over the weight, warmth, feel and meanings of the patterns and markings on the skin. It was a language that neither of us could interpret; simultaneously map, story and artefact. We were conscious of viewing the cloak through our own cultural filters, no doubt a far cry from those of the creator. *"...but that's putting my values and my ideas... And you can't help but do that because you look through your eyes,"* said Leela. Referring to different indigenous artefacts in another museum, Clifford (1997) explained that 'It was clear that from the elders' viewpoint the collected objects were not primarily "art." They were referred to as "records," "history," and "law" inseparable from myths and stories expressing ongoing moral lessons with current political force...' (p.191).

Along with many others, I had understood that indigenous languages were not written languages, but if that is true what was it that was ‘written’ on possum cloaks from other centuries? And what then counts as ‘written’? It brought to mind an African proverb that I’d recently heard: ‘Until the lion learns to write, every story will glorify the hunter!’ Despite the many efforts of diverse agents, the ‘glory’ is still far from being equitably allocated.

Spoken indigenous languages in Australia like clans, are multitudinous, and contiguous language areas overlap with each other so there were no gaps in comprehension (Figure 72a). Noah, a linguist explained that *“they’re not sure...there are various estimates but something in the vicinity of 300-400 [languages in Australia] and there are still parts of the world like...New Guinea where you get language chaining or gradation...That’s the whole way that language operates anyway... it’s literacy and standardisation through nationalisation which create the standard language.”* He went on to say that *“I’ve been to a couple of sessions here on indigenous languages and you meet researchers who are dealing with the last two or five speakers of the language, and that language will be gone within a few years. The fact that they are doing something here to recognise languages, even though a bit gimmicky, still helps to make people aware that those languages exist or have existed.”* This also revealed why, unlike in New Zealand where there is only one Māori language, Australian indigenous words have not found their way into mainstream spoken English.



Figure 72. Melbourne | a. Languages map | b. *“That would’ve been so scary” Smallpox* | c. *“This little girl had a sealer for a father”*

Untimely death whether violent or otherwise, is always lurking in histories of colonisation. Smallpox brought by the Europeans (Figure 72b), decimated indigenous populations and, as Leela suggested, *“that would’ve been so scary because it would’ve been so outside of anything they knew or understood or could stop. I wonder how long it took to connect it to the arrival of Europeans. If they made the link straight away, or where they thought it had come from.”* She was responding empathically, interpreting and imagining the feelings of indigenous peoples with respect to this ‘mysterious disease’, through her own affective attunement (Zembylas, 2018, p.206). Grace was also moved, feeling, as part of the settler collective, both ethically responsible in an indefinable way for what happened, and helpless to either undo or make amends (Britzman, 2000, p.202). *“God, so depressing... it’s really hard...I feel a bit like...”*

probably like some modern Germans feel about being part of the Holocaust even though it wasn't them." This response encapsulates a 'politics of empathy, in which cross-cultural understandings are seen as a basic tool for modern forms of citizenship based on the need to deal with past wrongs' (Witcomb, 2014, p.60). It is also testament to the fact that, as Todd (2016) contends, the 'dispossession wrought by centuries of stop-start chaotic colonial invasion and imposition of European laws and languages is *ongoing*' (p.18).

We talk of being in a postcolonial era, yet the impacts of colonisation are still being lived today by groups such as the 'stolen generation', their children and grandchildren. Leela, reading the information panels in the section on sealers and whalers in the 19th century was moved to speculate: *"Just think about what some of those [Aboriginal] girls would've gone through - how scared you would've been. Absolutely scared. And the sealers would have stunk and were probably disgusting."* Then, on seeing a photo of a young girl, *"But this little girl had a sealer for a father (Figure 72c). See that's why they're turned off. Unless you were pure aboriginal, they turfed them off the reserves and for some of those people, that's where they'd grown up... it's hard. These are good stories."* These were absolutely stories that needed telling: powerful stories, stories of racism, of injustice, of inhumanity, of cruelty, immorality, fear, grief, violence, despair and more. Stories that were not part of the sanitised mainstream discourse; stories rarely told and certainly rarely told in museums and perhaps that was part of their power. These were all part of what Witcomb (2014) describes as 'new conversations involving new understandings of what it is to be a citizen in a pluralist society that had its beginnings in a colonial encounter' (p.50). They were also stories that provoked critical and ethical engagement with a shameful past and its legacies in the present (Witcomb, 2013; Mulcahy & Witcomb, 2018)

The responses of participants to *First Peoples* were very much a matter of their feeling their way into the content of the exhibition and through empathy, of developing an understanding of the trauma of colonisation for indigenous peoples (Witcomb, 2014, p.58). At times I could certainly sense the visceral impact that particular artefacts and stories were having on participants in the alteration of body language, tone of voice and atmosphere, and their comments spoke to a process of modifying perceptions and revised understandings. It was a dynamic and ongoing process that occurred through bodily sensation, memory and emotion, and cognitively in conversation as different viewpoints were tested out, accepted, rejected, doubted and/or adjusted.

There is, it would appear, a limit to the intensity of feeling that a visitor is willing to experience, especially in the context of stories such as these. *"I do like this gallery, the objects, the stories. I like the way it's not too...it tells the dreadful story without putting too much guilt on us because sometimes you go to places, and you almost feel as if indigenous people are angry at you. And you think, well I know people did dreadful things, but I didn't. Perhaps I would've if I'd been*

there, I don't know, but it was a different time and I really think the story does have to be told."

In these vacillations, Leela was both owning the shared responsibility of the colonial collective, 'white guilt', and distancing, or even absolving herself from the 'dreadful things', much in the same way as the participants in Nantes had done with slave trading. Her response supports Huygens (2018) proposition that affirming visitors' own cultural identities, triggering responsiveness and responsibility rather than guilt, and inspiring hope are important to maximise the impact of affective engagement with heritage. The next sections examine how cultural identities, responsiveness and responsibility play out through the topic of war at Melbourne Museum and Te Papa.

7.3.2 War at Melbourne Museum

The unconventional curatorial approaches of the two temporary war exhibitions at the museum make them both intriguing and fascinating. The experience of these exhibitions lies at the nexus of individual and collective, personal and public (Varutti, 2022). Multifaceted, multidimensional personal stories at the heart of these two exhibitions aim at connecting and eliciting affects that provide the visitor with a more personal, profound and memorable encounter. They are also the means by which Australian visitors are able to validate, (re)negotiate and understand their individual and collective identities. Such stories are open-ended and open to interpretation, and so likely to 'open the door into something different' (Trofanenko, 2011, p.484). They have the potential to change how people think, what they know and how they feel (Weil, 1999).

For Country for Nation explores the little acknowledged military service of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders from the Boer War to recent times. This multivocal exhibition was developed in collaboration with elders, artists, communities and families and includes the juxtaposition of videos, photos, commissioned artworks and other artefacts. It is the sort of exhibition that captivates with the profoundly compelling and diverse stories and artefacts. *"This for me resonates in some way that Bunjilaka [First Peoples exhibition] doesn't,"* said Charlie. I also found that the exhibition was very alive, dynamic, open-ended, inclusive and future facing in a way that *First Peoples* is not. Artlink writer Catherine Speck (2017) describes the exhibition as '...not recovering an art history; rather, it is constructing a visual history within a wider recent history that is still a work-in-progress'⁷⁷.

A black net full of red poppies greets you at the entrance of *For Country For Nation* (Figure 73a). Like many participants, I was in for a surprise with this exhibition. *"I'd actually no knowledge of the contribution of our Indigenous people in the services of our nation...I certainly leave a lot better informed having seen this,"* affirmed ex-air force officer Evan. That

⁷⁷ <https://www.artlink.com.au/articles/4569/for-country-for-nation/>

exhibitions influence how visitors create meaning, understand, remember and what they do is contingent on what they feel, alleges Varutti (2022). Evan, surprised at his responsiveness, admitted that, *“I didn’t think I’d talk so much.”* In Charlie’s view, this exhibition *“is an attempt at reconciliation for the Aboriginal people and also for other people so there’s an Aboriginal focus on it and it’s saying they, like other people, died for their country. We are recognising that Aboriginal people fought in those wars. It’s like in America, they had separate black divisions but weren’t allowed to say they existed...”* It was unclear to me whether Charlie actually meant ‘reconciliation’, the resolution of differences, or ‘restitution’, making up for or reversing what occurred in the past; it was perhaps a little of both. Evan also brought up discrimination and wondered how that played or plays out given what we already know about women in the armed forces.



Figure 73. Melbourne | a. Entrance to ‘For Country For Nation’ | b. ‘On account of their colour’ | c. Uniforms, medals & other ‘small things’ | d. “Ongoing unfairness and injustice” Mixed marriage

Evan was empathically puzzled by the inexplicable readiness of Indigenous people to volunteer given how they were treated. *“What’s really curious to me is that given the situation with Indigenous people through the 2nd World War that they were so willing to volunteer. If I was socially marginalised in life, I don’t think I’d be joining the major cultural group to give them a hand.”* A worldview characterised by a process-oriented ontology, interconnectedness and an ‘ethics of human responsibility’ (Bignall & Rigney, 2019, p.159), could I thought, be a contributing factor to a willingness to volunteer. On another day, Kaye and I questioned whether indigenous people’s service had been entirely voluntary in the past. *“Not to devalue going to fight for one’s country but if you’re locked out of education, the military is something that you can still get into which means that you will be over-represented in dying for your country”*. She went on to say that *“It’s very confronting. I think it’s good to be confronted some of the time.”*

Kaye highlighted both ongoing social injustice and the unconscious disparity between what people say and what they do (Figure 73b, d). *“It’s being reminded that there is ongoing unfairness and injustice, and you might be quite comfortable because you don’t have to deal with any of that stuff. And you’re not going to understand what someone else is going through, but it’s about recognising that it’s going on and there’s still work to be done, and to be ready to*

support if there's something you can do. It's strange that people can stand up against what is going on to others yet then say that you can't have your kids in our school, and not even see that it's hypocritical. [Reading caption Figure 73b] "Unsuitable physique - colour!" If you don't let them vote or go to school etc but you let them go off to fight and die - that's the worst. They certainly weren't unfit!" Here, Kaye is taking responsibility, the shared ethical responsibility that comes with belonging to a collective, in this case, a settler nation. The exhibition disturbed her enough to move her into a different relation to norms that she felt must be contested (Ahmed, 2014), to want to 'act in the present for a more equitable future' (Mulcahy & Witcomb, 2018, p.225). In short, shame at this social injustice made Kaye 'care about things' (Zembylas, 2020, p.56), an example of the 'productive nature of shame within postcolonial societies' (Probyn, 2004, p.328).

Respectful was a common adjective applied to this exhibition which made a big effort to tell largely untold stories and make visible what has previously been invisible, thus promoting the critical dialogue that participants seemed so keen to engage with. *"This sort of stuff is good, a bit respectful. I don't know that a lot of people understand..."*, stated Kathy. Evan was surprised at some of the roles such as pilot, that Indigenous people had in the armed forces. He explained that it is very difficult to be accepted into flight school and the training is not only a big commitment but physically and mentally very demanding. *"...one could easily imagine that they would have filled entry level type jobs...but this guy is obviously a qualified pilot, and you wouldn't get that overnight (Figure 74a)."* Recognition, acknowledgement and respect are necessary for wellbeing and this exhibition was not only respectful, but it generated respect (Honneth, 2008; 2012; Taylor, 1992; 1994).

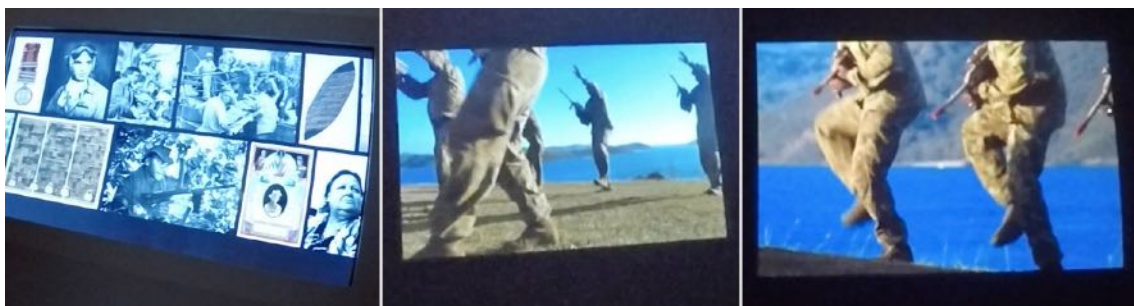


Figure 74. Melbourne | a. "Obviously a qualified pilot" | b.c. Video, dance as drill, indigenous soldiers

Kaye who had visited this exhibition before found the personal stories both touching and absorbing, *"I read this last time. This family was evacuated, and the father left behind. He died because he was working on the wharfs when the bombing happened. Very sad."* What was interesting about Kaye's visit was that she acknowledged that she really liked many artefacts in the museum because *"they are very beautiful and make you feel good,"* yet she spent by far the most time engrossed in this challenging exhibition that she had already visited, reflecting on the ethical inconsistencies and paradoxes that it disclosed. Her comments, although at

times curt, revealed empathy and ‘sincerity of intent... linked to imagination’ that is ‘vital in understanding difference and diversity’ (Smith, 2020, p.46) and in creating new meanings and understandings. What was articulated was clearly just the tip of the iceberg of inner turbulence. As Smith (2020) following Ahmed, Sayer, Wetherell and Morton states, ‘emotions, of whatever intensity, are integral to cognition and morality, and moral judgements are entangled with and facilitated by emotion’ (p.45).

The mixed media and heterogeneous approaches resonated, engaged and were unexpected. There was an impression of richness and a multiplicity of perspectives that is unusual in exhibitions on war. The exhibition was a ‘series of worlds unfolding and folding up again’ (Stewart, 2015, p.27), unfolding as participants engaged with them and folding up as they moved on. *“I like the way they’ve mixed both the formal military and the Indigenous culture...”* commented Evan. Painting, sculpture, video, photos, artefacts, and dance all told compelling and for the most part, open-ended personal and collective stories. It was a space in which ‘temporalities collide and merge’ (Crang & Travlou, 2001, p.161), where there was no clear boundary between past and present, where personal stories disrupt linear historical narratives and open onto new possibilities. Evan and Kathy both remarked on a video of Indigenous soldiers using dance as drill (Figure 74b, c): *“...that’s interesting. I mean you wouldn’t see regular soldiers try anything like that: use Indigenous music and dance routines and turn it into the drill.” “Now that’s integration isn’t it. At least they get to express themselves and they are in the military. It looks like they’re doing tai chi.”* An elegant glass sculpture of atomic bomb pieces (Figure 75a) by an Indigenous artist prompted Kathy to comment that, *“It’s sad that we have to put it into art to make an impact.”* And impact it had, an intra-active configuration of light, glass, form and beauty, glimmering, attracting, refracting, reflecting and actively soliciting engagement.



Figure 75. Melbourne | a. Glass sculpture: atomic bomb | b. WW1 Love & Sorrow

Participants who brought me to this exhibition seemed compelled to spend time ‘dwelling in the sensation of affect rather than the logic of representation’ (Dernikos et al, 2020, p.4), reflecting on the profusion of ethical and other issues called to attention. While immersed in and intra-acting with the intensities, forces and entities circulating in these spaces, they were tentatively or boldly and bodily exploring the “more-than’, the ‘other-than’, the ‘different-

than” (Seigworth, 2017, p.ii). As Kathleen Stewart (2015) so poetically writes, the ‘more-than representation, the more-than what we know, stretches out into nether lands and then snaps back to the register of sensory phenomena and compositional leaps. It catches attention, sets off lines and habits, spreads into an ecology of paths that matter by means of the things that happen in a present in which we are lost yet attuned’ (p.31).

For Country For Nation was an unexpected, thought-provoking, and disturbing exhibition that presented a confluence of major issues, from an unusually diverse array of perspectives, at different scales and using different media. It demonstrates a new stage in relations between settler and Indigenous communities wherein complex cross cultural dialogue calls for the modification of assumptions and beliefs of culturally dominant audiences (Witcomb, 2014). Confronted with the stories in this exhibition, visitors including myself, were pushed to re-examine, reconsider and rework assumptions, knowledge and understandings.

WW1: Love and Sorrow is an exhibition that chronicles the impacts of war and its aftermath through the very personal accounts of eight Australians and their families (Figure 75b). It was developed for the centenary of WW1.

*‘For four years, millions of families across the world said goodbye to their loved ones heading off to fight in World War 1... By the time peace was declared, over 60,000 Australians were dead and thousands more would soon die of war injuries—from a population of only five million people... World War 1 was a tragedy on an almost unimaginable scale. One hundred years later, its effects are still felt.’*⁷⁸

As with *For Country For Nation* and the *Gallipoli* exhibition at Te Papa, it was unusual in that very personal accounts were nestled in amongst the bigger picture of war. The exhibition invites you into the lived experience of individuals, the messy details of everyday life, the violence, terror, trauma, privation, comradeship, love, sorrow and loneliness of life in times of war. It establishes an emotional connection with visitors (Varutti, 2022), and at the same time, allows trauma or crisis to be apprehended through that which is ordinary and familiar (Berlant, 2011). “It’s not so much the war but the human experience of participating...,” stated Evan. He was referring to the pervasive impact of war on the physical, social and emotional wellbeing of those who survived (Trofanenko, 2011).

Standing outside the exhibition, Kathy, visibly distressed, said, “I don’t like this exhibit. I didn’t have any family in the war, but I find that its extremely upsetting.” She had been caught off guard when she had previously visited, very uncomfortably provoked, and the discomfort she

⁷⁸ <https://mw2015.museumsandtheweb.com/paper/storyteller-world-war-one-love-and-sorrow-a-hybrid-exhibition-mobile-experience/>

felt was still decidedly present. The exhibition had not appealed to me either. I had expected yet another generic war exhibition focussed on a neat and tidy legitimising discourse that the visitor is supposed to accept at face value. However, my expectations were royally shattered, and like the participants, I found it simultaneously confronting, compelling, disturbing, illuminating and touching.

For Naomi the exhibition did have personal meaning. *“I have an uncle buried in Egypt... He was the typical WW1 soldier; 19 years old, died for his country and buried in a foreign land.”* War is not a neutral topic for anyone whether they have a personal connection or not as the visible and invisible impacts of war are ongoing, flowing on through families, communities, generations and society as a whole. Evan indicated that we are *“good at inventing ways of killing other people.”* And Charlie, visibly very perturbed declared, *“I don’t know what to do about the world wars; they were terrible. World War 1 was just insanity as far as I am concerned. You had a few puppet masters who killed millions without ever saying sorry.”* Saying sorry would, of course have been entirely inadequate, but I did sense much of what was implicit in his emotion-laden understatement about the ‘unmitigated and abhorrent disaster’ (McKernan & McLeod, 2018, p.64) that is war. In this moment of agitation, Charlie opened himself up, offered a glimpse of himself, made himself vulnerable (Hentschel & Krasmann, 2020), and invited solidarity. Recognising ‘insanity’, injustice, shame, suffering and mourning, he was acknowledging ‘unfinished business:’ business about which he remained inconsolable and so open to engaging in ‘alternative ways of relating to otherness and history’ (Zembylas, 2020, p.63).



Figure 76. Melbourne | a. b. Facial reconstruction | c. Prosthetic limbs | d. Surgical instruments

The exhibition itself was not pulling any punches as Evan affirmed: *“This is quite impactful for me too. When you think of the millions of deaths, the lost limbs, the shattered faces (Figure 76a, b), the crazed minds that we brought home as well. [Photo of man with both legs amputated]. Imagine the crude surgery on the front line - amputations done with hacksaws and that (Figure 76d). Look at this - the horrendous facial injuries that these guys had (Figure 76a, b).”* We discussed the maiming, disfigurement and mental health consequences of combat for individuals and their families. Trauma is generally defined as ‘beyond the scope of language and representation’ (J. Bennett, 2005, p.3) and so, can be difficult to pinpoint, to

articulate or to discuss. Despite being deeply affected by what he was seeing, Evan was nevertheless able to identify the productive significance of past trauma in the present, pointing to positive outcomes such as advances in plastic surgery and the diagnosis and treatment of such disorders as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. He also mentioned that *“the wounded were treated fairly humanely by both sides.”*

There was a ‘rhythmic alternation’ (Stewart, 2015, p.27) between the horror and mitigating factors in Evan’s dialogue. From advances in surgery, he swung back to ‘worse things than dying’ while looking at a photo of a highly disfigured soldier (Figure 76b). *“If you returned to Australia looking like that... you never knew there were worse things than dying!”* I agreed that it would require substantial renegotiation of one’s relationships with everything and everyone including with one’s self and one’s body. *“If you woke up tomorrow and you looked entirely different... ‘Is it really me, am I the same person, how will people perceive me?’ My goodness, there is a lot of repair to be done.”* Evan went on to outline the psychological impacts on identity before comparing conditions in WW1 to those he had experienced in Vietnam. *“The [wounded] guys I saw...were medivacked off the battlefield in hours - these guys [WW1] would lie in the trenches forever and get poisoned by the crap all around them.”* He explained that in Vietnam they were often shelled, and that it *“makes your hair stand up.”* I could sense him shiver and shy away from the memory.



Figure 77. Melbourne | a. b. *“The little family things”* | c. *“All dolled up”*

Evan went on to explain that along with material conditions, technology and skills, attitudes have changed since WW1. *“Some of those guys [WW1] would load up every night and fly over occupied country. And some of them lost the plot; they lost their nerve and were condemned for that whereas we have more understanding... today. And these are all young people.”* Upset and wanting to elaborate, he went on to say, *“It’s the small things, the little family things.”* The small things do indeed make it very personal and intimate: they affectively connect the artefact and the viewer, inducing the viewer to empathise, to imagine herself in similar circumstances. In yet another spontaneous change of direction, he expressed his admiration for women in times of war (Figure 77c). *“The marvellous effort of these women on the home front and look at them all dolled up with hats and everything.”* Of course, dolling oneself up was another way of coping, of cheering oneself and others up, of seeking respite however

short from the relentless horrors of war. After seeing these two war exhibitions Evan said, *“I’m particularly enthusiastic about those two world war exhibitions. I love them.”* An unexpected response given the visceral impact both had on him/us. Yet, at the same time I understood that he was impressed with both exhibitions for their having made visible in an open-ended way, what challenges the ‘triumphant narrative of victory’ (McKernan & McLeod, 2018, p.57), and is generally kept very much out of sight and mind. Neither exhibition provided any resolution or conclusions, but instead, created a profusion of openings for visitors to come to their own if they wished to or could.

War for Noah is tangled up with national identity, although as he suggested, *“it’s a particular part of Australian identity... It’s important for a lot of people but I don’t think that it’s essential to all Australians.”* He added that *“it isn’t easy to decide about cultural identity and I find that your ideas change over time as you talk and read.”* This affirms the view that museums have a central role in articulating identity, in particular that of the nation-state which it has been argued, is moving towards obsolescence (MacDonald, 2012). Noah’s comments are indicative of current debates on changing notions of identity, its entanglement with culture and its more recent conceptualisations as endlessly in process, ‘fluid, hybrid, transcultural and post national’ (2012, p.10). They also attest to what Clifford (1997) calls ‘valuing an “us”’, that is, a culture or way of life, so important in these disturbing, mixed-up, troubling and turbulent times ‘where collective identity is increasingly represented by having a culture’ (p.218). In the case of Australia, culture is built on the Anzac myth; its ‘ideal of the courageous, honourable, good-humoured and resilient Australian soldier’ (McKernan & McLeod, 2018, p.60).

