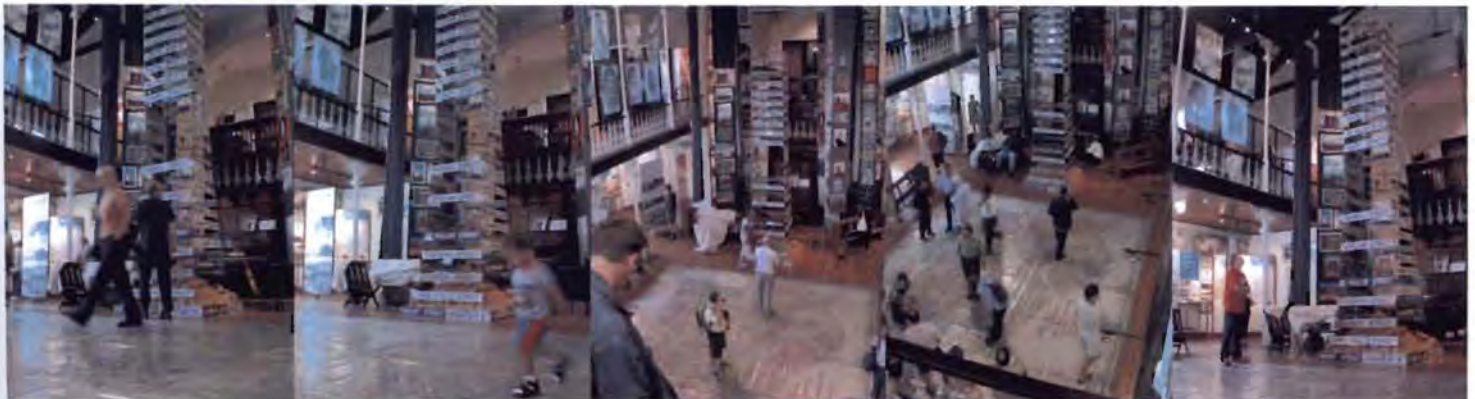


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Master of Philosophy (Fine Art)**

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(BAS, BArch, Post Grad Diploma in Museum Studies, Cape Town)**

**THE CHOREOGRAPHY OF DISPLAY: EXPERIENTIAL EXHIBITIONS
IN THE CONTEXT OF MUSEUM PRACTICE AND THEORY**



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Abstract

In this project I examine curatorial processes and the experience of constructing and viewing museum exhibitions. Specifically I have been interested in the way in which certain exhibits facilitate powerful emotional responses from their viewers. I suggest that the curators of these kinds of exhibitions employ strategies which not only choreograph the displays but the viewers' bodies themselves as they move through them. As a case study of an experiential exhibition I focus on the District Six Museum where I have been part of its curatorial team since 1999. The work of curatorship that I have done at the Museum during the period of my registration for this degree constitutes part of this submission.

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INTRODUCTION

There have been certain exhibits and museums that generate moving, emotional, powerful and seemingly 'authentic' experiences for their viewers. In this project I argue that the power of these experiences are linked to the way in which the display spaces are choreographed, engaging at once the viewer's physical and emotional attention. This project explores those curatorial qualities at the centre of such an engagement giving special attention to the way in which they are realised within the District Six Museum.

I use the term "choreography of display" to highlight the coordinated effect of the viewer's body moving through a multiply-coded space. The choreographed design framework, with its emphasis on the experience of the body, suggests and facilitates ways which include visitors in active engagement with the museum and exhibition. That is, unlike dance where the dancer performs and the audience watches, in the experiential museum space, the viewer, by actively moving through the space, simultaneously both views and performs. This aspect of experiential exhibitions is important because this exchange and transformation into viewer-performer creates what is recognised as an authentic viewer experience which, in a way, replaces the previous desire for the authenticity of the artefact. In reference to Stephen Greenblatt's distinction between the museum viewer's experience of "resonance" and "wonder", I show in my central example, the District Six Museum, the experience of resonance, usually dominant in historically contextualised museum exhibitions, is offset against feelings of wonder evoked by momentary involvement of the viewer's own body with the exhibition.

Firstly, this paper reviews some aspects of curatorship and museum practice which constitute some of the conditions that precipitated the emergence of experiential exhibition-making. I examine significant exhibitions and displays that trace an unfolding of experiential display-practice that place the sentient body of the viewer as central to its mode of communication. These comments are related to my concerns about museum practice and my interest in developing a curatorial practice that is equitable and dynamic. The range and selection of issues (and authors) brought together in this paper vary from the problems of representation to how sound resonates with buildings. This cross section of influences reflects the inter-disciplinary nature of my own background in architecture and design as well as the interests that emerged as I participated in the curatorial teamwork of the District Six Museum. I examine how each of these influences relate to and inform my understanding of experiential exhibitions, and the dynamic relationship between the viewer, the display and the curator.

As a case study I examine the District Six Museum and my role as both insider/curator and outsider/commentator. I evaluate and analyse its curatorial and design processes in two ways. Firstly, I discuss my first hand experience of being integrally involved with the curation and

design of the current *Digging Deeper* exhibition at the Museum, and secondly, I analyse the exhibition in terms of its objectives and its ability to engage the viewer in a sensory experience. In so doing I distill out of the curatorial process my own ideas about design and experiential exhibitions. Thus the focus of this project is, in a large part, an analysis of the processes involved in making experiential exhibits.