7.3.3 Gallipoli at Te Papa Tongarewa: World War II



Figure 78. Wellington | a. b. c. Entrance to Gallipoli | d. Inside the exhibition

Karen and I had spent a very animated hour together by this stage and were just walking past the entrance to the Gallipoli exhibition, when she said, *“I’ve been three times to Gallipoli, so I would go there but not for the fourth time. It was so amazing. I take it you’ve been there!”* When I admitted that no, I had not, she seized my arm and strode towards the entrance (Figure 78a, b, c). *“Come and have a look! You have to, it’s just phenomenal! Weta workshop did it, they did Lord of the Rings, and what they’ve done is taken eight people’s stories of how they experienced the war. It’s very well done, it’s very unusual. You’ll see why I’ve been three*

times!” So, I yielded to the superior force and in we went! It was dark, crowded, a little stuffy and full of sound. There was a voice narrating a story over the soundscape of a battlefield. Quite a sensory shock after the light, bright, spacious, multi-level, central area outside. We were confronted with a monumental 2.4x life size, hyper-real model of a military medical officer in the centre of a close round cave-like space. *“I’ll take you through. You can’t take it all in... we’ll do a shortcut and come back.”* We walked around the model and out the other side.

On the floor was a thick blood-red timeline annotated with dates, events and crosses, and leading through a rabbit warren of narrow trench-like corridors (Figure 79a, b). These densely cluttered labyrinthine corridors compel full corporeal engagement with the space (Edensor, 2005). We paused at a display. *“I’ve walked past that before. It’s the effects of the different ammunition and what it does to your body. See, I’ve never seen that before and I’ve been here how many times? It’s pretty horrible isn’t it! It’s pretty graphic. So, let’s see, ‘shrapnel’! I think it would be worse because it just tears you to bits. I didn’t know what shrapnel was until I came here. I thought it was great big, jagged bits. Artillery shells - that’s what I thought shrapnel was (Figure 79d). So, it’s the shockwaves that kill you with the artillery shells. They take your leg off. Pretty horrible but interesting. It’s trying to take the glory away in terms of saying...”* Karen was momentarily lost for words. The display was informative, graphic, and very moving! And yes, she was right, it did well and truly take the glory away, drawing attention instead to the ‘often long-lasting and devastating impacts of war on bodies and minds’ (McKernan & McLeod, 2018 p.57). It was simultaneously horrifying and fascinating, and certainly not anything that I had ever seen in an exhibition on war before. But then, as Edensor (2005) reminds us, remembering is at once a social, political, controversial and contested process. We remember together, in company with the human and nonhuman, visible and invisible. And this exhibition was an alternative, open-ended, and personal way of remembering war; one that strayed from the ‘series of potted stories’ (2005, p.831) and predominant master narratives of glorification, and heroism. It is one that does not constrain the interpretive range of visitors.



Figure 79. Wellington | a. b. The blood-red line | c. Hyper-real model of soldiers | d. Effects of shrapnel



Figure 80. Wellington | a. Battles | b. Model of soldier | c. Poppies surrounding a soldier, exhibition exit

We walked on into the next cave-like space with its huge model, a foot soldier (Figure 80b). By this time, we were entirely absorbed and engrossed in the atmosphere, the trenches, the earthy odours, the sandbags, the stories, the narrations, the sounds of war, and countless other sensory details. Artefacts, photos, text, displays, videos, soundscapes and voice-overs associated with a soldier's daily life at war were simply, yet densely juxtaposed in a 'clutter' in the next corridor. *"Look at this food [grimaces] uuugh (Figure 81)! It's all the rations they had, and they've pulled them out so you can have a look. And I think that is the latrine. They've recreated how horrible it was and these poor men had to sit next to each other and poo. At least they were facing away from everyone. Why couldn't they build a shelter? See the despair, it's amazing, isn't it? I don't know if he's on the loo or just... But it really brings it to life."*



Figure 81. Wellington | War rations

Despair was a palpable presence, permeating the exhibition. *“People didn’t get it did they?”* The horrors of war, and I believe that we still do not. I query whether if we had truly learnt from war, would or should there have been subsequent wars. This invisible yet pervasive despair activated a personal recollection for Karen. *“I barmaided - when I was at Uni, I went over to Perth for a summer and worked in the RSL, and there were some pretty ruined men and that was in 1980. Hooray Henry - he’d go down the street doing this (miming) to parking meters - you know! And he was such a ruin of a man...”* The individual and ongoing cost of war and how it impacts people’s lives and those of their families, is remarkably absent from the history books, and incongruent with received narratives and predominant characterisations. I wondered whether Hooray Henry had managed to find peace of a sort in his life, and how the ‘ruin’ of war might manifest in unforeseen and largely invisible ways.

“But there are all sorts of dimensions that they’ve brought to this exhibition, like the equipment, but also what was it like to eat, go to sleep, go to the toilet - all those things that you actually want to know but you never learn.” I had never quite thought of it this way but there are always so many missing facets to any story and generally it is the small, mundane, details of everyday life. Ordinary everyday objects and routines are particularly powerful; poignant in the way they invoke empathy and draw attention to the loss of everyday life - life that we all understand - through the violence of war. In this context, these everyday objects have become ‘objects of violence’ and exude or discharge affect (Navaro-Yashin, 2009, p.4), that disrupts, or destroys that ‘everydayness’. Deleuze maintains that affects are not feelings, but rather ‘becomings’ that continue beyond those who undergo them, to become other (Deleuze & Parnet 2007; Deleuze & Guattari, 1994).

We meandered into another ‘cave’ with its giant model, this time a nurse (Figure 82a). Her story was being narrated through a letter she had written with a background of music of the era and the sound of her weeping. *“And this is so sad - this nurse was on a ship out in the bay off Gallipoli and her brother was fighting, and she learnt that he’d been killed. It makes me cry this one. Even the buttons on her cloak. The grief is so intense.”* The grief was absolutely intense and embroiled in the very personal nature of the narrative.



Figure 82. Wellington | a. Hyper-real model of a nurse | b. Hospital ship | c. Medical display | d. Interior of a hospital ship

Personalising war in this manner allows it to escape the stabilising, sanctioned and disciplinary bounds of a 'network of social relationships' (Jedlowski, 2001, p.31) within which collective memories and dominant narratives are constituted. Rather than presenting Gallipoli as an abstract commodified concept, an event at a particular point in history, this exhibition reveals the impacts of war at a very personal level. It allows visitors to connect in very different, unpredictable, contingent and unruly ways that disturb 'the signifying chains of legitimacy' (Landzelius, 2003, p.208). We enter the trench containing the nurse's account. *"So that's her and then it shows what the hospital ships were like (Figure 82b, c, d). These are all the photos from them. I mean it's amazing, isn't it? It was such a disaster, wasn't it? I mean having the operating theatre downstairs... And the class system too, was so in your face. Like, this is the nurse's area, this is the officers'. It's kind of like they were trying to enforce a distinction all the time."* The exhibition induced a sensual, embodied and conjectural form of remembering that fosters improvisation (Edensor, 2005). Karen was actively remembering, interpreting and speculating imaginatively in direct response to the intense sensations elicited by ambiguity, the multiplicity of stories, the highly charged atmosphere and turbulent and chaotic forces flowing through this space and its visitors.

We continue on toward the exit, both absorbed in our thoughts, sensations and emotions. *"So, I hope you come back and have a proper look because it's pretty awesome. It's the best thing I've ever seen and it's free... So, you can see why I've been there a few times. It's intense, isn't it?"* It was intense, compelling, emotional and fascinating, and I had entered completely unprepared for it. The external exhibition graphics, more suited to a war film, had repelled rather than attracted me and they certainly did not provide any clues to the profoundly enthralling, intensely affective and unsettling content inside. It was atmosphere combined with content, a far cry from the 'established iconography', the 'publicly sanctioned narratives' and institutionalised rhetoric (Edensor, 2005; Ferguson, 1996) that one comes to expect. The exhibition assemblage was saturated with, and actively exuded the 'subjectivities and residual affects that linger, like a hangover, in the aftermath of war or violence' (Navaro-Yashin, 2009, p.5). And it appeared from the snippets of conversations overheard, and our own discussions, that against all odds, these subjectivities and affects were largely generative, provocative of reflection, conjecture, contemplation, debate and speculation. Examination of an intensely personal and entangled variety, that enmeshes sensations, perceptions, emotions, memories, materiality and cogitation and which has the capacity to bring forward 'submerged, quashed potentialities of the past' (Edensor, 2005, p.843).

7.4 Afterword: the productive capacity of intense bodily engagement

Encounters with dissonant histories can be upsetting, emotionally and conceptually (Zembylas, 2018), as they push the limits of one's willingness and capacity to understand (Simon, 2011). These encounters create affective dissonance and engender feelings of inadequacy,

helplessness and loss (Britzman, 2000). Yet dissonant sensations or affects are also provocative and productive; they perplex and so force 'us to pose a problem' (Deleuze, 1994 p.140), to think critically and creatively in an attempt to resolve or mitigate the dissonance. The process is an intra-action of affect, emotion and reason as 'each...shapes and informs the others and leads to [new and different] forms of thinking...' (Mulcahy & Witcomb, 2018, p.214). What dissonant or disturbing histories afford visitors is a challenge, provocation and the opportunity to 'think anew about themselves and their relations to others - whether in the past or in the present' (2018, p.227).

The accounts in this chapter are all accounts of the productive capacity of intense bodily engagement, of 'dwelling in sensation' (Dernikos et al., 2020, p.4), both consonant and dissonant. These seven encounters demonstrate the complexity, multiplicity, diversity and richness of that type of engagement. Several of these encounters included moments of vulnerability and exposure when uncomfortable or unanticipated realities insisted on examination, on being touched and on touching (Hentschel & Krasmann, 2020). These potent moments are productive, inciting connection, compelling us to reach out to each other (2020).

The encounters also revealed the paradoxical inclusion of the consonant within the dissonant and vice versa. For example, while the experience of *Te Marae* in Wellington was overwhelmingly positive and uplifting, it implicitly encompasses all of the initial and ongoing impacts of violence, death and deception that were/are so much a part of the colonisation and Treaty processes. Similarly in Melbourne, the Forest Gallery incorporates the destructive capacity of nature. On the flip side, the war exhibitions saturated in death, suffering, trauma and despair disclosed much about war that had previously been occluded by sanitised, sanctioned narratives and were also an all-important reminder of the fact that there is "*ongoing unfairness and injustice... and there's still work to be done.*"⁷⁹ And at a more tangible level, there were some positive outcomes identified in the form of advances in plastic surgery techniques and mental health diagnoses, and compelling works of art. There was also a tribute to the vital, yet often unacknowledged and invisible role of women on the home front during war.

Museums, according to Sloterdijk (Sloterdijk & Whyte, 2014) are xenological institutions. We visit museums seeking that which we would not normally encounter in everyday life. They are places we go to encounter and engage with what is alien, 'strange, discarded, bizarre, excellent, and incompatible' (p.446). Fitting descriptors for *Te Marae*, contemporary art, the Forest Gallery, slave trading and war. Encounters such as these through their affective intensity, have the potential to push us towards critical thresholds and into different patterns of activity, different ways of perceiving, feeling and thinking that involve changes in the

⁷⁹ Melbourne participant Kaye's comment from page 108

capacity to affect and be affected (Lorraine, 2005). Reaching those thresholds entails confronting and wrestling with ambiguities, contradictions and tensions, and actively dwelling in sensation.

The intense immersive and dynamic engagement of participants with both consonance and dissonance in these museums was remarkable. What is more, each participant in all four museums sought out both types and oscillated back and forth with, in, and amongst them. Consonance and dissonance are forces of potential; potential to move us beyond the routine and conventional, to bring us alive to new possibilities, to open us up to generative processes wherein memories are transfigured, imagination is unleashed and absurd ideas and unexpected connections form and shoot forth. In other words wherein capacity to act or wellbeing, is increased.

8. WHAT MIGHT THIS MEAN FOR WELLBEING?

8.1 Theatre of Individuation

The data chapters have shown that museum visits are far more complex than just an entertaining way to pass the time and/or as is often cited, to 'learn'. Museum visits are energising, inspiring, joyful, and enhance the wellbeing of visitors. But how exactly do they do this? What are the mysterious underlying workings of the affecting, expressive and inventive practices that revealed themselves? These practices turned out to have relevance for all visitors but particularly for older visitors as I will explain later in this chapter. This journey began with a new materialist worldview and four open-ended questions about museum visitation and the wellbeing of older visitors. In this chapter, I discuss the data in relation to those four questions - which provide the structure and sequence of the chapter - and in doing so, reveal the association between museum visitation and wellbeing. That is to say, how entities come into relation with one another to create wellbeing effects (Kennedy et al., 2013). Working with open-ended questions brings with it the risk of getting more than one bargained for and that was certainly the case with these questions:

How are positive cultural encounters between older people and museums materialised?

- a. What mechanisms are at work during these encounters?
- b. How is affect implicated?
- c. Which museum characteristics provide the 'conditions of possibility' for the wellbeing of older people?

We are, as Carr (2006) contends, always working on ourselves in museums, on how we exist or persist in the world; on what is commonly called our 'identity'. Identity is our most fundamental mental model. It is how we understand ourselves and our relationship to the world. It is also how we differentiate or individuate ourselves from everything around us; how we engage, are connected, belong, or fit in. In a relational world, identity is continuously evolving, emerging in affective assemblages in intra-action with the milieu. The milieu comprises people, places, spaces, entities, objects and intangibles with whom and with which we are fluidly in process. Museums afford the 'apprehending [of] *life knowledge*, that which speaks to the affirmation of life itself, to our feelings, desires, and beliefs that give us investments in the world and which makes us feel that we belong' (Dewsbury, 2003, p.1928, italics original).

‘Each of us is several, is many, is a profusion of selves. So that the self who disdains his surroundings is not the same as the self who suffers or takes joy in them. In the vast colony of our being there are many ... who think and feel in different ways’ (Pessoa, 2002, p.396)

Although I think of ‘identity’ as relational, emergent, performative narratives, and an aspect of individuation that is peculiarly human, and ‘individuation’, following Simondon and Deleuze, as the ongoing process of differential synthesis responsible for subject or self-formation (Simondon, 2009; Smith, 2012), for convenience I use the terms interchangeably in this study. An entity’s efforts to persist as an individual, its *conatus*, is determined by its wellbeing, its non-personal, assembled capacity to act in and respond to the world. Paradoxically individuation is a collective endeavour and one’s capacity is determined by one’s connections, one’s relationships. The more we have, the more choice and potential to act. For example, all other things being equal, a person with a mobile phone has much greater choice and capacity to act than one without one. As provisional entities, individuals never attain equilibrium or a singular, stable, determinate identity. We never ‘arrive’ at ‘an’ identity or ‘a’ state but are an ongoing, intra-active site of self-awareness; an assemblage; a subject or an individual. The process of individuation was at the heart of the ecology of practices uncovered in this study.

8.2 Positive museum encounters: an ecology of practices in oscillation

‘A process is... by its very nature collective...an ecology of practices’ (Manning, 2016, p.53)

Everything is profoundly entangled, according to the new materialist worldview taken up in this study. Thus, in order to make analysis and meaning possible, it was necessary to make contingent agential cuts, to create boundaries that determine what is included and hence what matters (Barad, 2007). Although I have clustered the ecology of practices uncovered in the data into consolidating or territorialising, and expansive or deterritorialising practices (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), they occur in generative oscillation within encounters. This back and forth movement came up repeatedly in the data and is the key to understanding the overall ramifications for wellbeing. The consolidating or territorialising practices affirm a relatively stable core, that sense of self which is a necessary condition for exploration, experimentation and expansion. Individuals must affirm their identities before taking on new, challenging information and feelings (Huygens, 2018). Participants in intra-action with museum content, were at once consolidating their sense of self through affirmation and affiliation, and modifying, augmenting and extending their capacity through exploration, speculation, experimentation and the assimilation and formation of new and different meanings and connections.

8.2.1 Belonging: consolidating the self

‘My value depended on the glorious intangibility, the eloquent invisibility of my just being part of the collective - and in direct response I grew spacious and happy and gentle’
(Williams, 1988, p.18)

‘For the first time in years, I felt that I belonged to the world. I knew that wherever life now took me...that feeling – the sense of possibility and, through possibility the sense of belonging – would remain with me’ (Monbiot, 2013, p.256)

To function in the world requires a core of provisional stability, a home-base, a sense of self that coheres but is constantly intra-acting with the external environment. Without this secure home-base, an individual will be disinclined to venture forth to seek more connections that could potentially undermine a fragile sense of self. Rather, she will be inclined to withdraw from the world to protect and nurture the existing core. The drive towards stability or homeostasis (Massumi, 2015), is exemplified by consolidating or territorialising practices, those that ground the sense of self. Identity work requires participation in exterior, collective relations, so being connected, belonging and fitting in are important aspects of this work. Belonging is signalled by affiliation with collectives of all types including non-human collectives such as bodies of knowledge and cultural practices or traditions. Validation, recognition, affirmation and acceptance are all forms of belonging. For example, Beris on seeing the hornbill in Manchester Museum recalls an affirming experience from her childhood: *“I remember drawing one of those when I was a kid, and I can’t draw but I copied it. It was brilliant; I think I got a star... it was very good...”* The school collective recognised, acknowledged and validated her drawing skill.

Social collectives share both an internal resonance and a common milieu (Grosz, 2012). As environments, activities, identities and networks of relations alter and reconfigure themselves, individuals necessarily become part of what Braidotti (2006b) refers to as ‘multiple ecologies of belonging’ (p.106), multiple collectives. In the data I found that these ecologies of belonging are manifested in diverse ways and at different scales. On the macro-scale, was an affinity with nature and humankind. At a more mundane level, affiliation with collectives such as family, community, municipality, region, country, culture, body of knowledge and social or activity groups was frequent. Belonging to these collectives implies participation in their histories and heritage, the associated traditions and rituals, along with the benefits and shared responsibilities that come with membership.

‘Our families provide the most obvious continuing connections to a meaningful life’
(Livingstone, 2006, p.112)

Family including pets, is a fundamental unit of belonging and featured in multiple forms in the museum. Spouses, nuclear families, extended families of multiple generations, close friends and pets all made appearances in the data excerpts below. Amongst the participants there happened to be several widows whose departed spouses were remembered during certain encounters. Beris in Manchester was particularly inclusive of her husband who although irretrievably absent, was persistently present. He was recurrently memorialised, embodied in narrative, forming part of, and contributing to various assemblages; keeping us company. “Well, it’s what myself and my husband always used to say...”, “Myself and my husband both did the same thing...”. Beris brought memories of her husband into the present, commemorating him and reaffirming their shared opinions, activities and shared time. In the course of these museum visits, memories were activated and participants emotionally reconnected with absent family members who might not often have been thought of during everyday life (Smith, 2020).

Data excerpt – family & pets	Participant
<i>That’s why I do volunteering really. It keeps me busy... it’s a lovely <u>community</u></i>	Beris, Manchester
<i>My <u>dad</u> had polio and couldn’t take us far, so my <u>uncle</u> Sam used to take us all over.</i>	Kevin, Manchester
<i>...several generations on he had a...<u>great grandson</u> who was on a whaling ship coming out to NZ who met one of my <u>great, great, great grandmothers</u> and never went back.</i>	Chris, Wellington
<i>... that’s why as a <u>kid</u> I started in boats when I was still in school. I started an activity (business) with my <u>brother-in-law</u>.</i>	Andy, Wellington
<i>My <u>husband</u> was principal of a teacher’s college. I was home-schooling my own <u>children</u>. My <u>mother</u> paid for me to come back to Melbourne to have the <u>baby</u>.</i>	Sara, Melbourne
<i>My <u>husband</u> cleared the land of trees and blackberries.</i>	Louise, Melbourne
<i>I was with one of my <u>granddaughters</u>, she was little, four or five years old...</i>	Yvonne, Nantes
<i>It was my <u>mother</u> who had the time to take my <u>daughters</u> to the theatre...</i>	Margot, Nantes
<i>When I came with my <u>daughters</u>, I’d show them on the map...</i>	Clémence, Nantes
<i>The best thing I ever did was getting Harry... He’s part <u>mongrel</u>, part moppet...</i>	Beris, Manchester
<i>Some people can’t understand why you want to have an <u>animal</u>, but they give you so much and all they want is a roof over their head and somewhere warm.</i>	Beris, Manchester
<i>So loving, and it doesn’t matter how bad you’re feeling when you’ve got to get up... because you’ve got to get out and take the <u>dog</u> for a walk and look after your <u>pets</u> whatever they are, they keep you active.</i>	Beris, Manchester

Table 5. Family and pets data excerpts

That which is displayed in museums, is in the eyes of visitors legitimised, affirmed and validated, much as peer reviewed papers are endorsed. Museums have institutional authority that validates ‘familial history and its place’ in collective memory (Smith, 2020, p.248). Laurent’s ‘family place’ in the museum in Nantes along with the concomitant intergenerational

remembrance, examination, discussion and communication is an example of this. *“Oh what luck to have your father in the museum,”* said young Lila on seeing Laurent’s father’s artefacts. There was an array of anecdotes about family pets, often triggered by the very tactile and lifelike taxidermy animals in the museums. Robert in Manchester explained that his lifelong habit of dog ownership was a family practice. He described verbally and bodily how his recently deceased dog had become part of his family. *“The day before, he sat still in his cage [in the animal shelter]. And this time [next day] because he was going to be given a dad, he started jumping up and down [laughing].”* Robert recognised the dog’s need to belong, ‘to be given a dad’. The dog became a dearly beloved companion and very much a part of Robert’s family which as he declared, would not have been complete without a dog.

Different types of families were assembled within the museum. Beris, a widow, had adopted or co-opted many of the vivarium’s residents and other museum artefacts into her own personal extended museum family of ‘pals’, ‘favourites’ and ‘nice ones’. Volunteers at Manchester had, over time, become a family at the museum with its wealth of knowledge and connections to other museums, communities, people and organisations. It was a very inclusive family and new members were warmly welcomed and made to feel that they belonged.

Civic pride and community identity encompass a sense of belonging and wellbeing, shared identity and active citizenship (Rentschler & Bridson, 2015). Participants were overtly proud of their cities, icons, history and heritage in spite of some questionable episodes, events and periods, and the ensuing consequences. *“I’ve always been very proud of Manchester,”* stated Beris. Colin added that *“we were brought up with pride in Manchester.”* Their affective attachment to the city and its museum was profound and nourishing, providing them with a strong sense of belonging, an understanding of their place in the world, self-esteem and thus, wellbeing (Smith, 2020). Pride signalled belonging, and the visits were rich in anecdotes of municipal history, which although containing factual elements, were highly personal. Many energising connections were formed with municipal and national icons. Each icon with its potent, tacit and explicit narratives connecting it to its city, citizens and history, was compelling and lively (Carr, 2006).

Data excerpt - municipal icons	Participant
<i>Ah, yes that’s very important in Nantes. <u>LU</u> is known all over the world... At one point in my life, I travelled quite widely and <u>LU biscuits</u> were everywhere...</i>	Yvonne, Nantes
<i><u>LU</u> is one of the great icons of which the Nantais are very proud</i>	Laurent, Nantes
<i>... the <u>marae</u> is a very special area in our culture... So, it’s become very much a welcoming space. And it’s kind of broken down some barriers... So, yeah, I think this is pretty special.</i>	Julia, Wellington
<i>...one of my favourite things here. I’ve attended quite a few talks up here in the <u>marae</u> which is just dazzling, it’s just gorgeous...</i>	Joyce, Wellington

<i>... they opened it (a drawer) and there this tigon was... She's [Maude] fantastic.</i>	Colin, Manchester
<i>She [Maude] is fabulous, look at those eyes. She's stunning.</i>	Beris, Manchester
<i>I've always been fascinated by him [Phar Lap] even as a kid and ... every time I come, that's one place I don't miss - going to see him - he's just magnificent... So yes, he's my favourite thing in the museum by far. *</i>	Debra, Melbourne

Table 6. Municipal icons data excerpts

The long-standing connection to Phar Lap for Debra in the example above meant that visiting that section had become a habit, a destination, a personal ritual that formed part of her practice of visiting Melbourne Museum. Rituals in the collective sense contends Manning (2016), are more formal 'techniques carried through generations that mark rites of passage in a given culture' (p.67). They reorient both the collective and the individual. Rituals connect and entangle us with tradition and the past, providing a sense of continuity, yet are paradoxically themselves, highly malleable. This malleability is exemplified by the marae, site of Māori rituals and bi-cultural activities at Te Papa Tongarewa.

If we take it that citizenship is not only a conferred status, but an 'emergent capacity of material social interactions: a ceaseless 'becoming' of the social world' (Alldred et al., 2020, p.149), then shared responsibility in this context is a practice of becoming citizen, of actively belonging to a particular collective. This practice materialised in many sections of the museums and was explicitly recognisable through the use of pronouns but also through body language (hand gestures, posture, voice timbre...) and context.

Data excerpt – becoming citizen, shared responsibility	Analysis
<i>For <u>me</u> this [slave trade] is completely incomprehensible. I don't understand how <u>we</u> could...</i>	Carole was horrified yet owned the slave trading practices of past citizens of Nantes.
<i>It's sad that <u>we</u> have to put it into art to make an impact [glass atomic bomb].</i>	Kathy identified the apathy/indifference that forces 'us' to find more impactful ways, such as art, of bringing issues to people's attention.
<i><u>They</u> don't know enough I don't think. Once no one would ever disclose that they had a mental [health] issue because they'd be labelled for life...What is normal for you may not be normal for me... But <u>we</u> don't have a tolerance for things outside our interpretations.</i>	Kathy acknowledged societal intolerance for mental health issues and shares responsibility for it. She attributes the intolerance to inadequate knowledge, understanding and empathy.

Table 7. Becoming citizen data excerpts

Participants were consolidating their sense of self in each of the museums by locating themselves spatially, temporally and collectively. The feelings of wellbeing generated by these consolidating practices described above increase the spaciousness required for an individual to open up, extend themselves, experiment, and in doing so, expand their capacities. Consonant themes were particularly, although not exclusively expedient for sensory spaciousness and dissonant ones for cognitive stimulation.

8.2.2 Becoming more: extending capacity in encounters with difference

‘Seeing familiar things in a new light filled him with unexpected vitality.’ (Okri, 2014, p.45)

“We can become rigid and narrow in our ways of seeing. It’s so good to see new things, different ways of living and looking at life... I’m interested in mystery, the unknown, items from different cultures from all around the world. It’s about broadening my vision although this is not a conscious goal.” Staff member, Melbourne

In the array of affective responses traced here, it is not only belonging, but also becoming more that indicates the materialisation of wellbeing in the museum. As new materialist scholars contend (DeLanda, 2013; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Massumi, 2015), we are torn between a striving for stability, the territorialising impulse that maintains that stable core on the one hand, and the imperative to escape constraint, assert agency, to deterritorialise and extend capacity, on the other. To become more, an individual needs encounters with difference that push her to think/re-think, to explore, experiment, speculate, understand things differently, process trauma, make new meaning and re-story. Encounters with difference require an ‘openness to the world’ (Massumi, 2015, p.ix), to new experience, to ‘degrees and shades of experience’ (Manning, 2016, p.15) that ‘stir our intellect’. These are productive of change and of transformation that increase the body’s capacities, and afford the ‘power to live’ (Smith, 2012, p.192).

“It’s very confronting. I think it’s good to be confronted some of the time.” Kaye, Melbourne

“Confrontation if we go with it, opens us up, pushes us to question our assumptions, our prejudices because it stirs our intellect - the museum energises us.” Victor, PVS, Nantes

“We are all trying to make sense of our world.” Staff member, Melbourne

Encounters with contradiction, inconsistency, conflict, uncertainty and ambiguity noticeably activated reflection, speculation, experimentation and exploration. The value of ambiguity in a museum lies in its ‘emphasising sensory and bodily encounters with space and matter,’ argues Birch (2018, p.517). Modes of uncertainty, claims Massumi (2015), can be empowering in that they provide a ‘margin of manoeuvrability’ (p.2) an opening, a fissure, ‘a threshold of

potential' (p.3), a 'line of flight' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). They are also modes that stimulate curiosity, perplex, insist on investigation, clamour for resolution and provoke thought. The kind of thought that is capable of forming adequate ideas and active affects (Smith, 2012). Adequate ideas, or knowledge from a feminist standpoint, is 'conceived of not as self-evident, static or neutral, but as emerging from conflicts of interest within an uneven epistemic terrain' (Hemmings, 2012, p.155). Put otherwise, knowledge emerges in encounters with difference. Sir Nicholas Serota⁸⁰ said of the arts, 'we must never forget that [they] are first about the magic of that individual encounter, the special experience that changes our view of the world or our understanding of ourselves.'

What expansive practices do is build tolerance and the capacity for change, adaption and improvisation through the exploration of alternative ways of being in the world. As Braidotti (2010) puts it, 'affirmative differences or creative repetitions...mean retelling, reconfiguring, and revisiting a concept, phenomenon, event, or location from different angles' (p.412). In Wellington, Melbourne and Nantes, the provocative and confronting themes of war, slave trading and colonisation for example, were particularly generative as they were open-ended narratives encouraging reflection (Witcomb, 2013). These themes compel engagement, produce 'impressions which force us to look, encounters which force us to interpret, expressions which force us to think' (Deleuze, 2000, p.95).

Data excerpt - expansive encounters	Analysis
<i>I think that this is one of the really good exhibits at the moment. You know you come out and you <u>question</u>, you <u>think</u>, have <u>discussions</u> - <u>opens</u> up a few doors. (Mind)</i>	Kathy affirmed that this exhibition pushed her to question and interpret things differently, opening up new ways of seeing.
<i>This family got evacuated and the father was left behind, and he died because he was working on the wharfs when the bombing happened - very sad. It's very <u>confronting</u>. I think that it's good to be confronted <u>some of the time</u>. (For Country For Nation)</i>	Kaye acknowledged the productive side of being uncomfortable, pushed into seeing things differently. However, only 'some of the time'.
<i>It's <u>being reminded</u> that there is ongoing unfairness and injustice, and you might be quite comfortable because you don't have to deal with any of this stuff. And you're not going to understand what someone else is going through, but to <u>recognise</u> that it's going on and there's still work to be done. (For Country For Nation)</i>	Kaye speaks to how uncomfortable encounters are mind-broadening, providing a comparison between a comfortable everyday life and the larger ongoing issues of social injustice.
<i>It's <u>strange</u> that people can be standing up against what is going on for some other people and then saying that you</i>	Kaye identified the often unconsciously contradictory positions that people can

⁸⁰ Serota, N. (2017). A Creative Future in a Changing World. Speech presented at No Boundaries, Hull. Sir Nicholas Serota is Chair of Arts Council England (ACE).

<i>can't have your kids in our school and not even seeing that it's hypocritical. (For Country For Nation)</i>	take; supportive of social justice elsewhere, yet racist at home.
<i>"Unsuitable physique - colour!" On the <u>one hand</u> if you're not letting them vote or go to school etc <u>but</u> you're letting them go off to fight and die - <u>that's the worst</u>. They certainly weren't unfit! (For Country For Nation)</i>	Kaye saw the injustice in enrolling Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people to fight and die for their country, yet not allowing them to vote or be educated.
<i>We didn't talk about the Treaty or any of those (Māori) things. I read some public health papers recently and that's <u>really what opened my eyes</u> to all of this. A lot of New Zealanders...haven't had a lot of education in that area and that's probably why there's been so much misunderstanding. (Te Marae)</i>	Robyn regretted her lack of early education in Māori history and culture but affirmed that recently gained awareness had increased her empathy, allowing her to create new meaning and to re-story.

Table 8. Expansive encounters data excerpts

In the musings of museum participants, the relationship between anecdotes and artefacts was not always obvious and in fact at times completely obscure. Several ethical concerns were raised throughout the visits. Most were directly related to the artefact being viewed such as Maude the tigon and Egyptian mummies, whilst others seemed to be unrelated, perhaps a delayed response to something previously viewed. All were reflective, exploratory and indeterminate, requiring inference, conjecture and interpretation.

Data excerpt - ethical issues in Manchester	Issue
<i>I don't think it's cruel, I think it's <u>sad</u> that we have stuffed animals. Well, <u>we</u> do still do it don't <u>they</u>. But I do think that it's really sad and it used to be that people went out shooting and they'd bring them back. That's how come we got them, they've been in collections, and they've been <u>donated</u>. Beris amongst Bird Taxidermy, Living Worlds gallery (Figure 37).</i>	Taxidermy for museums
<i>The glorious twelfth [start of the shooting season in August]. Not very glorious for the grouse is it? Beris amongst birds, Living Worlds gallery (Figure 34).</i>	Animal rights
<i>I thought well, if you [cod] weren't there, you'd be on somebody's plate. I'm trying to become vegetarian but I'm struggling a bit. Beris amongst bird skeletons</i>	Food ethics
<i>I was watching a program...and it was saying about artefacts that people think should be <u>returned</u> to their places of origin if there's a dispute about them which is fair enough. I think that's <u>probably a good idea</u>... And they say well, he <u>shouldn't have bought them</u> but <u>at the time</u> it was acceptable. <u>Nowadays</u> like somebody else pointed out, would you rather they were left to be blown up.... If they are in a museum the <u>world's got access</u> to them. Beris viewing a plaster facsimile of an ancient frieze (Figure 26)</i>	Repatriation
<i>It was quite Eurocentric, archaeology. The way you display artefacts has changed dramatically because <u>everything was very Eurocentric</u> instead of world centric. I don't</i>	Eurocentrism

<i>think it should be Eurocentric... Now the museum has been trying really hard to <u>move away</u> from Eurocentrism. Tess in the Egyptian gallery (Figure 32a & b)</i>	
<i>... lots of museums used to have things like shrunken heads and stuff belonging to first nations, Americans and aboriginals but <u>they've</u> tried to <u>give them back</u> to the people of those nations.... I mean especially shrunken heads; some people say that it's gruesome, but I think they're human remains and <u>we have different sensibilities</u> nowadays thank God. <u>We don't exhibit</u> them now. Tess viewing Egyptian mummies</i>	Display & repatriation
<i>And the story is a bit... She (Maude) died. Yeah, but it came from Dresden, this idea of experimenting, mixing species. It <u>smacks of Nazism</u> to me. Colin viewing the tigon</i>	Genetic engineering
<i>Like Maude, you don't know if what they're doing is <u>right or not</u>... Tignons are born sterile so they can't reproduce. So, they're born, they live, they die and that's it... they bred six pure white tignons but that's it, they'll live, and they'll die. Just to prove they could still do it; but <u>it's just not</u>... Kevin viewing the tigon (Figure 40).</i>	Genetic engineering

Table 9. Ethical issues in Manchester data excerpts

8.2.3 Generative oscillation: opening up to transformation

'Our work is transformation. For every learner the tasks are the same - expand self-awareness; reconsider habits, assumptions, and perspectives; question the premises of belief and behaviour; strive for moments of critical reflection and extend them; and remain calm and unafraid of error.' (Carr, 2006, p.15)

The consolidating and expansive practices outlined in Tables 5-9 above were entangled, they worked in tandem. There was a generative, energising, irregular oscillation, a back-and-forth movement, a form of experimentation. The oscillations were multidimensional, occurring simultaneously on many axes - internal/external; past/present/future; indeterminate/definite; and familiar/new, for instance. Oscillations occurred within assemblages brought into being through encounters and events. The back and forth movement was pivotal in unsettling the inertia of routine, habit and cliché, destabilising and loosening entrenched notions and mindsets enough to create cracks and fissures through which new ideas, new connections and new meanings could come about. This oscillating movement was ubiquitous, occurring not only with-in, but amongst exhibitions and consonant and dissonant content. It was present in the form of dialectical monologues, conversations, narrations, body language and the physical movement amongst artefacts and exhibitions. Melbourne participant Kaye for example, intentionally moved from the largely consonant Forest Gallery to dissonant exhibitions such as 'For Country For Nation' and back again to the Forest Gallery. *"I quite often go back for a second round [Forest Gallery] before leaving... A lot of things I really like in the museum are because they are very beautiful and make you feel good, which is why it's good to go back to the garden [Forest Gallery] after you've seen everything else."*

The following table of data excerpts on slave trading in Nantes, provides examples of this process of oscillation. In this case the oscillation was amongst the positions of shared responsibility as citizens, shame for past reprehensible practices, pride in the acknowledgment of these practices and shame at the fact that they were tacitly hidden for so long. Participants were trying out stances and their associated affects, testing the scope of an idea and applying different imaginative frameworks (McLeod, 2017).

Data excerpt - slave trading	Analysis
<i>For me this is completely incomprehensible. I don't understand how we could...</i>	Although Carole as an individual (me) found the practice of slave trading both shameful and incomprehensible; as a citizen of Nantes (we), she reluctantly shared responsibility.
<i>And it is true that as citizens of Nantes, we were not very proud.</i>	Yvonne shared responsibility (we) for slave trading whilst recognising that it was shameful, so distanced herself and the collective.
<i>It was pretty terrible when you look at the conditions under which we transported people.</i>	Evelyne as a citizen (we), shared responsibility but as an individual, was ashamed of what had been perpetrated on other 'people', describing it as ethically reprehensible.
<i>The inhumanity of it didn't even cross their minds. They were making money!</i>	Evelyne went on to distance herself from these practices (their; they). Yet this distance worked productively, allowing her to identify the ethical disconnect in the minds of those practising slave trading.
<i>...we had heard about it, of course; the slaves, but it's not the same. I think Nantes was really brave. They did not always do all the right things but with this...</i>	Evelyne attests to her citizenship (we), praises her city's courage in confronting its participation in slave trading, then distances herself (they). This distance and thus weaker affective connection, allows her to reflect on what she sees as a questionable mix of past municipal actions. She ends on an affirmation (but with this).

Table 10. Slave trading data excerpts

Mancunian, Colin's description of industrial pollution in his beloved city of Manchester, was another good example. His narrative oscillated amongst past and present; municipal prosperity and social health costs; societal and individual impacts; generational attitudes; adaptation and re-adaptation of nature; scientific and experiential references; and positive and negative approaches. This informal narrative also shuttled back and forth between the very personal and the more distant or 'objective', as Colin wove his personal narrative into larger societal narratives⁸¹, thus affirming his 'place' on the temporal continuum and his sense of belonging. Although this was an extemporaneous account, it was quite a complex analysis of a multitude of issues. It was at once consolidating and expansive, ending on a positive note as was often

⁸¹ This process is also referred to as individuals curating their lives (Solway et al., 2016, p.92).

the case with Colin. At the time we were standing in a liminal connecting space, on the enclosed sky bridge between two buildings, looking out at the museum's new building site.

Data excerpt – industrial pollution	Analysis
<i>Manchester was the home of pollution.</i>	Growth, progress & prosperity vs pollution in the 19 th century. Productive/destructive; past/present.
<i>Because let's face it if your chances of getting bronchitis were 100%.</i>	Social cost of progress in terms of health of Manchester's citizens. The inevitable, immediate impact was bronchitis.
<i>Every year there used to be big fogs, smogs even when we were at school...</i>	Although pollution is still a problem in modern Manchester, pollution and its impacts were extreme in Colin's childhood. Past/present; child/adult; visible/invisible
<i>At school we used to put our handkerchiefs like this [over mouth] and breathe in. And of course, it would just get black, and you'd get a good smacking when you got home...</i>	New knowledge, understanding, awareness re pollution and its health impacts brings a shift in perception, a different meaning to the black handkerchiefs of childhood, the response of parents and the overall social costs of industrial progress. Past/present; child/adult; cleanliness/health.
<i>They [moths] changed colour... so they would blend in with the soot and then when the Clean Air acts came in in the 1950s, they changed back.⁸²</i>	Colin creates distance from the very personal with this interlude. Perhaps also reflecting on the fact that even nature was affected by man-made pollution, adapting, then re-adapting as the environment altered.
<i>...my brother he died two years ago from lung cancer...if you grew up in Manchester, the chances of you getting lung cancer...are pretty strong.</i>	Colin's brother was a victim of the effects of pollution and Colin acknowledged his own vulnerability. Familial impact > probable, serious long-term cohort impact > individual, personal impact.
<i>So, I might be on the list. I do a lot of running and things, and that helps.</i>	His approach to this risk was one of mitigation in the form of running. Acceptance of risk > proactive mitigation strategy.
<i>Two years ago...in Perth... it was the World Masters Games Championships, it was wonderful.</i>	The serendipitous, enriching and expansive outcomes of Colin's mitigation strategy: opportunities for travel, new experiences, meeting people, forming new connections...

Table 11. Industrial pollution data excerpts

The above account might be considered as an example of processing trauma⁸³, the death of a brother and Colin's own prospect of succumbing to lung cancer. Processing trauma in Foster's (1996) view is an oscillation between pain and numbness, between 'direct, unmediated affective experience and an absence of affect' (J. Bennett, 2005, p.5). Colin was dulling the

⁸² Peppered moths. See Manchester chapter 5.

⁸³ Trauma, resistant to cognitive processing, induces "psychic numbing" (J. Bennett, 2005, p.5).

pain of his brother's death in contextualising it within Manchester's history, whilst working against or deconstructing what might be considered an inevitable future in his own case.

Manchester Museum was the only one of the four museums that did not have any overtly dissonant exhibitions at the time of this study. But the Living Worlds Gallery with its animal skeletons and taxidermy animals could be considered dissonant when one considers the practices that led to the specimens on display. However, as mentioned, consonant and dissonant exhibitions, narratives or themes are not static binaries: each embodies the other and Mancunian participants often raised tacit or implicit ethical concerns such as industrial pollution, Eurocentrism, animal rights, repatriation and genetic engineering during otherwise affirming, uplifting and expansive narratives. This occurred in all of the museums, and as Gilles from Nantes so concisely stated, *"one thing is certain, visiting a museum, even if it does provoke contradictory feelings, brings me a form of peace, calm, wellbeing."*

Encounters in this study were all consolidating and expansive. However, there is always the potential for a third type of encounter, one that limits or reduces capacity. This type of encounter can be overwhelmingly confronting or frightening and thus threatens the coherence and stability of the individual (Smith, 2012). Naomi in Melbourne described one such encounter with the mummy of a young princess, part of a blockbuster exhibition on Ancient Egypt that she had visited with her daughters. The visit was within a year of the death of her husband, and she described it as traumatising, tragic and sad, compelling them to leave the museum. *"I thought; 'I have to get out of here!' I was having a panic attack and the girls felt the same... It was because we had lost someone that we loved deeply."* In this instance, intense affect functioned to repel, disengage and distance Naomi and her daughters from its source.

Although far from binary, consonant and dissonant content appeared to have a different operational focus. Dissonant content was overtly more productive of cognitive engagement, examination and experimentation. However, it could also trigger affirmative, consolidating practices. Conversely consonant content tended to noticeably produce more intense sensory engagement and spaciousness. Yet, it too could generate disquiet, speculation and conjecture. As outlined, consonant and dissonant content are neither static nor binary types but complex continua with overlapping, intersecting and diffracting effects and affects productive of any type of practice.

In Spinoza's view, *conatus* is 'neither a 'want' nor 'lack' but the effort of an individual entity to persevere in its own existence... [and is] determined by its capacity to affect and to be affected...' (Boundas, 2010, p.266). To persist requires both the consolidating and expansive practices of individuation as summarised in the diagram below:

Conatus: <i>Striving to persist as an individual – determined by the capacity to affect & be affected (agency). The pursuit of joyful encounters impels us to seek meaning as active affect or joy, is ‘born of reason.’</i>		
Individuation: <i>Process by which an entity differentiates or individuates itself in intra-action with its milieu. Individuation is powered by the flow of affect.</i>		
Consolidating Practices*	Limiting Encounters*	Expansive Practices*
Affiliate Affirm Acknowledge Accept Commemorate/memorialise Identify Validate...	<i>Encounters that limit or reduce capacity such as:</i> Disconnection Illness Loneliness Trauma...	Explore Experiment Examine Investigate Improvise Speculate Transform...

Figure 83. The ecology of individuating practices that occur in museums.

* These three types are indicative, fluid, permeable and not mutually exclusive. All have the potential to become any of the others if/when contingencies present.

The oscillation between consolidating and expansive practices in museum encounters in this study resulted in the intra-active generation, integration and re-storying of new perspectives. This was by all accounts an energising, capacitating and satisfying process although not without some degree of discomfort in the majority of cases. Underlying this process, was a single mechanism that functioned synergistically throughout.

8.3 The mechanism at work: perception-memory-imagination

‘[People] are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with... inconceivable rapidity, and are in perpetual flux and movement.’
(Hume, 1969)

The mechanism at work during these encounters was the perception-memory-imagination mechanism. It was rarely if ever at rest throughout the visits. As detailed in chapter 3, memory operates in conjunction with perception and imagination, bringing the past into the present in a continuous and rhythmic, generative feedback loop (Bergson, 1990). We effectively access or experience our past through the perception-memory-imagination mechanism. As Bergson (1990) notes, ‘there is no perception which is not full of memories’ (p.24). We mingle a multitude of details from our past with what we are perceiving in the moment (1990). Put otherwise, perceptions in the external world trigger and amalgamate imaginatively with memories from the internal world. And memories, when narrated to the self or others, disclose identities which, to be comprehensible, require a field of common knowledge known as the collective memory (Calhoun, 1997). A person without memories is a ‘ghost, trapped between worlds, without an identity, with no future, no past.’ (Tan, 2012, p.33).

Memory flows unaided, disconcerting the individual with swarms of recollections (Gross, 1985). Okri (2014) describes this experience: ‘memory flooded him like an epiphany and for a moment he experienced an extraordinary expansion of being bordering on vertigo’ (p.269). During encounters, there is an uninterrupted current, a series of snippets, anecdotes and narratives, all of which attest to rich lives and the disruption of received narratives⁸⁴. These are creative, energising and expansive. Creative imagination contends Deleuze (1992), is indicative of entities endeavouring to ‘organise their encounters’ (p.260). It requires ongoing experimentation in the pursuit of the most ‘compatible relations’ for enhancing agency (Deleuze, 1992, p.262; Duff, 2014, p.158), and is able to form the ‘ever expanding webs of associations and interconnections’ (Braidotti, 2006, p.164) so important for wellbeing. The process was by no means linear, but highly rhizomatic, and associations often seemed tenuous, improbable and quite unexpected as evidenced in the examples below.

Perception-memory-imagination in Manchester	Affective effects
<i>These are called Kissi pennies... I think 100 of these could buy you a wife, so I would say to them ‘how many would you need to get a husband?’</i> Colin	Kissi pennies as marital currency
<i>... when I first came here, they used to tell me that in the Victorian era, that [tiger] would’ve been further over because the glass that they made the iris with was so expensive that they’d only put one eye in.</i> Colin	Rampant tiger provokes reflections on Victorian practices (Figure 32c)
<i>I was kind of having an island-hopping holiday. Yes, I went to Ischia and Capri ... It was probably about 20 years ago; it was really lovely.</i> Sylvia	Pompeii brings back fond holiday memories
<i>Yeah, in fact I have some toys from being a kid and one of those is one of those [iguanodon]. It’s about that big. That’s how interested I was.</i> Kevin	Iguanodon attunes Kevin to childhood attachments
<i>And one woman, she sent me an email from Italy, and she said in 1955 my mother saved this parakeet and gave it to Belle Vue zoo and told me its name was like David.... And she said, can you find out what happened to it?</i> Kevin	Old photos trigger the memory of a surprising Italian connection
<i>I remember when I was a kid. We used to come because they had big snakes, pythons. Huge pythons!</i> Anna	Tree frog returns Anna to her childhood
<i>You don’t realise until you go to... especially Australia, how wild it is. I went to this beautiful beach.</i> Anna	Hammerhead shark jaw evokes ‘wild’ Australia
<i>I’ve actually seen a python’s nest in India. It’s just a big hole but they all lie in there in the sun, resting after they’ve eaten or whatever.</i> Anna	Mangy lion takes Anna to a nest of pythons
<i>... when we were kids, we went to this zoo called Belle Vue... and my friend and I used to go on our own when we were ten and we had this thing about how many animals you could actually touch through the bars.</i> Anna	Rampant tiger recalls dangerous childhood pursuits. (Figure 32c)

⁸⁴ Received narratives in a museum are curatorial narratives or descriptions of a series of events.

<i>When I was volunteering for that conservation charity in South Africa...I was in the kitchen... and I looked out and one of those was staring at me.</i> Tess	Jackal transports Tess to a South African kitchen
<i>A few years ago, a book came out called 'Coelacanth'... and I had to buy it and that's because I was taken to the museum when I was little, and I've never forgotten that amazing creature...</i> Doris	Sloth skeleton prompts childhood museum visits via a book on coelacanths
<i>I have a whole enamel bowl full of tiny shells that I collected when I was in India many years ago... I went for six months...started off in Delhi went up into the mountains then went down the west coast over to Sri Lanka...</i> Doris	Glass sea anemones take Doris to India via a bowl of shells (Figure 18a)
<i>Yeah, I like a nice scallop with a bit of bacon. I love a good scallop.</i> Doris	Conch whets the appetite

Table 12. Perception-memory-imagination in Manchester data excerpts

Habits are modes of energy saving self-organisation formed through past experience. Habits and inclinations along with a person's experience accessed through memory are what differentiates an individual. We are 'nothing but habits – the habit of saying 'I'', affirms Deleuze (1991, p.x). Memory underpins habit, and habit gives rise to the temporal framework of everyday experience (Deleuze, 1994). It allows living beings to organise their worlds (Ravaisson, 2008), to make them habitable. Habits which include mental models, provide continuity. They are how a subject coheres as an entity and makes choices. They are a 'motor of individuation' (Lapworth, 2015, p.89). Put concisely, we're 'all just a bundle of habits shaped by our memories. And to the extent that we control our lives, we do so by gradually altering those habits, which is to say the networks of our memory' (Foehr, 2012, p.269). So, in fact it is our body/mind habits that are being altered in the museum, altered through the perception-memory-imagination mechanism that materialises in an ecology of individuating practices.

Naomi entering *Dinosaur Walk* in Melbourne explains one manifestation of the perception-memory-imagination mechanism: *"What I love... and this is why museums are important. When you put things like that on, you get the perspective, you get the size, the scale and your imagination starts thinking, wow what if..."* The perception-memory-imagination mechanism also underpins human acts of humour, such as Kevin in Manchester explaining that they always get the pharaohs and never the Egyptian street cleaners. Humour works by making connections amongst previously disparate notions, to create new ideas in the context of a shared culture (Foehr, 2012).

Bergson (1990) argues that our scope of action enlarges according to the number and the distance of the points in space with which we connect in any encounter. This explains why museum encounters are so important to our capacity to act. In three short sentences describing her encounter with an eel spear in Nantes, Evelyne connected eel fishing, a moment

in her childhood, earrings and the sailors who wore them. She evoked the livelihood and lifestyle of the sailors who lived along the Loire at that period in history, and the very pleasing gender-specific earrings that were an identifying feature of those sailor-fishermen. As Manning (2016) explains, the experience of an object, like the eel spear, 'is never a finite one, it is never contained by the dimensions of the object (or subject) itself' (p.48). Evelyne was edging into the affective bodily experience of the eel spear and the many expansive and imaginative connections and reflections that it encompassed for her. There was a process of mutual territorialisation, deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation, occurring as Evelyne and the eel spear intra-acted.

Yet one might ask: why did Evelyne and the eel spear engage; what attracted them to each other; what was the driving force; what made this encounter and other museum encounters possible? For encounters to occur there needs to be a will or drive to connect, engage, intra-act. This force is what is known as affect.

8.4 The role of affect: the will to connect

Our focus is generally on the visible, the tangible, the static and the stable, yet it is the 'vast and mysterious unseen forces' (Auster, 2017, p.563) that propel us, sustain us and move us. The protagonist of this inquiry is one such invisible felt intensity, energy or force called affect. Affect is implicit in the visible effects in the world and is defined in many ways including openness, 'pure sociality', hope, 'a point of entry into an eventful, relational field', and the 'domain of feeling' (Massumi, 2015). Affect is the 'medium through which bodies sustain and transform each other, and, as such it is fundamentally social' (Woodward & Lea, 2010, p.157). It is what impels us to act and the driving force for the ecology of practices described above.

Affect connects us to the world, and connection implies relationality, sociality and collective participation which generate potentialities and intensities that go well beyond what might be achieved individually. Participation heightens the sense of belonging, spatially, temporally and collectively and thus consolidates the sense of self. Affective 'responsivity keeps ...bodies in motion and in the process of making meanings' (Myers & Dumit, 2011, p.248). And animated bodies produce dynamic affects, gestures and stories which are the 'source of the liveliness... in encounters' (2011, p.248). Connections or relations are productive of capacities; collective, creative capacities of 'assembled difference' (Potter, 2008, p.173). Notwithstanding, it must be noted that affect can also act to disconnect, disengage and disempower such as in the case of Naomi, her daughters and the mummy of the Egyptian princess. As a pre-personal dynamic force or intensity that exerts causal effects, the orientation of affect's effects is not pre-determined. Affect places 'the individual in a circuit of feeling and response, rather than opposition to others' (Hemmings, 2005, p.552). Thus opening up (or closing down) conversations, flows of affecting and being affected. Affect manifested in the museums as a

diverse array of feelings, moods, sensations and resonances, all forming networks of relations - intra-active assemblages. When affect is intense, concentration increases and there is a stronger sense of embeddedness, a heightened sense of belonging (Massumi, 2015). Participants were drawn to exhibitions, rooms, displays and artefacts that resonated, that affected or touched them. There were particular artefacts in the museum that resonated very strongly for numerous participants. Two examples of these in Manchester were Maude (a stuffed tigon skin) and Maharajah (an elephant skeleton), both of which were very much alive with memories, stories, sensations, feelings, emotions, vitality, fascination and more. And as municipal icons, they reinforced the sense of belonging. These are examples of the positive affective interplay between bodies and environments (Atkinson, 2013; Coffey, 2020).

Data excerpt - Maude & Maharajah	Affective effects
<i>They thought it [Maude] was a carpet, a rug and they opened it (a drawer) and there this Tigon was...this is a modern piece of taxidermy. She's fantastic!</i>	In admiring the skilful piece of modern taxidermy, Colin maintained an 'objective' distance yet manifested a great deal of warmth, affection and appreciation in his comments. Maude progressed from 'it' and 'this' to 'she'.
<i>Yeah, but it came from Dresden 1948, this idea of mixing. It smacks of Nazism to me.</i>	Colin showed concern, aversion and distaste for what he felt were the ethically questionable practices of experimentation on living beings. Maude, again appearing as 'it' opened up a fissure, a rhizomatic and uncomfortable new line of thought and reflection.
<i>Maude how are you? She is fabulous, look at those eyes. She's stunning... I think she looks quite comfy... You're stunning aren't you princess!</i>	For Beris, Maude was alive and beautiful. She addressed Maude directly and openly with warmth, intimacy and the affection one would have for a family member, close friend, a familiar.
<i>I'm quite fond of Maharajah you know... And it's just with me spending so long here I almost feel that I knew Maharajah.</i>	Paul's fondness for and familiarity with Maharajah had developed over time. Affects accumulate and capacitate. Maharajah gave Paul a sense of comfort, ease, security and belonging.
<i>...Maharajah who hasn't got an ounce of meat on him.</i>	Kevin spoke of warmly of Maharajah as a living being, a 'him' although he is a no-longer-living remnant of his former self. A skeleton with a great capacity to affect.

Table 13. Maude and Maharajah data excerpts

"...contemplating objects in a museum... brings calm, a lightness of being... and a sense of wellbeing, the feeling of belonging to a great universal whole..." Margot, PVS, Nantes

Nature: Everyone has a drive to connect meaningfully with people, places, living and non-living entities, epiphenomena, and to something bigger than themselves. As an affective entity, one is by definition interconnected with all of life and so immersed in affect, emotions and passions (Braidotti, 2006b). It was clear from the empirical material that museum visitors were

attuned to nature; the dynamic forces greater than the individual. These are what Simondon calls the preindividual (Grosz, 2017), or that which is eternal, enduring and immortal. The attraction of nature is that it is vast, sublime and remains ‘eternally strange and surprising’ (Giggs, 2020, p.137). Participants were very strongly drawn to nature - the living, the not quite living and the no longer living - finding it relaxing, calming, peaceful, nurturing, inspiring, humbling, amazing, wondrous... This is exemplified in the responses below.

Data excerpt - nature	Sensation
<i>I think that's why people like to watch them [reptiles] because they look relaxed, so you <u>relax</u> too. Isn't that one of the benefits of visiting a museum, it makes you <u>feel good</u>. It works with me...</i>	Relaxed; feeling good; happy. Tess, Manchester
<i>He [frog] looks as if he's made of rubber or been glazed. I love this corner. I feel really <u>rested</u>, it's <u>peaceful</u>.</i>	Rested; relaxed; calm. Tess, Manchester
<i>One time I was out... and it was on a road that was a very quiet road, and I came around the corner and there were two boxing hares... It was <u>amazing</u> seeing boxing hares, they were lovely.</i>	Amazed; surprised; appreciative. Sylvia, Manchester
<i>Look three [skinks] out sunning themselves on the stones. When you're in something like this you <u>tune in</u> to seeing what's around...</i>	Attuned; receptive; open; aware. Kathy, Melbourne
<i>...there is a very <u>special</u> light; the atmosphere really is <u>unique</u>... it is truly very <u>beautiful</u>... I <u>love</u> it; there's a particular atmosphere.</i>	Inspired; expansive. Evelyne, Nantes
<i>Crystal caves...It looks as though it's been invented doesn't it. <u>Wow</u>, <u>wow</u>, <u>wow</u> and <u>wow</u>!</i>	Amazed; awed; inspired. John, Melbourne
<i>I absolutely <u>love</u> this [Forest Gallery]. I just find this <u>really peaceful</u>... Because we're an urban society, you can easily disconnect from nature... And I just love the sound.</i>	Appreciative; relaxed; amazed; serene; calm. Naomi, Melbourne
<i>I think this [Forest Gallery] is terribly important because water and ferns are <u>relaxing</u>. See, that's really rewarding isn't it [seeing a bird]. There's another bird in there [running]. Oh <u>beautiful</u>, isn't it <u>fantastic</u>!</i>	Relaxed; awed; excited; enthusiastic. Luke, Melbourne
<i>I always like going here first [Forest Gallery]. This museum has all this living stuff... Aaaahhhh isn't that <u>nice</u> [breathing fresh air deeply]. The temperature doesn't matter...if there is airflow, shade and greenery.</i>	Energised; vital; healthy; calm. Kaye, Melbourne

Table 14. Nature data excerpts

In the last example above, Kaye's extended 'aaaahhhh' spoke volumes, which I empathetically understood but much of which I am unable to put into words. In that moment, she paused, closed her eyes, took in a deep breath, exhaled at length, relaxed her shoulders, her hands, her torso and her face and became intensely porous and radically open to her surrounds. It is an example of what MacLure (2013) calls an emission that lies 'on the boundary of language and body' (p.171). It was an intensely affective moment that exemplifies the multitude of unspoken emissions that irrupted throughout the visits and which although I have not described in great detail, were intrinsic to the analysis. This type of emission is best shown.

However, due to an ethical regard for the anonymity of participants, this is only possible in a limited way such as in the images of hand gestures in chapter 3 (Figure 3).

Stories: are highly affective and integral to our lives, they are intrinsic to the human condition (Randall, 2011). As Ursula Le Guin (1979) put it 'there have been societies that did not use the wheel, but there have been no societies that did not tell stories' (p.27). Humans are both storytellers and story-listeners. Stories 'are the context and currency of our lives' (Randall, 2001, p.35), they are how we connect and make meaning, and one of the ways that we manage our identities. Stories are 'the sensuous, sinuous intertwining of things with memories' (De Waal, 2010, p.17), of the past, present and future woven together. Through stories we learn to appreciate 'life's internal intricacy, its ever-unfolding flow, and... both its coherence and its marvelous incoherence' (Randall, 2001, p.54). Stories are one of the fundamental ways we have of connecting with others, and through them, we organise information, define ourselves and feel that we belong (Smith, 2020). Cast your mind back to the last time you visited an art museum and came across a work labelled 'No Title'. I've always found this disappointing as titles embody stories, signposts and connectors. They provide another way into an artwork; another way of connecting or engaging with it.

Museum visitation affords and facilitates the telling of and listening to stories, and through them connecting with others, and with collective and personal memories. These are memories that we would not recall during routine everyday life, unexpected memories from other times and places, memories that validate the richness of lives well lived, memories that bring pleasure and joy at their recollection. The museum visits in this study could all be described as an atemporal and fecund flow of vibrant, engaging and intra-active stories in process.

All 'relationships and all of human experience are the result of the flow and circulation of affective energy' (Oliver, 2001, p.195). Sensing/feeling/thinking are how an entity experiences life, it is what constitutes life. We register affect bodily through sensation (Massumi, 2015) and sensation generates movement (Bogue, 2019). Sensation is the bodily experience that makes us feel alive. Sensation invigorates, and as Deleuze (2003) argues, 'is the opposite of the facile and the ready-made, the cliché...' (p.34) which anaesthetise⁸⁵ and desensitise. We seek sensation as both enlivening and connecting us to our bodies and the external world. In sensing, 'both self and the world unfold simultaneously for the sensing subject; the sensing being experiences himself and the world, himself in the world, himself with the world' (Straus, 1963, p.351). The body is the mediator of sensation (Bogue, 2019), and museums are 'places where people go to feel' (Smith, 2014, p.125). Museum director, Linda Duke (2017) suggests that much public education in the United States has both devalued non-verbal learning and

⁸⁵ The word 'aesthetic' is derived from the Greek and means sense perceptions. However, it now applies to the branch of philosophy concerning art and the nature of beauty. To anaesthetise means to minimise or remove feelings or sensory experience.

knowing and ‘eroded basic human capabilities to learn and know in non-verbal ways’ (n.p.). She argues that aesthetic experiences ‘allow humans to embrace complex, dense, and ambiguous [sensory and verbal] data sets’ (2017, n.p.) and are the key to the type of learning that occurs in museums.

Art: ‘But then I discovered art. I saw for the first time nature and pure feelings expressed in a form I could understand. A painting was a translation of the language of my heart. My emotions were all there – but in a painting, a sculpture. I went to museum after museum, into the labyrinths of rooms and that of my own soul. And there they were – my feelings, and all of them natural, spontaneous truthful, and free. My heart cavorted within shapes and shadows and splashes, in patterns, repetition, and abruptly ending lines. My soul shivered in tiny, feathered strokes, one eyelash at a time.’ (Tan, 2006, p.31)

Art is one means of accessing sensation, as art’s function, according to Deleuze, Klee and Maldiney, is to render visible the invisible (Deleuze, 2003; Bogue, 2019); the world of unseen forces and sensation. This world argues Maldiney (as cited in Bogue, 2019) is one where ‘when we view a painting we enter that world through the painting and experience it within the painting’ (p.281). It is only through art that we can ‘emerge from ourselves...know what another sees of this universe that is not the same as ours’ (Deleuze, 2000, p.42). Art is beyond memory, beyond time, it is essence and ultimate, internalised difference (2000). The essence that is art, affords us the ‘joy of time regained’ (2000, p.56), an ‘image of eternity’ (2000, p.46). Art forces us to look, to interpret, to speculate and so provides the opportunity to extend and transform ourselves, to form adequate ideas that allow us to actively pursue the joyful encounters so essential for wellbeing.

Data excerpt - art	Sensation
<i>I think that those creative people...are inspirational. They lift you out of you and that's what I like... and normally in everyday life, even if you have a good life, you never get that experience</i>	Inspired; stimulated; moved; invigorated. Amy, Wellington
<i>Oh, wow, that's fabulous. That's joyous!... Very powerful... when we go out, we'll be on top of the world</i>	Joyful; powerful; enlivened. Amy, Wellington
<i>But you know, these places make you think, extend you, you know</i>	Extended. Joyce, Wellington
<i>... it's all very deep and quite challenging art. And when I look at it, it gets to your heart. So, when I see something like this, I need a lot of time and I find it quite exhausting. Quite... you know, I need recovery time afterwards. I need to go away and have quiet time.</i>	Challenged; touched; thoughtful; exhausted. Helen, Wellington
<i>I always think of my mother when I see Colin McCahon... She never liked his work. I've always liked it. It is, it is [emotionally intense].</i>	Evocative; moved; intense. Wellington, Helen
<i>...these [history tapestries]. It's such a creative way to... you see for me, seeing something like this, you're getting different perspectives.</i>	Moved; inspired; amazed; open. Naomi, Melbourne

Table 15. Art data excerpts

In the first data excerpt above, Amy speaks of being ‘lifted out’ of herself, out of the everyday by the inspiration of creative works. This is an example of what Braidotti (2006b) refers to as an ‘affect that breaks through the established frame’ (p.178), providing an opening, a ‘line of flight’ towards ‘the as-yet-unseen, the as-yet-unthought, the as-yet-unfelt’ (Manning, 2016, p.23). In other words, to what was previously unimaginable. This type of opening has the potential to increase wellbeing; the capacity of the individual to form more, new and different connections and networks that expand outwards rhizomatically. It often occurs through touch.

Touch: ‘(N)ot only through the fingers, but through the whole body’ (De Waal 2010, p.279), touch is one of the most direct forms of connection, it is the ‘archetypal sense... to touch something is both to act on the world and to be affected by it’ (Lapworth, 2015, p.95). Touching is a very explicit two-way flow, what touches is also touched in return. Pallasmaa (2014c) argues that it is ‘the sensory mode that integrates our experiences of the world and of ourselves... my body remembers who I am and where I am placed in the world’ (p.34). The ‘moment of looking then choosing, and then reaching in and then picking up is a moment of seduction, an encounter between a hand and an object that is electric,’ explains ceramic artist and writer Edmund de Waal (2010, p.66).

At handling tables in museums, the will to connect is much in evidence as bodies come into direct visceral contact with artefacts. The weight, size, density, texture, volume, temperature and more, are felt, sensed. Manning (2009) claims that ‘to touch is to activate relational movement-toward’ (p.212). Haptic experiences go beyond direct physical contact (Deleuze, 2003). Bogue (2013) elaborates, arguing that ‘knowledge of objects as three-dimensional forms requires the subjective synthesis of multiple tactile and visual experiences of the entities’⁸⁶ (p.137). Or, as Victor in Nantes so beautifully put it, “*the object nourishes our senses, even if we only touch it with our eyes!*” Throughout the museum, the will to connect physically was strong and was often articulated.

Data excerpt - touch	Participant
<i>... <u>touching</u> is so important in the museum... in olden day museums you weren't allowed to <u>touch</u>, and you never <u>touched</u> anything. You really remember things by experiencing them through different senses.</i>	Amy, Wellington
<i>...I've gone to other museums, you get to <u>touch</u> things and they might be a model, but it gives you that - oh it's about this big and this heavy - but we don't really do that here!</i>	Kathy, Melbourne
<i>Here you can <u>touch</u> the plants - you shouldn't but I do. For visitors that's really good. This feels real...</i>	Kathy, Melbourne
<i>One wants to <u>touch</u> - it's frustrating in a museum...</i>	Carole, Nantes
<i>I love the stone, its ancient, there are others who have <u>touched</u> it...</i>	Aurèlie, Nantes

⁸⁶ Art historian Alois Riegl, called this tactile or haptic vision (Bogue 2013, p.136).

<i>I don't dare <u>touch</u>. ...are we allowed to touch? It's not fragile</i>	Margot, Nantes
<i>... the real object nourishes our senses, even if we only <u>touch</u> it with our eyes! It is the materialisation of a period in the history of mankind.</i>	Victor, PVS, Nantes
<i>And when you've got the animals out, the kids absolutely love them you know. They come up to them and start <u>stroking</u> them, they won't go away.</i>	Paul, Manchester
<i>And they loved to <u>touch</u> real objects because it seems unusual to them and to actually get your <u>hands on</u> some history was fantastic.</i>	Doris, Manchester
<i>And it makes the museum more accessible in a way because you're actually <u>touching</u> some museum objects. I really like that.</i>	Doris, Manchester
<i>Yeah, you do just want to <u>touch</u> it, it is very tactile.</i>	Beris, Manchester
<i>...to see and sometimes <u>handle</u> some things that are billions of years old...To see and <u>touch</u> things from different cultures and parts of history is amazing,</i>	Beris, PVS, Manchester

Table 16. Touch data excerpts

Individuals are wholly entangled and interdependent with their milieus, enmeshed in webs of relations, intensities and flows where affect is both connector and dynamic force. It follows then that the milieu provides the field of conditions with more or fewer opportunities for connection, participation, capacitation. The milieu, the environmental constituent of the individual-environment pair in this study is the museum, a place that affords particularly rich conditions of possibility for wellbeing.

8.5 Ageing, museums and wellbeing: the potential

'...and we would talk, about aches and pains, illnesses, our feet, our backs, all the different kinds of mischief that our bodies, like unruly children, can get up to...' (Atwood, 1996, p.20)

The 'mischief of our unruly bodies' is only part of the sum total of changes that occur in the transitional period from mid to later life. Retirement and menopause add to the confluence of physiological, psychosocial and environmental changes that take place (Kroger, 2002). Shifts in mobility, vision, hearing and cognition can reduce a person's field of action, social connectivity, confidence and self-esteem. And changes in roles and social position, a heightened risk of disease, and the likelihood of the loss of family and friends (WHO, 2015) can act to increase susceptibility to social isolation, loneliness and depression, and their associated health and wellbeing impacts (Karpf, 2015). Noticeable physical changes moreover, augment vulnerability to ageism (Nelson, 2016; Palmore, 2015; Robertson, 2017), which in turn impacts opportunities for connection and meaningful participation.

The complex, multidimensional experience of retirement from a human perspective, is a very significant and under-acknowledged change. The notion of retirement itself continues to be restructured and 'individualised', bringing 'new risks and insecurities' for retirees (Phillipson, 2013, p.79). Although individuation or identity construction is a lifelong process, the

sometimes sudden and significant psychosocial and physical changes around retirement can cause an unusual degree of uncertainty and anxiety. To begin with, there is the loss of professional identity which for many is the core around which other identities have been constructed, and which contributes greatly to meaning and purpose in life, and thus self-esteem and confidence (Borrero & Kruger, 2015). Not only do the reassuring rhythms, routines, structure and income of work life disappear overnight, but so too does the daily social interaction with a diverse and evolving group of colleagues. The loss of the work routine for those coming from full time employment can lead to a feeling of having been suddenly untethered and set adrift in 'days of unwanted leisure' (Brookner, 2010, p.11). Said John from Melbourne, *"I know a lot of guys have difficulty adjusting to retirement because they come from a workplace that was partly their social life, to home where their wife - if they're still partnered - she knows her way around the kitchen, but he doesn't."*

Retirement is a liminal or threshold period, a time of transition from 'what was' to 'what comes next'. Priorities and roles change along with income, and relationships with the self, others, and society must be renegotiated. The individual must find new ways of understanding herself and her capacities relative to the collective and of staying in touch with what matters. She must confront prevailing ageist discourses, and create a new understanding of her place in the world, thus ensuring a sense of belonging, purpose and meaning. At a time in life when opportunities for social connection may have dwindled and one's identity is in flux, engaging with-in museums is one way of renegotiating relationships, making new connections and meanings, staying in touch, and through the process, enhancing wellbeing. As Edgar from Wellington wrote, *"I think museums have an ability to confirm yourself and your identity... helps me understand who I am and understand others who inhabit the world with me."*

Social connection is highly significant for the health and wellbeing of older adults (Dawson-Townsend, 2019; Dizon et al., 2020; Douglas et al., 2017; Luo et al., 2012; Novotney, 2019; Saeri et al., 2018; Sirven & Debrand, 2008; Umberson & Montez, 2010; WHO, 2015; Wilkinson et al., 2019). There is a clear and unchallenged association in the literature between social connection and participation, and positive health and wellbeing outcomes. Social relationships provide people with a sense of belonging, purpose, meaning and support, and are vital to health, wellbeing and longevity. However, to date the literature has defined social connection and participation exclusively in human terms. Taking a more-than-human view I argue, affords a fuller account by complementing human relations that impact wellbeing with those that are nonhuman. This also, as it happens, goes some way towards explaining why there are many older adults who appear to be socially isolated yet are neither lonely nor lacking in rich, affirming and satisfying interactions with pets, plants and a multitude of others.

When wellbeing is rethought 'as the affective fluctuation produced from sustainable, modulating assemblages, [t]he issue becomes to facilitate encounters between collective

bodies where different kinds of connections can be made in a sustainable way, utilising the proximate and specific material of people's lives.' (McLeod, 2017, p.182)

Connection and participation are fundamental to maximising capacity and potential in a paradigm where the more an individual is capable of affecting and being affected by her milieu, the greater her overall capacity and hence, wellbeing. One of the key re-framings of this study is that of the more-than-human nature of social connection and participation. Participants in this study were noticeably energised by their intra-actions with the spaces, displays, artefacts, the living and non-living, the human and nonhuman, and narratives that make up the museum assemblage. Put another way, wellbeing emerged in the intra-action of individuals with-in the museum's field of conditions. This more-than-human intra-action manifested in the consolidating and expansive practices of individuation described in the first section of this chapter are summarised in the diagram below and in the next section.

Wellbeing: <i>The proxy for wellbeing, increased capacity or agency, is produced collectively with other entities. A body's capacity to form new, productive relations with-in its milieu will determine its wellbeing. Wellbeing is generated in the intra-action of visitors with the field of conditions in museums.</i>	
Older people: <i>Fewer opportunities for social connection.</i> <i>Identity in flux: confluence of changes to be negotiated/processed.</i>	
Conditions of possibility	Ecology of practices
Heterotopia: a place of all times outside of time Time: non-linear, dissociated from routine Space: self-determined, interactive movement Difference: other ways of being in the world Dissonance: triggers expansive practices Familiarity: fosters sense of belonging Past + present: history, the temporal continuum Present + future: societal matters of concern Formal and informal ways of engaging: Visits, volunteering, intergenerational interaction, debates, membership, programs, outreach...	Consolidating: Affiliation Affirmation Validation Recognition Acceptance Belonging... Expansive: Reflection Exploration Experimentation Speculation Engagement with: ambiguity, conflict, contradiction, difference, dissonance Limiting: Too confronting, frightening or overwhelming (No examples in this study but always possible)

Figure 84. The conditions of possibility that museums afford for the wellbeing of older people.

8.5.1 The conditions of possibility for wellbeing⁸⁷

Museums offer complex, diverse and dynamic spatio-temporal fields of conditions which Foucault described as heterotopias. In one real place, museums juxtapose spaces and times⁸⁸ that are incompatible and contradictory (Foucault, 1984). Subjects and themes geographically or historically distinct intersect, connect and interact in museums (Clifford, 1997, p.192), generating new possibilities and meanings. Like libraries, museums themselves are ‘outside of time’, facilitating a decoupling from the often stress-charged routine mode of chronological time and habitual space with their associated obligations, duties, assumptions, clichés and stereotypes, to the liberating sensory immersion of experiential time and space. This spatio-temporal decoupling creates fissures and openings for new connections, new ways of understanding and new meanings as everything becomes more malleable, permeable and plastic. It fosters the ecology of practices outlined in the first section of this chapter.

On entering a museum, one is ‘[s]eparated from the movement of the street...released into the space of the interior like a molecule into a gas’ (Duncan & Wallach, 2019, p.486). This ‘gas’ is a rich, lively, vibrant, purposeful, meaningful more-than-human community where time is non-linear and the personal, internal and private encounter the public, external, and official (Kavanagh, 2000). Space writes Foucault (1984, p.3), draws us out of ourselves, connects us and is a set of relations. ‘If time unfolds as change, then space unfolds as interaction’ proposes Massey (2005, p.61). Space then is the social dimension. There is a resonance between human bodies and their environments. And museums with their cornucopias of accumulating content, diverse opportunities for engaging, extensive networks and potential for intra-action are particularly captivating and resonant environments. Personal memories, identities and imagination collide with public objects, histories, narratives, archives, cultures, perspectives, meanings, atmospheres, spaces, collective memories and identities, staff and other visitors.

Collections and displays use meaningful ordering systems to structure and present an array of diverse ways of being in the world and of making sense of them. People have unique relationships with material objects (Camic, 2010; Miller 2008; Solway et al., 2016). *“The real objects secure things in your brain – helps you make sense...”* said Kathy from Melbourne. Objects stimulate and nourish the senses and intensify the feeling of being alive. As objects resonate, stimulate and take on significance, different relationships amongst them become visible, ‘the air is charged with possibility’ (Puar, 2012, p.61) and anything could happen. This of course, is one of the main reasons for visiting museums.

⁸⁷ Coffey, J. (2020). Assembling wellbeing: bodies, affects and the ‘conditions of possibility’ for wellbeing.

⁸⁸ There are many conceptions of time: chronological, experiential (flow), deep (cosmic), Planck (quantum), poly/monochronic...

"A bit of time in a museum can cheer me up no end on a miserable day. It might even set me off on another adventure..." Beris, PVS, Manchester

Museums are places of self-determined action. Visitors meander through spaces of parallel, overlapping, overlaid and synchronous experiences, making meaning and creating associations that are complex and serendipitous despite, or in parallel with the best efforts of curators. Motion has limitless potential for connection, disaggregation, reconfiguration and adventure. 'Bodies think as they feel as they move' (Massumi, 2015, p.211), and connect to a continuously shifting array of people, objects, atmospheres and displays. Doors to the unknown open, new worlds and potentialities become visible. And walking is a largely overlooked and highly beneficial by-product of museum visitation⁸⁹. Walking is not merely a body in motion, but what a body is; it is a way of knowing, a way of connecting to the earth, one's body, and to space. It is a sensory experience and researchers have found that creative output increases by around 60% when walking (Oppezzo & Schwartz, 2014, p.1144). Faced with a choice of stairs or a lift, and aware of the benefits of the former, Gilles in Nantes said, *"Let's take the stairs, that way we'll get a bit more exercise."* Karen in Wellington had the same idea, *"I use the stairs so that I get some exercise."*

Museums aggregate, structure, memorialise and validate the collective memories and identities of different cultures, their distinctive ways of life, traditions, art forms, crafts, objects and rituals. They display and cultivate tolerance for different perspectives and meanings. They are a 'low-risk environment for encounters with difference' (Rounds, 2006, p.146) as museum curators are skilled at managing the level of dissonance of confronting or difficult histories. Carr (2006) writes that 'we hunger for different perspectives' (p.13) rather than different information. Naomi from Melbourne wrote, *"I'm fascinated by how other people live, different cultures and enjoy being moved out of my comfort zone."* Museums with their multifarious collections and legitimised ordering systems, discourses and narratives are ideal places for joyful encounters. Encounters that produce sensations and problems that impel us to seek meaning and understanding. Encounters from which adequate ideas and active affects flow. Encounters that open up new possibilities that 'affirm the power of life' (Smith, 2012, p.220) and enhance our overall capacity to act, our wellbeing.

'These were objects suffused with a life and a past. They had a history, a personality, a connection to other memories' (Tan, 2001, p.128)

History reassures us, it 'makes us feel safe and enriched to be part of that temporal continuum' and so we seek out 'historically dense settings because they connect us

⁸⁹ Physical activity sustains and possibly improves cognitive function for those without dementia (WHO, 2015 p.71). See chapter 3 for more detail on the benefits of walking.

experientially and imaginatively with past life' (Pallasmaa, 2014c, p.29-30). *"You never think of yourself as having lived in a period of history. Yet looking through there...I can see things obviously displayed for their historical interest, that I had experiential learning of as a boy,"* said Edgar from Melbourne. History is what Manning (2016) calls the 'persistence of subjectivities', a 'serial activating of a certain degree of continuity' (p.135). With the continuity of history comes a strong sense of collective identity and connection in times of rapid change (Clifford, 1997, p.193). History as practised in museums both memorises past events (Fox & Alldred, 2019) and functions in other consolidating modes, confirming and validating existing knowledge, beliefs and feelings of visitors (Smith, 2017). This in turn, bolsters the sense of belonging and self, and acts as a trigger or aide-mémoire for very personal identity affirming narratives and expansive practices. Melbourne participant Grace said, *"that's what museums do; they give you the experience of where you've come from."*

Museums are also places where things happen, a point of connection, a nexus of chance encounters. They provoke engagement and cultivate inquiry and in doing so, open up to possibility, foster a sense of being part of the stream of life, of belonging to something greater. As Doris from Manchester wrote, learning in the museum *"is so important because it opens your mind to all sorts of things. It keeps your mind and body active and makes you feel good. It can set you off on new paths at any time of life, paths along which you can meet new people, see new places, encounter other cultures. It can give you new skills and opportunities in life, and a sense of achievement, and encourages you to look to the future - all positive things."* Helen from Wellington agreed writing that it *"broadens our interests and extends our existing knowledge, increases our social contacts, develops our sense of social and community responsibility, provides opportunities to connect... This may help us to become more resilient in the face of change. It is fun and creative...helps us move forward positively into the future."*

As keepers and tellers of our stories, museums have a responsibility to bring data and facts to life, reveal alternate possibilities and facilitate debate amongst diverse publics on matters of concern, thus building civic relationships. These matters of concern include both local and global crises that will impact the futures of everyone such as the environment, health, war, technology and social justice. Museums are 'increasingly promoters of social change, [and] powerful sites of social activism' (Varutti, 2022, p.2).

8.5.2 More-than-human social connection

Social connectedness is defined as 'belongingness', as 'any and all connections made with others', or the basic human need to feel accepted and part of something bigger (Wilkinson et al., 2019, p.2). Although implicit there is no stated requirement for connections to be human. During this study, it became clear that connectedness and the sense of belonging went well beyond the human. It included other living entities such as pets, amphibians and plants, along with inorganic entities such as artefacts and spaces. These relationships were highly affective.

Participants intra-acted with the embedded knowledge, histories, narratives and imaginaries in these non-human entities. In what follows, I discuss some examples. However, I suggest that this is a rich and extensive area for further research.

Affective connections with other living entities that became visible in this study included pets as discussed in 'consolidating practices'. They also unexpectedly included reptiles, amphibians, fish, birds and plants. Affect was manifest in the familiar and informal way that these entities were addressed and discussed. Beris in Manchester has ongoing and highly affective intra-actions with her extended more-than-human museum family. And Nadia in Melbourne had a friendly exchange with a lungfish in passing; *"I wonder what he's thinking about us? Wow. Oh it's amazing. [Speaking to the fish] I'm sorry that you weren't born so beautiful. [Speaking to me] But they do have a beauty to them... I wonder if they are a family... What's their relationship I wonder. Nobody's asked them."*

Non-living entities also formed affective connections with participants. Artefacts in the form of icons such as Maude and Maharajah in Manchester, LU biscuits in Nantes and Phar Lap in Melbourne had ongoing relationships with many participants. Kathy in Melbourne imparted that *"visitors I bring, they always want to see Phar Lap⁹⁰. He's quite iconic, isn't he? Everyone knows Phar Lap."* Debra added that *"Phar Lap is...just (an) incredible story. A hero at a time when people needed something to feel good about during the Depression. He's just such an integral part of Melbourne."*

Liminal⁹¹ spaces such as the Forest Gallery in Melbourne, the vivarium in Manchester, the Château in Nantes and Te Marae in Wellington, figured significantly as spaces, places or entities of social connection. Liminal spaces are threshold spaces of transition, introspection and potential where 'people can engage with their surroundings in new and meaningful ways'⁹². The Forest Gallery is one such space, being at once inside and outside, natural and designed, and peaceful and noisy. Participants, finding themselves suddenly and unexpectedly immersed in nature, underwent a very noticeable change in state of being. They seemed to experience a heightened level of sensory awareness, expressed inspiration, curiosity, enthusiasm and awe, and showed signs of being excited, relaxed and refreshed. Melbourne participant Luke proclaimed that, *"this is terribly important because water and ferns are relaxing. Stop! Stop [pointing to a bird]! Wait on, that's the female bower bird. Then the male of course is that bright dark blue black one. See, that's really rewarding isn't it [seeing a bird]... Oh beautiful, isn't it fantastic! [very excited]... See how relaxing this is..."*

⁹⁰ <https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/articles/1628>

⁹¹ Liminal means a threshold space/place/stage – where one has the potential to act but one has not yet done so.

⁹² <https://science.howstuffworks.com/engineering/architecture/liminal-spaces>

Although embedded in the museum building, the vivarium in Manchester had a similar effect. The atmosphere, sounds, humidity, odour, temperature and lighting distinguish it from other spaces in the museum. Said Mancunian participant Tess, *“I love this corner, I feel really rested. It’s peaceful. I think that’s why people like to watch them [reptiles & amphibians] because they look relaxed, so you are relaxing.”* The Château in Nantes is a monumental spatio-temporal threshold, connecting multiple epochs in the history of the region. On entering, one is instantly conveyed to medieval times. Participant Carole remarked that there’s an odour, *“it’s very distinctive, of wood and stone, it’s unusual. I love it, it’s part of the experience. You’re transported backwards in time.”* Another beloved liminal space is Te Marae in Wellington. *“I think it’s beautiful. I really love it. It’s one of my favourite places,”* enthused participant Amy. It is a living, functioning, sacred communal space within the museum, and a lively and highly affective point of connection between Aotearoa’s⁹³ two cultures. As a ‘marae’ it is also a threshold space between the everyday world of communal life and the spiritual realm. Liminal spaces⁹⁴ like these foster reflection and meaning-making through their indeterminacy, ambiguity and atmospheres.

8.5.3 Ways of engaging

“I didn’t realise that they had so many things, you can go on visiting days to other places and it’s really great to get that chance. And I’ve made some good friends whilst I’ve been here.” Beris, volunteer, Manchester

“Each object has a number, an accession number and I was adding these myself. It felt amazing to be able to write in this book myself and become part of the museum if you like, and I loved that!” Doris, former volunteer, Manchester

Two ways of engaging within-in museums that are particularly salient to older adults are volunteering and intergenerational visits. At a time of life when possibilities for social connection may be on the wane, museums offer an array of choices for meaningful participation. In Manchester for example, volunteers are very active in multiple areas of museum life including conservation, handling tables, collections, documentation, exhibition development, exchange programs, professional development, education, events, research and outreach. All of these provide a multitude of opportunities for connection, collaboration, friendship and support. Volunteering⁹⁵ moreover, is a ‘socially valued and publicly recognized’ activity that can provide a sense of purpose, meaning and opportunities to both learn and give back to the community (WHO, 2015, p.189). Beris, Paul, Tess and Doris at Manchester Museum outline some of the benefits of volunteering in Table 17 below.

⁹³ Māori name for New Zealand.

⁹⁴ Liminal spaces like these, are saturated with atmosphere, unlike junk space which has none.

⁹⁵ There is a reciprocal relationship between health and volunteering (WHO, 2015 p.189).

Data excerpt - volunteering	Benefits
<i>I think it's <u>brilliant</u>. And I do other volunteer work...it <u>makes my day</u>, it's an <u>interest</u> for me and I like <u>talking to people</u>... it's just fascinating and I like giving any <u>knowledge</u> I've got, passing it on to them and I'm <u>learning</u> from them as well... It keeps me <u>busy</u> as well. Beris</i>	Joy, interest, exchange, learning, social interaction, being occupied
<i>You get to <u>meet</u> a lot of people, so it's a <u>social</u> thing as well. You can <u>bring friends</u> here. It's just an amazing place. Paul</i>	Connection, interaction, friends
<i>They're <u>amazing</u> people, they really are <u>lovely people</u>. They are really just so <u>welcoming</u> and so <u>friendly</u>. Paul</i>	Supportive culture, welcoming, warm
<i>...when you speak to people and you <u>tell them</u> part of the history...and <u>they tell you</u> things that you don't know, you're <u>learning</u>. And at the end when they say, well that's very interesting, thank you very much, it makes you <u>feel</u> that you've <u>done well</u> by people. Paul</i>	Exchange, learning, appreciated, satisfaction in meaningful activity,
<i>I love to teach <u>children</u> you know because I <u>want them to learn</u> what I never did. I want them to grow up to become doctors and archaeologists and to fulfil their life <u>potential</u>. Paul</i>	Giving back to the community, children, potential

Table 17. Volunteering data excerpts

Intergenerational interaction is known to be beneficial for all participants, and their communities (Bocioaga, 2020; Henkin & Butts, 2012). Within families, it can strengthen bonds, foster understanding and provide meaning. It has the 'potential to foster cohesion and inclusion, to increase social participation' and bring great joy (Gan, 2021, p.7). The majority of participants mentioned family members of different generations and/or children either in the museum or within their communities. The roles of grandparent⁹⁶, mentor and teacher were particularly meaningful and important for them as exemplified by the collaborative war exhibition in Nantes. This exhibition acted as a familial 'theatre of memory' (Samuel, 1994), facilitating difficult, complex and/or confronting conversations that deepened bonds within families. It also demonstrated how visitors used 'familial memories and identity to negotiate their sense of place within society' (Smith, 2020, p.243).

Data excerpt - intergenerational interaction	Museum
<i>And you get <u>one or two</u> who are a bit frightened of it, <u>hiding behind their dad's legs</u> or whatever. But it's just fascinating and I like giving any knowledge I've got, passing it on to them and I'm learning from them as well.</i>	Manchester Beris
<i>Oh yes, I've been in here before with the <u>children</u>. They adore the mummies... they're really mad about them.</i>	Manchester Sylvia
<i>When there were <u>young children</u> here, I'd throw the magnets onto the banded iron and they stuck, it was exciting! ... the other thing they found exciting...was all the fossils.</i>	Manchester Robert

⁹⁶ Herron & Jamieson (2020).

<i>I can't imagine any <u>children</u> not being interested when they see something like this. I have...a stuffed brown hare...on the table and it's quite big... And I remember a <u>young child</u> walking in, turning around and seeing it and he said, wow!</i>	Manchester Paul
<i>...when people come and ask you what's good for <u>children</u> and I always say to come in here (vivarium). And I say, live animals and they say, yeah, yeah, love that.</i>	Manchester Doris
<i>I took my <u>granddaughter</u> to the art museum, and we were looking at a very large monochromatic painting and she said 'grandma, they haven't finished it yet!'</i>	Nantes Yvonne
<i>I spent quite a bit of time with my <u>granddaughter</u>, trying to get her to understand how the slaves were packed like sardines into the ships.</i>	Nantes Clémence
<i>This is my <u>grandson's</u> favourite room [Bugs Alive] in the museum. He loves this room - just loves it and I think part of what he loves is the display!</i>	Melbourne Leela
<i>But all my <u>grandkids</u> loved that [Children's Gallery] when they were little. Oh, loved it.</i>	Melbourne Leela
<i>There used to be a table here where the <u>kids</u> could put on a possum cloak. Well, I've got a photo of my <u>granddaughter</u> who's now 16 when she was four, so that's how long ago. Proud, beaming, with this massive cloak on.</i>	Melbourne Leela

Table 18. Intergenerational interaction data excerpts

8.6 In a nutshell

At a time of life characterised by significant change, what is important for individuals is to have a firm sense of self, quality relationships, a role and meaning in life, the prospect of enjoyment, autonomy, and the potential for personal growth (WHO, 2015). Museum visitation, in spite of 'museum fatigue' and other physical obstacles such as invisible lifts and 'stairs everywhere', is a highly rewarding activity with a multitude of wellbeing benefits. Museums afford particularly fecund conditions of possibility for wellbeing. Conditions that foster and enhance care, connectivity and agency, provoking curiosity, wonder, and an openness to others (Hinchliffe, 2008) and the world at large. Being open is essential for sociability, conviviality and ensuring an 'open future' (Buchanan, 1997, p.82), one in which new human and more-than-human relations continue to form and enhance wellbeing. The many implications of the findings from this study and their associated opportunities form the core of the next and concluding chapter.

9. OPENING UP CONVERSATIONS

9.1 Overview

In this concluding chapter, my aim is to open up conversations about wellbeing, older visitors and museums. The study has generated many questions which I hope will provoke speculation while at the same time troubling or disrupting some common assumptions. Of course, this is just a more open-ended way of structuring, framing and contextualising key findings, their contribution, implications and opportunities, limitations of the study, and recommendations for further research. And no study would be complete without situating it within the bigger picture context. In this case, that of museums, ageing populations, public health, wellbeing and society in what is now a global context and an era of unintended consequences known as the Anthropocene.

I set out with this inquiry to better understand how museum visitation contributes to the wellbeing of older visitors and what museums might do to foster this. Put another way, how the affective interplay between older people's bodies and the museum milieu create the 'conditions of possibility for wellbeing' (Coffey, 2020, p.13). What the study has brought to light are the relational groupings that form, disperse and reform, and the different ways in which museum visitors are capacitated as a result. There was unexpected richness and diversity in an array of individuating practices that enhance wellbeing. It became clear that wellbeing is not a state pertaining to individuals (Atkinson, 2021) but is rather an affective, collective, more-than-human endeavour. It emerges from an ecology of individuating practices in oscillation, and museums provide particularly good conditions of possibility for its emergence. Museum visitation is charged with challenges, confrontation, dissonance, learning, ambiguity, uncertainty and other experiences that push beyond the realm of routine life. Yet it also gives rise to fulfillment, joy, wonder, inspiration, contentedness, meaning, purpose and a sense of belonging to multiple collectives and of having a place on the temporal continuum of history. In short, wellbeing in the museum emerges in meaningful, enlivening and capacitating socio-material experiences that enrich our understanding of ourselves in intra-action with-in the world.

The intention and contribution of this study was not to provide heuristics, principles or guidelines for museum wellbeing programming, but rather to suggest a set of questions in the light of the key findings with a view to opening up 'new ground for the exploration and invention that re-energizes people' (Massumi, 2015, p.73) and allowing the reader to make her own connections. By putting a new materialist lens to work in the examination of the museum visits of older people and framing wellbeing as a more-than-human collective⁹⁷ endeavour, this

⁹⁷ Implicit with-in any collective or assemblage are the relations that afford its coherence.

study emphasises the very sensate, affective, embodied and serendipitous nature of museum visitation. It builds on existing knowledge, contributing to fields including health sciences, gerontology, museum studies, pedagogy, and the arts/wellbeing sector by:

- framing wellbeing as the assembled capacity to act in and respond to the world around us, rather than an individual attainment or static characteristic. This builds on the work of health sciences scholars such as Atkinson, Coffey, Duff, Fox, McLeod and McPhie
- putting the combined theories of Spinoza, Simondon, Deleuze and Bergson to work. This enabled bringing to view an ecology of paradoxically collective, individuating practices underpinned by the perception-memory-imagination mechanism
- gaining insight into how the perception-memory-imagination mechanism operates in museums
- theorising museum visitation as a set of wellbeing practices that has particular relevance for older people undergoing a significant confluence of change
- revealing the breadth, richness and productivity of the conditions of possibility for wellbeing offered by museums
- bringing into view the generativity of dissonance and consonance in museums
- framing affect as the will to connect in the search for joyous, capacitating encounters that enhance wellbeing. This builds on the work of museum and affect scholars including Mulcahy, Smith, Trofanenko, Varutti, Watson and Witcomb
- problematising social connection and participation as more-than-human. This opens up to the sociality and conviviality of nonhumans, artefacts and epiphenomena
- extending visitor research methodology with a focus on the dynamic visitation process and the non-linguistic aspects of museum visitation.

The three overarching findings of the study are that: wellbeing is an affective, collective, more-than-human endeavour; wellbeing emerges through an ecology of individuating practices in oscillation and; museums offer particularly fecund ‘conditions of possibility’ for the emergence of wellbeing. Before discussing the potential of these findings, I firstly outline them below, make recommendations for further research, and then elaborate on selected implications and opportunities in the broader social context within which the study’s significance might be understood.

9.2 Working on the self collectively

Much visitor research is predicated on the assumption that learning is both the main reason that people visit museums, and what they do in museums. In the words of Trofanenko (2011), the ‘pedagogical imperative has been a mainstay of museums since their inception’ (p.481). Post-visit surveys (PVS) that participants filled out a few days after their visit, included a

question on the importance of learning. I did initially regret this question feeling that it played into assumptions about learning and museums. However, the responses revealed that participants used the category of 'learning' as a catch-all for the entire museum experience, and that learning, although important and integral to museum visitation was, like walking, incidental. As one participant said, *"I guess we're learning whatever we do, wherever we are."*

What visitors are doing in museums is individuating; working on themselves (Carr, 2006; Foucault, 1990) collectively, seeking joyous, capacitating encounters that consolidate a sense of self and extend capacity. These are all manifestations of the drive to cohere and persist. As ecologist David Abram (1997) argued, 'we are human only in contact, and conviviality, with what is not human' (p.22). By the same token, we are individuals only in contact, and conviviality with that which is 'other' (Barad, 2012). These are some of the reasons that museums provide ideal conditions for the consolidating and expansive practices of individuation. Above all, they are trusted sites of emotional connection and engagement. What visitors learn, think, do and remember will be based on what they feel (Varutti, 2022). Exhibitions provide experiences that sit at the nexus of the individual and collective, personal and public, internal and external, local and global...(2022). Visitors encounter both what is familiar and reassuring, and what is new, different, 'other' and therefore potentially expansive. They make new connections, new meanings, understand things differently, and are impelled to act.

Engagement is very personal. Beris in Manchester for example, co-opted a variety of entities and artefacts such as reptiles, amphibians and taxidermy animals, into personal more-than-human collectives in the museum. Her participation with-in these collectives contributes greatly to her ongoing wellbeing. Content that attracts, as the study shows, is content that resonates with personal meaning. In spite of curatorial intent, individuals engage with exhibition content in their own very particular ways according to their background, interests, experiences, priorities and mood. Exhibitions that foster personal connections are those that are most productive. These are most likely to be open-ended, given that received narratives leave little room for interpretation and imagination. What occurs in museums is the creative consolidation and extension of an individual's field of agency, her intra-activity, her capacity to act in, and respond to, her environment.

The individuating practices were themselves collaborations, co-productions, processual assemblages, and they underscored the intra-dependence (riffing on Barad), intra-activity and 'intra-animacy' (Myers & Dumit, 2011, p.248) of entities with-in their milieus. Investigating visitors in motion in museums highlights the entanglement of individual and milieu. And, entanglement according to Barad (2007), is 'to lack an independent, self-contained existence' (p.ix). Implicit in this entanglement is the more-than-human, new materialist worldview in which individuals are inseparably embedded in their milieus and can only be considered

together. It is an ontological extension of the WHO's (2015) notion that an individual's functional ability is the interaction between intrinsic capacity and environment.

Consolidating practices work to reinforce and stabilise the sense of self, the 'identity', providing a safe home-base from which to venture out and explore, to engage with, improvise and experiment with-in the world (Barad, 2007; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). One's identity is the core of provisional stability and keeps chaos and confusion at bay as much as possible (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). As already discussed, a safe home-base is fundamental for wellbeing. Without it, there is a loss of confidence, withdrawal and disengagement from the world that leads to isolation and fewer opportunities for connection.

Consolidating practices are on the whole, activated by encounters with the familiar. They provide a sense of belonging, continuity, ways of understanding one's place in the world and in the multiple collectives of which one is a part. Expansive practices occur largely in encounters with dissonance, difference, contradiction, ambiguity and the not-yet-known. These extend the capacity of an individual to make new connections, create new meaning, adapt, improvise and transform. It is through the process of affective dissonance, according to Hemmings (2012) that one becomes 'other' to oneself. She adds that 'in order to know differently we have to feel differently' (2012, p.150) and it is through affective dissonance that we feel differently. Affective encounters are investigative, experimental, improvisational, imaginative, creative, reassuring, transformative and normative. In this study, they functioned in oscillation between the consolidating and the expansive, loosening rigid habits and ideas, and generating openings and potentials as they move back and forth from one to the other.

Individuating practices are particularly important for older people as leading up to and into the third age tends to be a time of great change on many levels. The degree, intensity and diversity of that change can cause anxiety, fear, depression, loss of confidence and self-esteem and stress, all of which impact health and wellbeing. Individuating practices may be equally important for teenagers, as both late adulthood and adolescence incorporate significant 'biological, psychological and social changes' (Kroger, 2002, p.82; Newman et al., 2014, p.433). Despite having particular significance during later life and adolescence, individuating practices, are important for all of us as they are a pleasurable, constructive and satisfying way of navigating 'the emotional volatility and uncertainty of our [lives and] times' (Varutti, 2022, pp.2-3).

It might be tempting for museums to conclude that individuation as an incidental benefit of visitation, is 'out of the control' of curators and other staff, and that museums can do nothing more than encourage people to visit. However, the findings suggest myriad ways that museums could connect and engage more effectively and meaningfully with their publics,

communities and older visitors, and in doing so, foster wellbeing. Several of these are addressed below.

9.3 Implications and opportunities

The association between cultural attendance and wellbeing is well established, although until now (as far as I have been able to establish), the underlying workings were unknown. Many of the implications of this study and their associated opportunities concern the conditions that encourage and stimulate connection, inclusion, and ways that museums could engage more deeply, affectively, meaningfully and productively with visitors. Understanding the conditions and practices that generate wellbeing brings with it the potential for cultural institutions to more actively involve themselves in fostering the conditions of possibility for the emergence of wellbeing (Coffey, 2020) in rich, resonant and meaningful ways. In this section, I elaborate on selected implications and opportunities that impact individuals, museums, government and society. Not elaborated on are avenues for further wellbeing-museum research suggested by the study including: the wellbeing of First Nations people (Dalziel et al., 2019; Dow et al., 2023) and adolescents (Coffey, 2020; McLeod & Wright, 2016); the pedagogical potential of non-verbal learning and knowing (Duke, 2017); and encounters with death.

9.3.1 For individuals

The spatio-temporal conditions that prevail within museums productively foster disconnection from routine spacetime, liberating visitors to perceive, remember, conjecture, imagine, feel and think differently. Heterotopias such as museums, generate anticipation, an expectation of encounters with novelty and difference and a greater state of openness and permeability to what is generally experienced during everyday routine life. These factors are conducive to the energising ecology of socio-material practices summarised in the previous section. Not only that, but museum visitation involves getting out of the house, walking, and an array of opportunities for social connection and participation. As members of diverse collectives, individuals are implicit in the implications and opportunities outlined below. These speak to Grosz's (2017) reminder that the world is not 'governed by scarcity and lack, but by an abundance of potential, the endless possibility for becoming, and becoming-more, for continual replenishment and transformation through these inexhaustible potentials' (p.180).

9.3.2 For museums

Connecting and engaging meaningfully with publics: Apart from being necessary for understanding who we are, where we belong and how we fit in, social inclusion, integration and participation are, as we have seen, protective of illness and essential for wellbeing. Museums are places of collective life with great potential for connection, participation, individuation and joyful encounters. Josef Helfenstein (2021), director of the Kunstmuseum in

Basel, proposes that museums offer sustainability in the form of ‘providing something important and precious for the long-term health and wellbeing of society’ (p.116). Yet do museums make assumptions about older people, what interests them and how and with what they wish to engage (Dodd et al., 2018, p.10)? And are they doing enough to connect and engage meaningfully with their older visitors and their home and source communities? Are they ‘permeable to the exterior and sensitive to heterogeneous realities [necessary] to question both the transformations of the present and the narratives of the past’ (Borja-Villel, 2021, p.51)? Are publics welcome to ‘spend time sitting, reading, watching, discussing... all those activities that were central to museums prior to the 19th century colonial models’ (Déliiss, 2021, p.96)? And, do museums ‘routinely adapt [too much] to the tastes of an assumed audience... and the sources of their material support’ (Clifford, 1997, p.209), their funders?

The power and potential of the local: Museums are located within communities, and it is the local that differentiates and grounds a museum, counteracting the homogenising forces of ‘globalization’ (Obrist, 2021, p.227). Helfenstein (2021) points out, that the ‘local remains the key source of energy, engagement and critical feedback’ (p.115). The social functions of a museum are embedded in local communities which provide a springboard for engagement with and understanding of the global. Being ‘locally rooted’ says Sam Keller (2021), director of the Fondation Beyeler, ‘is ... a condition for branching out internationally’ (p.144). The relationship between the international or global and the local is also what underpins cultural exchange and dialogue (Tan, 2021). It is in local cultural contexts that the impacts of global trends must be critically engaged with; displayed, examined, discussed, debated, and reflected and acted on. It is the local context that connects and provides relevance and meaning. Habermas as cited by Barrett (2011) alleges that if space/place is to be a ‘discourse of the public sphere...it must be central to the “lifeworld”, the everyday’ (p.102). Museum director Franklin Sirmans (2020) agrees, stating that museums must ‘allow for real life to enter into the conversation’ (p.49).

“People who come to museums want to connect to real things; things that somehow, they can connect to their lives. The visitor experience must be really rich & unique... Experiences must be authentic.” Staff member, Melbourne

The participants in this study were all local ‘residents, stable and regular visitors who feel the need to nourish themselves’ with the collections (Bellenger, 2021, p.35). The power and potential of the local was strongly reflected in the positive and affective connections and engagements with municipal icons, local history and issues, and the local natural environment (Knez et al., 2020). Participants connected to, engaged with, and discussed the larger global issues and trends in terms of the local, how impacts were being experienced within families, neighbourhoods and amongst communities. This is what Keller (2021) refers to as ‘building a bridge... to the museum’ by connecting to people’s existing interests (p.140), making

collections relevant to visitors' lives and in so doing, creating publics. Museums, after all is said and done, are social and communal infrastructure that should first and foremost be for their communities (Chipperfield, 2022).

Dissonance and the messiness of life: The participants in this study engaged most significantly (in depth and duration) and productively with what are often called difficult, contested, or dissonant histories. Histories concerned with human rights, animal rights, social justice, equity or ethical components such as war, slave trading, repatriation, genetic engineering, environmental concerns and colonisation. These are themes that constitute critical publics and audiences, that 'call publics to attention' (Hickey-Moody et al., 2021, p.17), and solicit action. As such, they have the power to advance the common good in the form of such causes as human rights and social justice.

Director of the National Gallery of Singapore and the Singapore Art Museum, Eugene Tan (2021) proposes that collections 'should be presented in ways that provoke a reflexive examination of contemporary [issues] ... through specific relationships to history' (p.219). Dissonance, controversy, inconsistency, uncertainty, contradiction and ambiguity do just that; they stimulate curiosity, insist on investigation, provoke thought, and call for resolution. They are so compelling because they reflect the messiness of life. As the dissonant and more potentially confronting exhibitions are few in number, one wonders whether museums as a general rule, have a tendency to simplify and tidy up this alluring, provocative and productive messiness in a bid for a more sanitised, hermetic, streamlined, educational or entertaining experience. In which case, do they underestimate their publics and their willingness and desire to engage in this way, and the productivity or generativity of such untidiness? And is the productive potential of dissonance incorporated in museum pedagogy?

"I would love to openly discuss controversial issues with the public. Things like the indigenous objects that we have in the collections that we shouldn't have and what we should do with them... Everything is changing so fast." Staff member, Melbourne

Mary Louise Pratt (2008) in coining the term 'contact zones' as 'spaces of colonial encounters' aimed to invoke the intersecting 'spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated' (p.8) geographically and temporally. In contact zones, meanings are primarily relational, and collections become 'an ongoing historical, political, moral *relationship* - a power-charged set of exchanges, of push and pull' (Clifford, 1997, p.192, italics original). Loss and struggle sit side by side with continuity and connection and visitors use what they encounter to make, unmake and remake their own meanings.

Themes of loss, struggle and injustice were particularly confronting, yet were also the ones which most often captivated and engaged participants affectively, provoking deep personal

and ethical reflections and sophisticated and highly personal analyses. Engagement was very subjective, characterised by intertwined personal narratives such as Clémence's visit to an embarkation room for slaves in Zanzibar, Kathy's story of migration or Colin's experience of industrial pollution. These themes are all associated with global megatrends, contemporary themes that solicit engagement, and 'call publics to attention' (Hickey-Moody et al., 2021, p.17). Yet they were contextualised, examined and discussed by participants with a deep personal concern for the future. This is at odds with the assumption implied by a focus on reminiscence sessions for older museum visitors, that 'the best of older people's lives... lies in the past' (Dodd et al., 2018, p.10), and that older people have little interest in the present or the future. A sense of belonging, citizenship, shared responsibility, purpose, and meaning are all implicitly about connecting past, present and future, and call for active and critical engagement with current affairs in imagining and creating sustainable futures.

Citizenship and community building: Museums and citizenship have been entangled since the time of the French Revolution (Krasny, 2017) and many strands of this study converge around the notion of citizenship. These include participation, belonging, shared responsibility, rights and duties, connection with the local and the everyday, engagement with global trends, a future facing orientation and so on. In fact, the consolidating individuating practices could all conceivably be framed as formal and informal citizenship practices as could several of the expansive individuating practices. Citizenship is defined by Alldred, Fox and Hakak (2020) as 'an *emergent capacity* of material social interactions' (p.149, italics original), 'a material flux of affects between humans, things, social collectivities and ideas' (p.153), and 'replaces concern with belonging with an open-ended becoming' (Braidotti, 2013, p.169). As such, it is an assemblage of intra-active capacities that now spill well beyond national borders.

Volunteering is one form of citizenship that adds value to society and is therefore perceived as both productive and meaningful by both volunteers and society. In volunteering people are affirming their citizenship, 'earning' their rights and taking on the responsibilities that come with being a citizen (Dizon et al., 2020). Many of the volunteers in this study expressed a strong desire and great willingness to do more, to be more involved and to contribute more. These comments were entirely unsolicited, leading me to wonder whether museums are leveraging the enormous potential that exists in their volunteer groups. At one museum for example, over 100 volunteers offered to participate in this study with only 12 places.

The demonstrated concerns with global trends and their impacts, as revealed in this study, are a form of active political citizenship, part of what Krasny (2017) calls the 'new rituals of citizenship' (p.58). Lister (2003) claims that to 'act as a citizen requires first a sense of agency, the belief that one can act; acting as a citizen, especially collectively, in turn fosters that sense of agency' (p.39). This is important for older people potentially facing a diminished sense of agency (Cockburn, 2013). Citizenship practices are capacitating practices of individuation that

are both consolidating and expansive. For example, learning about and caring for native flora in cities both promotes environmental stewardship and provides opportunities to connect with nature and build community (Singh, 2018). Museums are themselves citizens; posthuman citizens, with rights and responsibilities for the advancement of public good based on an ethics of care (Hickey-Moody et al., 2021). They are sites of performance and display, soliciting audience engagement, providing a focus for their critical⁹⁸ capacities. As such, they have a responsibility to engage in citizenship practices such as raising public awareness, addressing issues of human and animal rights, social justice, equity and care, and promoting debate and social change. This area is yet another potentially fruitful area for further research.

Publics and the public sphere in this study were always more-than-human, consisting as they do of the more-than-human collectives to which individuals belong. They include other living entities, the environment and the weather for example (Hickey-Moody et al., 2021). Engaging with the materiality of the museum, its artefacts, atmospheres, spaces and narratives, is a form of civic participation and was productive of a sense of purpose, meaning and agency for participants. The depth of critical engagement, particularly with the dissonant themes of slave trading and war were, I suggest, individually capacitating contributions to the collective public good.

Inclusion, diversity and heterogeneity: Social inclusion is a prerequisite for participation, for a sense of self, of belonging and for wellbeing. Yet, how well and how often are minority, disenfranchised and vulnerable groups invited into, represented or included in museums? Diversity, plurality and heterogeneous realities are all characteristics of communities, the diverse and multiple publics that museums as 'inclusive, and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue'⁹⁹ serve. There are no absolute or singular truths, only coexisting divergent views (Robertson & Cohen, 2011). It is these divergent views, these encounters with difference that this study found to be so generative of 'meaningful and useful experiences' (Nielsen, 2015, p.376) along with a depth of engagement and reflection that are both expansive and potentially transformative. The way, for example, that *Te Marae* has 'broken down some barriers' through its contemporary interpretation and location and role within Te Papa. This is what Tony Bennett (2005) was referring to when he proposed that 'museums are variously conceptualized as contact zones, as spaces for dialogic encounters between cultures, as instruments for the promotion of cultural tolerance, or as means for promoting and managing the identities of differentiated communities' (p.538). And what Gurian (2001) meant by museums being 'safe places for unsafe ideas, meeting grounds for diverse peoples and neutral forums for discussing issues of our day' (p.97). Yet, how many museums conceive of themselves in this way?

⁹⁸ Critical is used here in the sense of making use of reason (Habermas, 1991, p.24).

⁹⁹ A definition proposed by curator Jette Sandahl at the ICOM conference in Kyoto, 2019

Intergenerational activity: According to the WHO (2021a), intergenerational programs ‘are among the most effective interventions to reduce ageism against older people...’ (p.126). Benefits are many and include the ‘transfer of knowledge, skills, values, history and culture from generation to generation’ (Gan, 2021, p.3; Newman & Hatton-Yeo, 2008), health and wellbeing outcomes, improved sense of self-esteem and self-worth, and shared understanding amongst generations (Gan, 2021). Intergenerational museum visits are used to tell and validate stories, understand legacies, strengthen familial connections, ‘negotiate... sense of place within society’ and to connect with absent family members (Smith, 2020, p.243) as was the case with Laurent, Clémence and her granddaughter in Nantes.

Museums are ideal environments for both educational and intergenerational activities. Anecdotes from participants and museum staff in this study indicate that many older people visit or have visited museums with children (familial and non-familial) and grandchildren and that they view this as an important, enjoyable, and meaningful activity. A recent study supported by the findings of this study, indicates that museum visitation is a habit formed early in life (Temple & Gan, 2020). Encouraging intergenerational visitation would not only benefit the visitors themselves but also museums, as it is now often grandparents who have the responsibility for inducting their grandchildren into the joys of museum visitation and so developing new publics for museums. This suggests further research into the potential of museums as hosts for grandparenting and foster grandparenting. Notwithstanding, it must be remembered that these grandparents are also highly intra-active, creative individuals in their own right with rich, complex and nuanced lives, stories, skills, interests, opinions and feelings.

Social justice and inequity: If museums as some contend, should be defined as ‘polyphonic spaces for the advancement of social justice, democracy, and global well-being - as central agents in the development of a more just and equal society’ (Bechtler & Imhof, 2021, p.6), then one would expect a focus on social justice and equity issues. However, discounting the prevalence of colonial exhibitions and displays, how often are the persistent issues stemming from colonialism or those of racism, sexism, ageism and ableism discussed or debated in museums? As previously noted, ageism with its highly deleterious wellbeing impacts, is ‘everywhere, yet it is the most socially ‘normalized’ of any prejudice and is not widely challenged - like racism or sexism’¹⁰⁰. Despite being a current ‘social urgency’ (Tan, 2021, p.219) of some significance, it is rarely seen in museum exhibitions or included in programs.

We are not separate from each other or our environment: Nature-connectedness or biophilia (Kellert, 2012; Nisbet et al., 2011; Ulrich, 1984) was a recurrent theme in all museums and with all participants. Biophilia is both an important health and wellbeing concept (Van den Bosch & Bird, 2018; de Wet, 2018; Li & Bell, 2018; Olivos & Clayton, 2017; Seymour, 2016) and an

¹⁰⁰ WHO, 2021a.

approach rich with potential for engaging museum visitors with natural heritage collections and fostering environmental stewardship (Dodd et al., 2018; Louv, 2008). A diversity of sometimes unexpected artefacts triggered anecdotes of being in and with nature, and reflections on biodiversity, environmental and other nature-related concerns along with animal rights. These ranged from taxidermy animals, skeletons, botanical specimens and geological samples, through photos, paintings, maps, diagrams, videos, interactive elements, models, sculptures and boats, to gardens, forests and other living creatures. Not all museums in this study had natural heritage collections or displays. Nantes, for example, does not, yet, participants engaged affectively with nature through the ever-present and highly significant element of water. Water appeared explicitly and implicitly in many forms; in paintings, photos, maps, diagrams, models, videos and interactive elements.

Natural heritage has the potential to open up and connect visitors to social and ethical issues including climate change, environmental sustainability, nature connectedness, species extinction and the impact of humans on their environment, all key and current concerns of the Anthropocene (Dodd et al., 2018). Nature-connected embodied, affective, and 'sensate processes are crucial in producing' the potential for wellbeing in museums (Coffey, 2020, p.12). In a recent study on using natural heritage collections to work with older people, Dodd et al., (2018) found that didactic knowledge-based approaches were less likely to engage 'sensory, everyday interest in and relationship with nature' (p.49). People have an 'affective, cognitive and experiential relationship with the natural world' (Nisbet et al., 2011, p.304). Yet, as Varutti (2022) states, 'virtually no scholarly attention has been paid to investigating the dynamics that make [museums] affective' (p.3). The acknowledged imbrication of the senses, emotion and cognition (Gruber, 2019; Menary, 2010; Newen et al., 2018; Szanto, 2016), the growing number of theorists (Damasio, 2005; Immordino-Yang, 2008; Mulcahy, 2019; Smith, 2011; Trofanenko, 2014; Varutti, 2022; Witcomb, 2015; Yob, 1998) who insist on the fundamental role of affect in pedagogy, and the findings of this study all have consequential implications for pedagogic practices in museums.

Museum as public intellectual: The exhibitions with which visitor-participants spent most time with, were those that were open-ended and had depth of content and cogent narratives. These tended to be the dissonant histories, controversies and content with ethical components, indicating that curatorial practices, both individual and collaborative, have much to 'contribute to the role of the museum as public intellectual' (Barrett, 2011, p.143). It also suggests an appreciation for curators using their 'specialist expertise to challenge and inspire audiences in unexpected ways' and 'interrogate the political and cultural significance of collections' (2011 p.148 & 159). Spending time with complex or controversial content was not a concern for the participants in this study, and in fact seemed to be welcomed. As a staff member in Nantes pointed out, *"I'm very wary of the image we have of older people. We have realised that those who engage most profoundly with content are often those who no longer*

work fulltime, as they have time to do so..." This is yet another pointer to the demand for museums to be 'institutions of public culture, of intellectual development, and as facilitators of debate among diverse publics' (Barrett, 2011, p.163). Museums unlike nation-states, are well placed to be 'promoters of social change, powerful sites of social activism' (Varutti, 2022, p.2), and to discuss, debate, examine and act on the impacts and significance of global trends and concerns in local contexts.

Museum as entity: a model for critical reflection and introspection: The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the world and how we live in ways that were unimaginable just a few years ago. Individuals, institutions, and many other entities have been and continue to be forced to adapt. Museums are no exception. They must evolve, change and reinvent themselves in order to survive (Dercon, 2021; Keller, 2021; Obrist, 2021; Ozerkov, 2021; Pfeiffer, 2021; Szymczyk, 2021). In times of constant, rapid and significant change such as we are currently experiencing, critical reflection and introspection are imperative. It is expedient for museums to 'look at their own condition, critically' (Szymczyk, 2021, p.214) and 'rethink their existing operating paradigms' (Tan, 2021, p.221).

This wellbeing inquiry applies to both individual wellbeing, but also to the wellbeing of institutions. Director of the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Manuel Borja-Villel (2021), suggests that 'we view a museum as a living organism... continually reformulating itself' (p.56). He goes on to propose that the concept of *autopoiesis* or the capacity of living beings 'to relate to one another, their ability to rethink their own structures in relation to others, and their impulse to negotiate their interests collectively' (p.56) could be productively applied. This notion aligns with Simondon's concept of individuating entities, assemblages or collectives which is a framework that could productively be applied to examine the internal and external workings, the connections and networks, and the wellbeing of a museum.

Like an individual, a museum entity is interconnected, intra-active, self-organising, and has the capacity to act in the world. The wellbeing or capacity to act of a museum is, like that of an individual, predicated on connectedness, the ability to 'form new relations' (Buchanan, 1997, p.82), and the quality and intensity of those relations (Massumi, 2015). Museums produce networks of relations with visitors, local and other communities through communications, exhibitions and outreach activities, and with institutions through exchange, sharing and collaboration. To form more relations, the museum 'must remain permeable to the exterior and sensitive to heterogeneous realities' (Borja-Villel, 2021, p.51), allowing it to remain responsive to the needs of the publics, communities and societies it serves. This takes place both inside museum buildings and out in the world. As curator Adam Szymczyk (2021) suggests, 'in a post-Covid world, what museums do outside their walls will become as

important as what they put on them¹⁰¹ (p.17). The globally networked vivarium for the conservation of amphibians and reptiles at Manchester is one such example.

Museums are, and always already were, in intra-action with multiple collectives such as government through cultural policy, the museum sector with its traditions and protocols, local communities, and society in general (Witcomb, 2015, p.137). Possibilities for forming new and different relationships, embedding themselves within their operating environments, and mitigating the impacts of economic rationalisation by leveraging these connections abound. Collaboration with other sectors, public institutions, social services, local communities and publics, curation as a shared endeavour, and museums as ‘dialogic’ spaces (Witcomb, 2003), are just some examples.

9.3.3 For government and society

Fostering conditions for wellbeing: policy implications: The Centre for Policy Development’s submission to Treasury on ‘Measuring What Matters’ recommended that the Australian government should begin by identifying broad wellbeing goals¹⁰². If indeed, one of those goals is to improve the wellbeing of citizens, then what we measure and how we measure it will determine the parameters. The implications of this study strongly indicate a shift away from individual wellbeing, to what emerges in intra-active, more-than-human collectives or fields of conditions within which they are embedded. Thus, in view of this study’s findings, I suggest that policy focus should involve identifying and creating capacitating conditions, and the encouragement of active participation with-in museums. This would mean enquiring into the activities and collectives that bring purpose, meaning, joy and satisfaction into people’s lives, fostering the conditions for these, and encouraging participation.

Belonging, Being and Becoming is the Australian national Early Years Learning Framework¹⁰³. It refers to how children are connected to family, community, culture and place and how these connections or relationships are instrumental in how a child finds her/his place in the world, creates an identity and makes meaning. The principles and components of this framework are equally significant for wellbeing in the third age. The relevance of this early years framework for later life brings into view the similarities between adolescence and late adulthood mentioned earlier. All of these life stages encompass substantial change at multiple levels (Kroger, 2002, p.82). A focus on life stage similarities and the potential of leveraging relevant frameworks and principles is an additional area for further research.

¹⁰¹ Szymczyk was referring to art museums in this instance but the quote is relevant to all museums.

¹⁰² <https://cpd.org.au/2023/04/measuring-what-matters/>

¹⁰³ <https://www.education.gov.au/child-care-package/national-quality-framework/approved-learning-frameworks>

Funding for the arts: Funding for the arts/culture/heritage as with any funding, is contingent on a demonstrable return on investment. As an explanatory framework for the association between culture and wellbeing has been elusive to date (Fox, 2012b, p.496), arts funding for the most part tends to be adhoc and unsustainable. The ecology of practices in museums uncovered by this study, provides a way of understanding the interaction of culture and wellbeing. These practices highlight the role and importance of the arts/culture/heritage in providing the conditions of possibility for wellbeing, and thus present a strong case for more, and more sustained funding.

Creating lively, dynamic public spaces that heighten the senses: From the time of the Guggenheim in Bilbao, many museums were caught up in tourism and urban regeneration programs rather than what architect David Chipperfield (2022) defines as their core role as ‘social and cultural communal infrastructure’ (p.67) for their communities. Then, as Chipperfield went on to say, ‘visitor numbers become the measure of everything’ (2022, p.67) as museums attempt to demonstrate return on investment, and the visitor experience becomes a lesser priority. The gift of architecture claims architect Bjarke Ingels (2022), is in creating an ‘environment that engages us and makes us feel fully present’ (p.196). However, one feels impelled to ask whether museum management on the whole, is more concerned about what museums look like literally and figure-atively¹⁰⁴, than how they are experienced; how they feel.

Spending more and more time staring at screens and cruising through virtual worlds as we do, intensifies the yearning for visceral, sensory, embodied, analogue experiences that good museums provide. And museum buildings have the potential to create spaces of inspiring experiences and meaningful interactions, encouraging people to roam and to create their own journeys. By providing a ‘landscape of surface texture, duration and spatial sequence’ (Adjaye, 2022, p.52), museum buildings can heighten the senses and make the visitor think. In describing what makes a good museum building, architect Frida Escobedo (2022) explains that it is a variety of spaces that shift as you move through them; favourite corners that you can feel are your own, areas for people-watching and others for connection, reflection and imagination (p.88).

“Many museums have become generic; they have the same flavour and no personality. I think that museums are undergoing a period of soul-searching or searching at least. We are asking ourselves why fewer people are visiting than before and why blockbusters are not the answer to everything,” says a staff member at Melbourne Museum. Architect David Adjaye (2022) agrees, warning that many ‘contemporary museums fall flat because they end up with

¹⁰⁴ By figure-atively, I mean showing high visitor numbers and thus good return on investment. It should be noted that visitor numbers, like GDP are quantitative and indicate little about the quality of visits.

something generic – they become dead spaces,’ (p.53) without character and, rather than enlivening, ‘lull the visitor to sleep’ (Ingels, 2022, p.196).

Social prescribing: A person’s environment plays a large part in her wellbeing, either extending or limiting functional ability or agency. Arts on prescription, a subset of social prescribing¹⁰⁵ is a collaboration between healthcare and social services to address psychosocial problems in non-medical environments. Museums provide rich, inclusive non-clinical and non-stigmatising environments for self-reflection (Colbert et al., 2013). Two of the visitor-participants in this study disclosed that they had been referred to their museum by community healthcare professionals with excellent outcomes. Yet, the majority of museum programs for older adults focus on health conditions such as dementia and stroke (Dodd et al., 2018; APPGAHW, 2017), thus publicly affirming, albeit unwittingly, deficit models of ageing and older people.

Participants in this study came from diverse backgrounds, socio-economic and health status and education levels. However, there was no noticeable difference in their willingness to reflect nor on the levels of perceptive, creative and imaginative engagement and speculation. Given that current museum visitors are predominantly well off and well educated, and the strong link between health, wellbeing and poverty, this suggests another area of largely unleveraged potential that museums have for wellbeing (APPGAHW, 2017, p.30). Although not a focus of this study, and speaking speculatively, participants in Manchester from working class backgrounds seemed to benefit and appreciate the possibilities of museums even more emphatically than others. These points also indicate the promising outcomes that might result from cross-sectoral collaborations and transversal alliances, such as the joining of forces and sharing of territory amongst healthcare services, social services and cultural institutions.

More-than-human social connection and participation: At this point I return to social connection and participation, and the more-than-human, transindividual and relational nature of affect (Celis Bueno, 2022, p.122). The literature is very clear with regard to the association between social connection and participation, and positive health and wellbeing outcomes (Amagasa et al., 2017; Curvers et al., 2018; Dawson-Townsend, 2019; Douglas et al., 2017; Vozikaki et al., 2017). However, the research is predicated on social connection and participation being exclusively human. This study shows that social connection and participation is decidedly more-than-human and includes taxidermy animals, reptiles and amphibians, fossils and narratives, for example. This is, I believe, a very rich area for further research and may well account for the many older adults who appear to be socially isolated yet are not lonely and furthermore, lead rich and satisfying lives. By way of speculation, these adults ‘socialise’ with pets, and/or engage with nature through activities such as gardening,

¹⁰⁵ The Social Prescribing Network (UK) notes that up to 20% of patients see a GP for an issue that requires a social solution (All-Party Parliamentary Group, 2017, p.7).

and culture through art, music and literature. Problematising¹⁰⁶ social connection and participation using a more-than-human worldview, I believe, could be productive given its focus on relations and intra-action with any entities whether human or not.

9.3.4 For research methods and process

The literature highlighted some significant gaps in museum-wellbeing research that this study addresses. Firstly there is the perception-memory-imagination mechanism and the ecology of practices that link the arts, culture, heritage with positive health and wellbeing outcomes. Next there is the experiential museum visit that views the museum as an intra-active field of conditions rather than a collection of artefacts, a group of exhibitions or specific programs. And finally, there is the processual nature of museum visitation, which continues to operate well after the visit is over. This was particularly remarkable in the comparison of the pre-visit and post-visit surveys. Spending time with participants in motion with-in a field of conditions fosters trust, sympathy and thoughtfulness. Sending surveys two to three days after the visit allowed the workings of the visit to take provisional effect, for participants to (re)create their own meanings and more productively address survey questions. It also speaks to our need to share experiences and in the sharing, to continue to process and to better understand what they mean for us. This I believe, has great potential for research in general.

Methodological challenges: Before concluding, I point to some challenges in working with the methodological toolkit employed for this study. Although this toolkit was ultimately generative, and I suggest, innovative in relation to the use of post-qualitative methods, it is not one that is either readily applicable or ‘user-friendly’. It takes a considerable investment of time to comprehend the theoretical framework well enough to work with it, and to immerse oneself in, attune to, and map the affective flows and connections within assemblages. Moments of clarity are rare amongst the plurality, indeterminacy and entanglement of assemblages in motion and one’s own subjectivity is sorely unsettled along the way (Dernikos & Lesko, 2024). Furthermore, researching with this toolkit does not lend itself to planning, project management or any of the reporting requirements mandated by universities, and perhaps most disconcerting of all, there are no guarantees in terms of output. It is not a toolkit that results in neat solutions, facts or certain knowledge, but rather by forcing thought (Deleuze, 1994, p.139), speculation and the reconceptualisation of self and other, produces ‘ongoing sites of exploration and struggle’ (Dernikos & Lesko, 2024, p.43). According to one’s onto-epistemological commitments, this might be viewed as a limitation and/or a strength.

¹⁰⁶ Problematising is constituting something as an ‘object for thought’ (Foucault, 1996, p.456-57).

9.4 Final words

‘The essential need we identify is culture change: change in conventional thinking leading to change in conventional practice.’ (APPGAHW, 2017, p.6)

‘Filling the gaps in our (arts, health and wellbeing) knowledge will involve the better coordination and funding of research, including cross-disciplinary studies... especially in the areas of prevention...’ (APPGAHW, 2017, p.42)

Sarah Harper (2017) states that we need to ‘recognise that twenty-first century living is structured by twentieth century institutions which may not be effective for the twenty-first century dynamics’ (p.204). Are we, as Bruno Latour (2004) asked, ‘like those mechanical toys that endlessly make the same gesture when everything else has changed around them’ (p.225)? Or, are we able to make the necessary adjustments to function more effectively in current conditions? There is a structural lag, which Chris Phillipson (2013) proposed, has ‘taken on a degree of social pathology in its consequences for the individual and society’ (p.165). As entities, museums have a core of provisional habits that form the ‘self’. This includes standard operating procedures, policies, mission, vision, goals, guidelines, strategic plans and so on. These habits are either adaptable and dynamic, adjusting to the ever-evolving operating environment, or intransigent, ‘tired’ (Massumi, 2015, p.66) and quickly losing relevance.

Museums are institutions with immense and as yet largely unrealised potential to contribute to wellbeing, and in doing so to foster partnerships and build social cohesion that will contribute to alleviating current and projected stress on public health systems. As entities, they provide ‘something important and precious for the long-term health and wellbeing of society’ (Helfenstein, 2021, p.116). They are open or ‘sandbox’¹⁰⁷ worlds that are temporally indeterminate and ‘one of the last public refuges... (where) self-determined action’ is possible (Dercon, 2021, p.13). By definition, museums are social spaces oriented to common welfare, and in an age where capitalism has a tendency to convert public services into commodities (Navarro, 1977), ‘we must respect and sustain areas in which communication and co-operation is not commercialised, where services do not have the character of commodities’ (Deppe, 2010, p.36). Commercialisation argues Zukin (as cited in Barrett, 2011), ‘limits the potential of public culture to effect democracy in a positive way’ (p.91). However, museums must be well themselves to leverage this potential. They must think differently, operate differently, and move beyond stereotypes of visitors as passive consumers (of edu/infotainment), responding to them instead as engaged, capable and active participants in the museum experience.

Michel Foucault (1984) stated that ‘[w]e are at a moment...when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points

¹⁰⁷ A sandbox or open world video game is one in which there are no predetermined narratives or prescribed goals, the player is free to explore, modify and interact creatively with the world she/he discovers.

and intersects with its own skein' (p.1). Life in this Anthropocene epoch I suggest, is more-than-human and affectively relational, rather than sequential or linear, and was always-already thus. Acknowledging this opens up many as-yet-unrealised possibilities, much potential for joyful encounters and for greatly enhanced wellbeing. This study has taken the conversation concerning the wellbeing of older adults and cultural institutions in new directions, prised open Pandora's box and opened up whole new worlds of potential. And, to provide a 'jumping-off point' (Massumi, 2015, p.204) on this open-ended journey, I close with the following questions. Are museums structured for and embracing the current global context and its conditions? Are museums collaborating with the communities within which they are embedded? Do museums make limiting assumptions about visitors, and in particular older visitors? And, are museums places of hope that can help us navigate the complexity of the present and imagine a better future?

EPILOGUE: A CONFESSION

‘We need to shift from thinking about methods as processes of gathering data toward methods as a becoming entangled in relations.’ (Springgay & Truman, 2018, p.204)

The greatest struggle with this research has been and continues to be my own habits of mind, default thinking/framing, stereotypes, biases, and clichés. I kept setting out determined to think differently, to be open to possibility, yet decades of habits of mind and unconscious slippages accumulate and suddenly, I find myself thinking/doing again with a socio-culturally normative mindset. Collecting, analysing and coding data, attempting to bring it to heel rather than acknowledging/realising that I was/am hopelessly entangled and that the best-case scenario is that ‘we’, the data and I, will come to an understanding. This research is/was/will be as much about the ongoing wrangling with myself as it is/was/will be about the ‘oh so enchanting’ data, and of course about the contingent understanding that ‘we’ may come to together.

Default or domesticated thinking is alarmingly efficient, streamlining possibilities, with the unfortunate side effect that we no longer notice what is taken-for-granted, is habitual and deeply ingrained. Doors close, cracks are filled and the ‘other’ becomes invisible as we sweep by in the slipstream of daily routines and habits. We remain safely and comfortably immersed in socially accepted, institutional clichés, ‘conventional significations’ (Deleuze, 2000, p.16), stereotypes and formulae that stem from mainstream narratives and meta societal discourses. To truly create new knowledge, requires discomfort, rupture, framing things differently, taking a different approach and escaping those persistent habits of mind, and, as Deleuze (2006) puts it, ‘[t]hinking would then mean discovering, inventing, new possibilities of life’ (p.101). It is just neither straightforward or easy!

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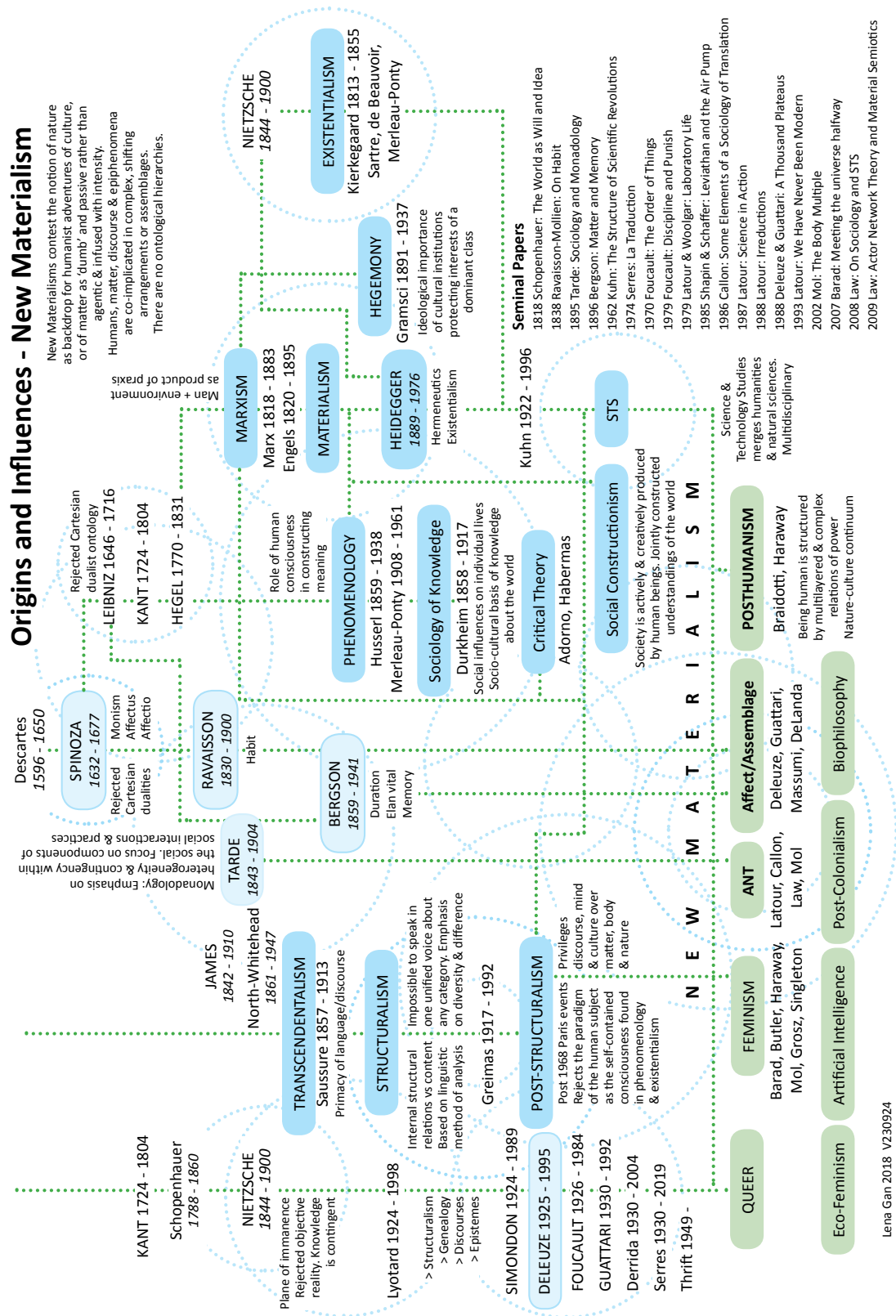
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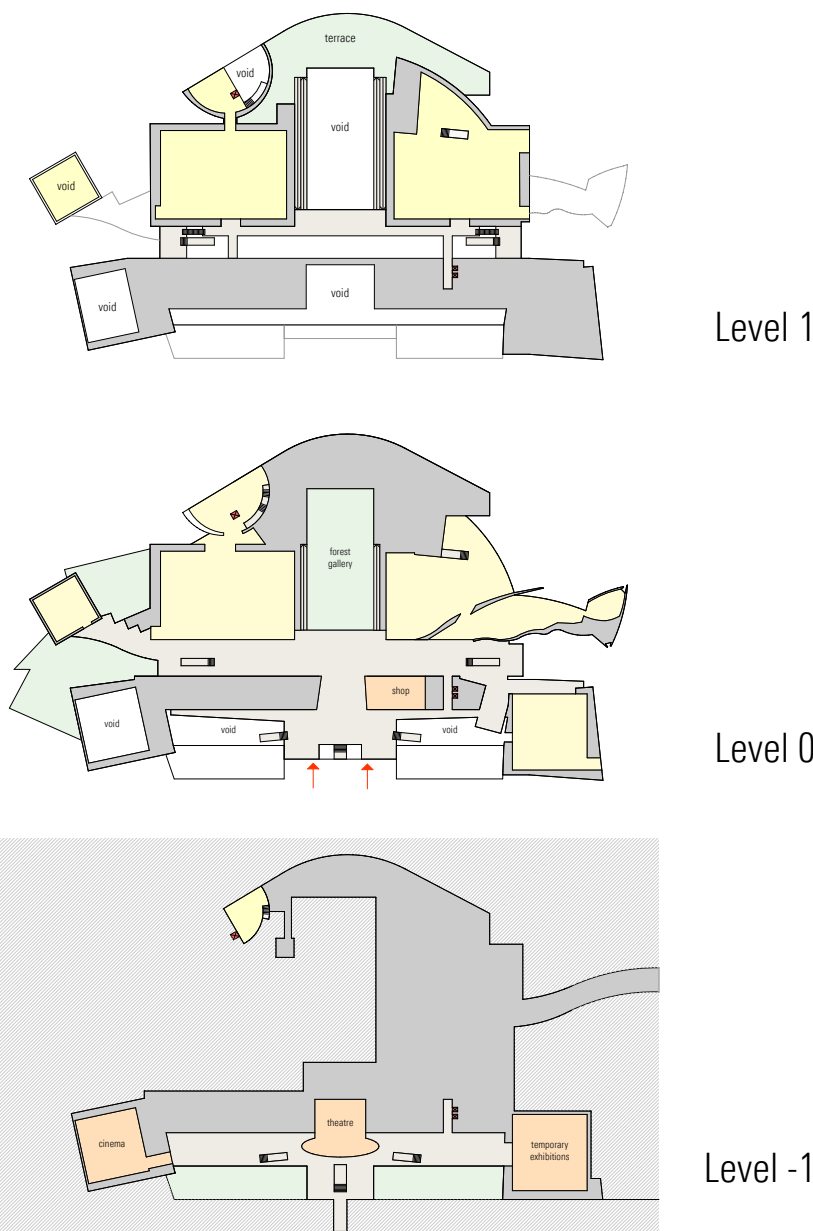
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Appendix 1. New Materialism: Origins & Influences

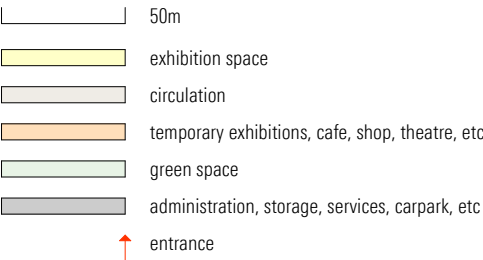


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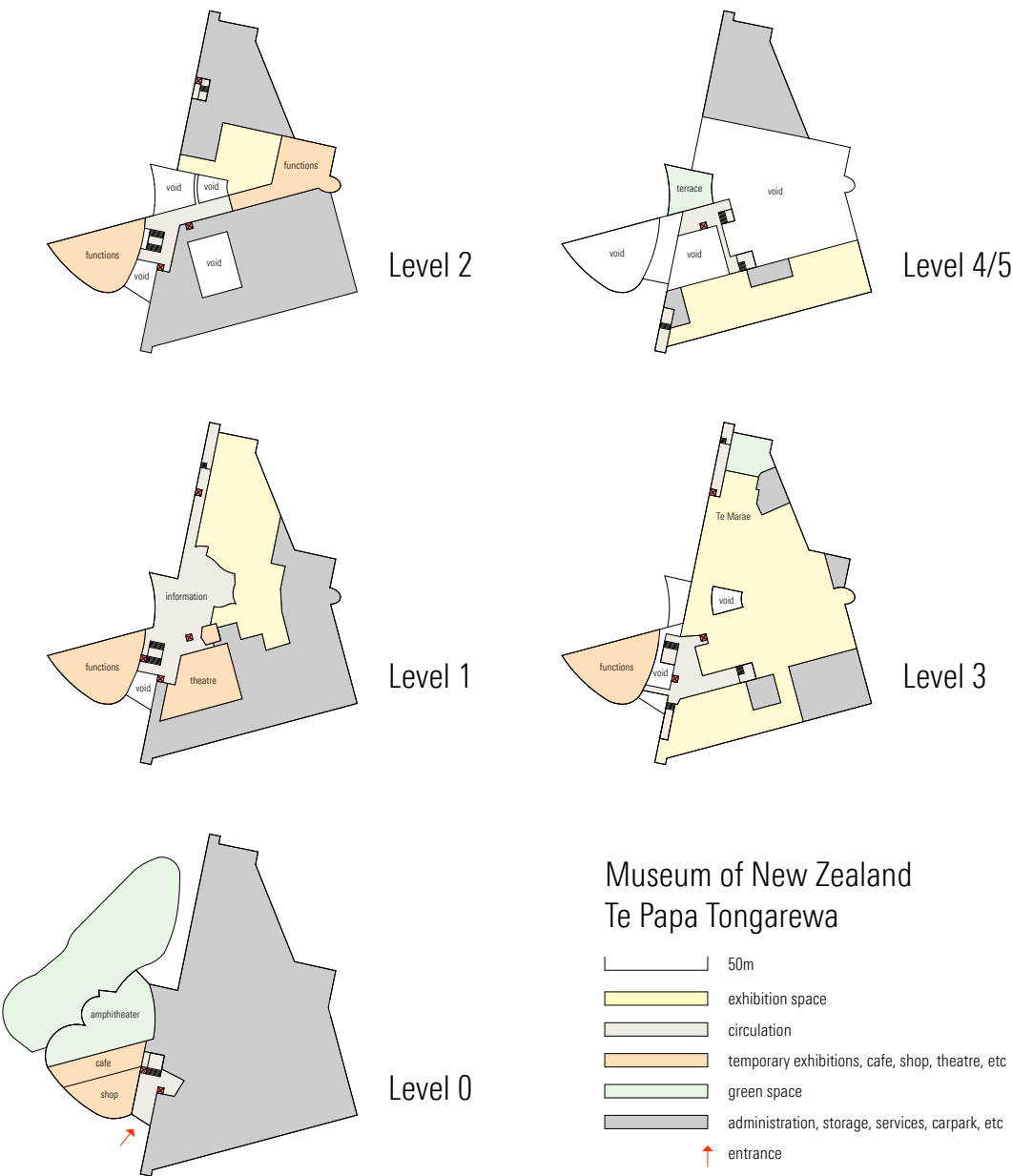
Appendix 2a. Indicative Floor Plan: Melbourne Museum



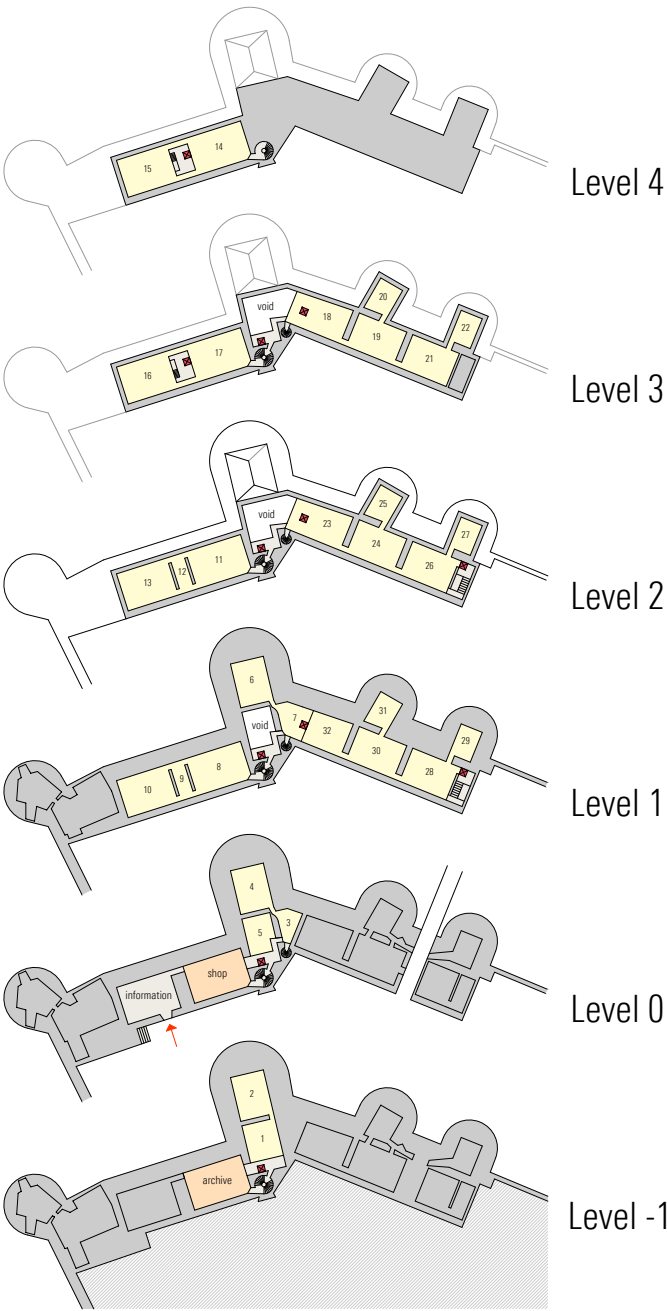
Melbourne Museum



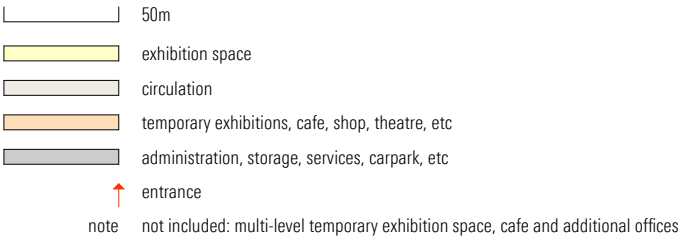
Appendix 2b. Indicative Floor Plan: Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington



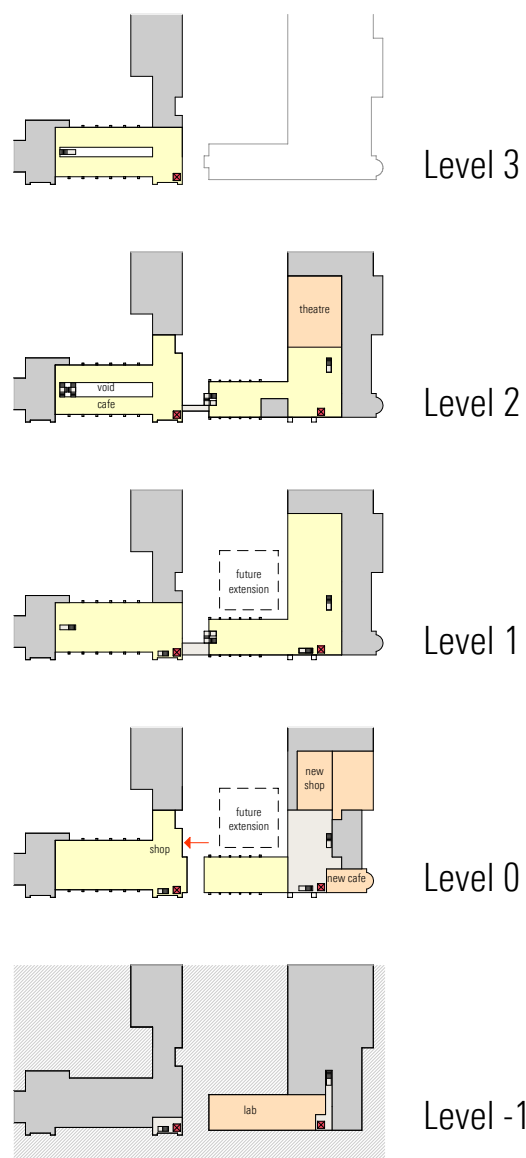
Appendix 2c. Indicative Floor Plan: Musée d'Histoire de Nantes



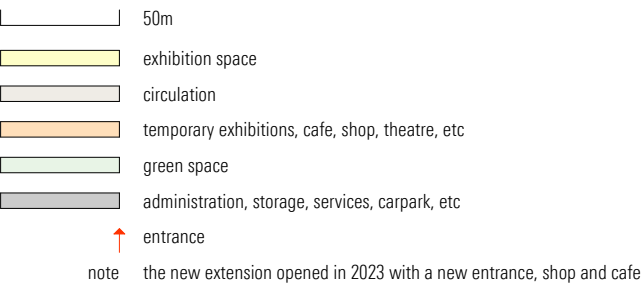
Musée d'Histoire de Nantes



Appendix 2d. Indicative Floor Plan: Manchester Museum



Manchester University Museum



Appendix 3a. Methods: Pre and Post visit survey and interview questions

a. Pre-visit survey

1. My most memorable experience in a museum was...
2. I first started visiting museums when...
3. The three most important things for me about museums are...
4. After visiting the museum I feel...

b. Post-visit survey

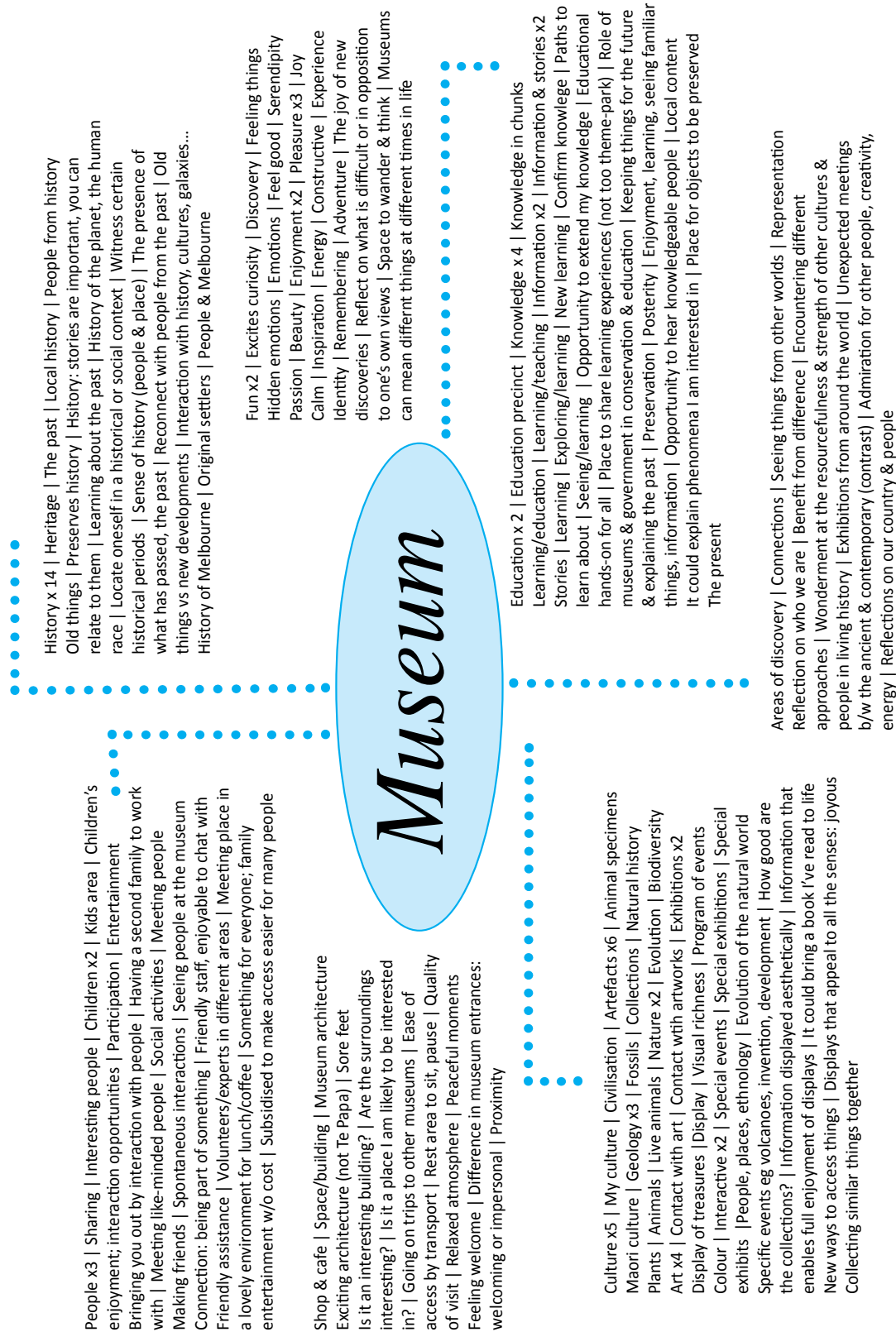
1. How often in a year do you visit a museum, art gallery or library?
2. Why is learning so important?
3. Why is it so inspiring/essential/meaningful to see objects in real life?
4. If there was a fire, which two/three (favourite) artefacts would you choose to save?
5. What types of stories do you prefer: the everyday life of ordinary people; the life of the elite (powerful, rich & famous); how other people live; mankind's ingenuity (inventions); history (ancient & modern); other cultures; the mind and body; nature; or science & technology? Other? Why?
6. Are stories important? Why or why not?
7. Why do you leave the museum feeling energised/inspired/restored/other?
8. Is the fact that a museum is a public space belonging to its citizens meaningful to you?
9. Do the sections you visit or don't visit tell you anything about yourself or the museum?
10. Which part of the museum did you enjoy the most or find most memorable or meaningful?

c. Semi-structured interview questions: staff

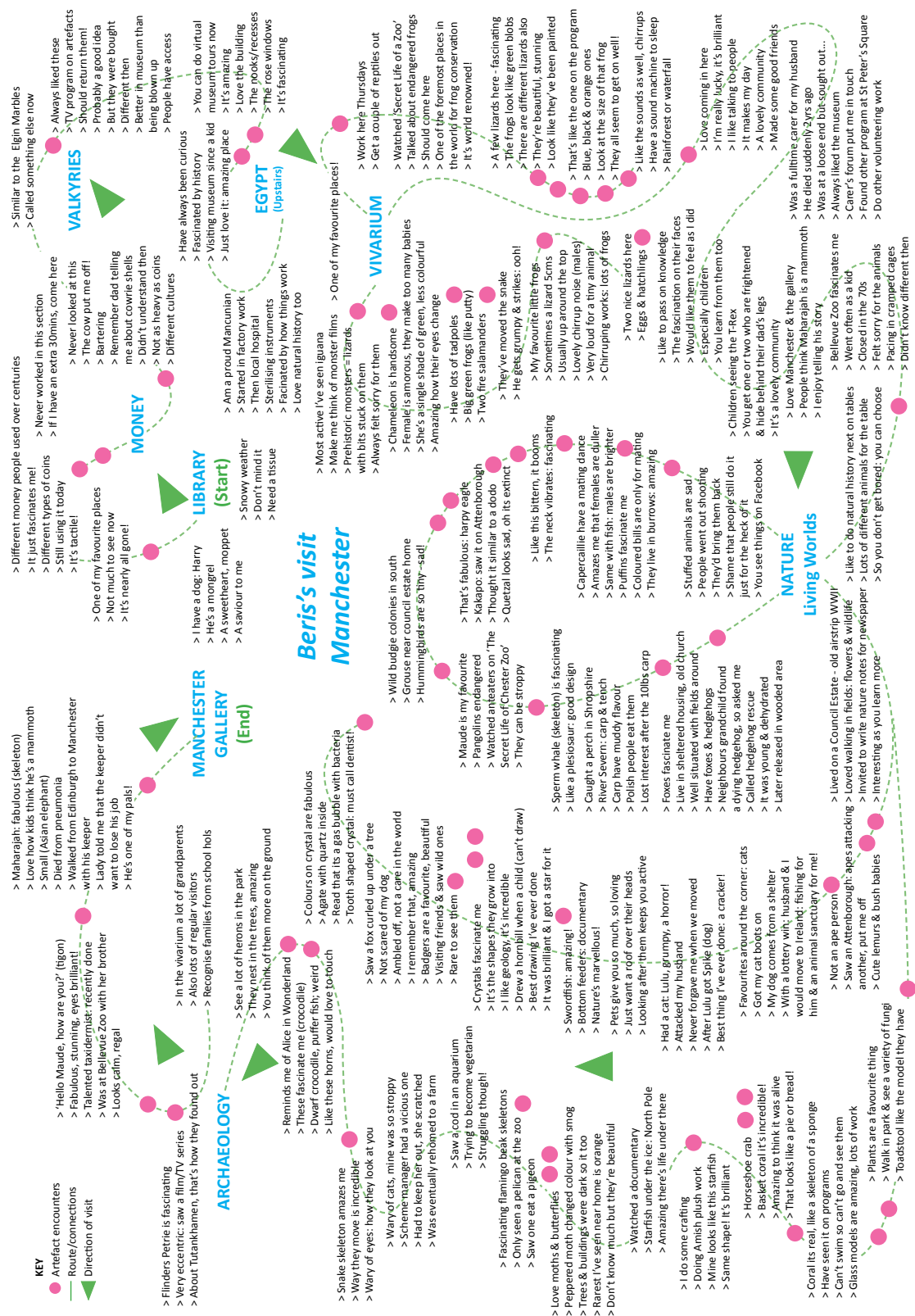
1. Do many older people (60+) visit your museum?
2. Does your museum have any programs or strategies designed specifically for older people?
3. Does your museum have any policies or particular interest with regard to older people?
4. Has there been an exhibition or artefact that particularly attracted older people? Why?
5. Do you think that the physical environment of your museum works for people of all ages?
6. If you were asked to promote your museum to older people, what are some of the changes you would make and why?
7. Who are the museum's target markets?
8. What do you think people get out of a museum visit? Why do they keep coming back?
9. What do you personally get out of visiting museums? How do you feel after visiting a museum?

Appendix 3b. Methods: Key words collated

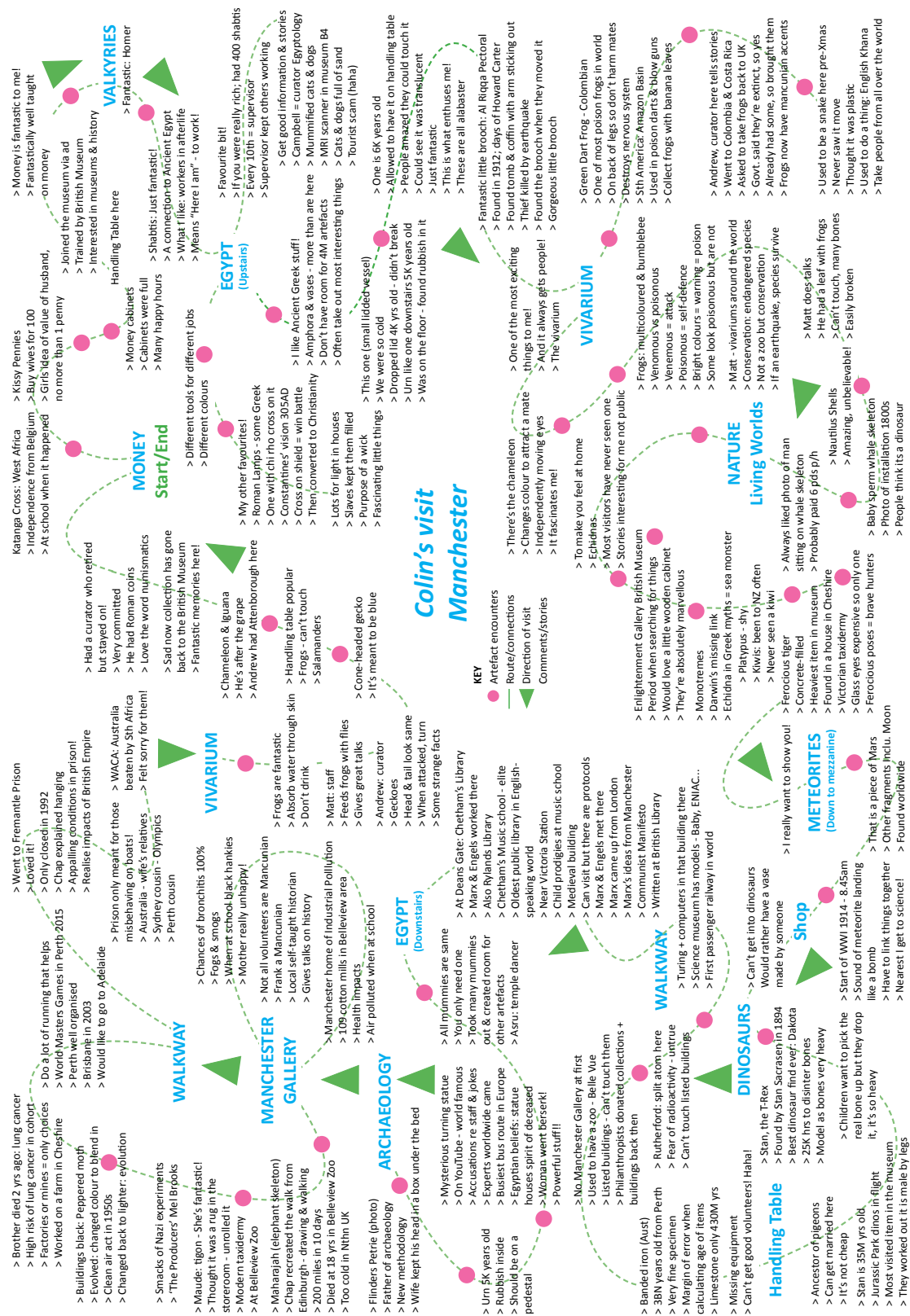
Participants were asked for five words or thoughts relating to museums



Appendix 4a. Beris's museum visit: in detail



Appendix 4b. Colin's museum visit: in detail



Appendix 4c. Colin's museum visit: simplified