In this project, I re-examine the curatorial processes of the District Six Museum focusing on the qualities of the Museum and exhibition that are brought about through sentient experience of the viewer. I show that the curatorial intentions of the District Six Museum, such as inclusivity, interactivity, complexity, multi-sensory displays, memory-work, exchange and dialogue, have created an environment that is able to better evoke bodily experience and feeling and that this is achieved by the participatory framework of the exhibition involving the viewer with the exhibits. The viewer's involvement generates an experience which is performative in a way that centres the viewer in his or her own experience. Thus the viewer-performer becomes easily yet powerfully engaged with the exhibits in a multi-faceted way which is both meaningful and unique for each individual. This combination of resonance and wonder that is key to the distinctive success of the District Six Museum, is born out of its capacity to provide an inclusive, multi-layered and interactive aesthetic framework that attempts to engage the viewer as a participant, rather than as a passive visitor.

In Section One, I look at the historical context of some of the problems related to power relations normally inherent in museums and exhibitions. I also look at cultural possibilities that are emerging out of new forms of curatorial practice such as inter-cultural dialogue and exchange, museums and exhibitions that are self-reflexive, and community based living museums working with memory and intangible culture; all of which are interactive, performative and experiential in nature. I suggest that experiential exhibitions like the District Six Museum offer a more balanced and reciprocal relationship between the exhibits and the viewer.

How the human body acts and reacts in exhibitions and displays is the focus of Section Two of the paper. Here I explore elements of design that are necessary determinants in experiential spaces. I look at how our bodies develop meaningful experiences through sensory perception of and participation with the physical environment. My architectural training has made me aware that in the built environment, physical structures and the human body are mutually affected and reflected, and that structural elements act as a framework through which people negotiate space. I suggest that this relationship between the built forms and the people who engage them is the principle behind spatial choreography. I also look at how sound is an element of form which is able to connect the sensory body to the space it occupies. To illustrate these modes of representation and design I look at several examples of artworks using spatial choreography which actively involve the sentient viewer to generate evocative and sensory experiences.

I go on to follow a progression that begins, firstly, with the hyper-realistic, awe inspiring and viewer-centric panoramas of the nineteenth century; secondly, with the scientifically modelled habitat dioramas of natural history museums; and thirdly, with the display of human casts in the *Bushman Diorama* in the South African Museum in the 1950s. I also compare the *Bushman Diorama* with the reflexive counter-exhibition *Miscast: Negotiating Khoisan History and Material Culture* (1996), at the South African National Gallery. I look at these exhibitions to explore how the human body is activated when on display. I find that the primary effect of the representation of the body results in its objectification so that it becomes symbolic of complex political and other relations, which are often marked by dominant and subaltern disparities. Likewise performers, who in displaying themselves, are subject to objectification despite a co-dependent relationship they have with their viewers.

Further to this I suggest that commonalities exist between the District Six Museum, panoramas and museum dioramas, because the District Six Museum's multi-sensory display is experienced similarly to the rapture of the idealised realism of a panorama or museum diorama. In all the above examples, the human form evokes strong emotional and psychological responses from viewers because the viewer's own body is brought into a sentient relationship with itself and with the bodies on display. I assert that the District Six Museum is not compromised by dominating power relations because in participatory exhibitions, viewers are invited to insert themselves in the exhibits and the curatorial process, and in this way they are brought into an equal and reciprocal relationship, viewing themselves and each other as both subject and object.

In Section Three, I return to review the District Six Museum and the *Digging Deeper* exhibition (2000). I present an overview of its curatorial objectives, processes and exhibitionary techniques. I show (with image and text) that this is an exceptional exhibition in which the viewers' sentient experience is significant to its success. It is an exhibition that engages all its viewers (District Six ex-residents, school learners and tourists) through various processes of participation. Much of the participatory processes involve collaboration with the Museum and are an important part of its policy of inclusiveness and generates much of its experiential and performative characteristics. However, this project focuses more on how the different physical and spatial elements of the exhibition engage with the viewer's body to create a participatory experience. The generation of such an experience can be aptly described as the choreography of display.

SECTION ONE

1.1 The museum and power relationships

In Section one, I discuss aspects of curatorship in the context of the broad question of power relations inherent in acts of representation. I do this because exhibitions are a medium through which people perform and express social relations, and cultural and political positions and understandings, and because exhibitions are thus “involved in creating, disseminating, and debating cultural values, identities, and cultural knowledge” as well as being forums for disagreements or controversy of the material on display (Kratz 2002: 92). Moreover, issues of power relations in museum exhibitions are particularly pertinent in the South African context where the representation of knowledge and culture has been dominated in complex ways by a history of political control of a minority over the majority.

One of the major dilemmas facing curators of museums is how to deal with historical residues of unequal power relations. I believe it is necessary to acknowledge the imbalances of power in our society and the results of these imbalances in our museum exhibitions. Even in the normal course of social relations, the cultural knowledge of socially separated groups differs enormously and many groups have trouble understanding each other. These distinct forms of understanding, which constitute the boundaries of cultural difference are exacerbated in South Africa where separation and exploitation, enforced over many generations, has left the majority of people distanced from issues of museum practice and disempowered by the difficulties associated with taking control over the representation of culture and knowledge. Understanding how power relations work in exhibitions means understanding how social inequalities are embedded in the communicative practices of exhibitions. This provides a context through its example of the District Six Museum for thinking about new models of curatorship. In particular, this project proposes a mode of curatorship that is inclusive and participatory and that provides opportunities for diminishing the distance between curators and their audiences. This is not to suggest that this strategy is applicable to all forms of museums and exhibits, but does propose that where the engagement of the body in exhibits elicits an active and willing involvement of the viewer, curators are able to prevent feelings of alienation.

It is generally accepted that the normal functions of museums have been to acquire, preserve and display objects. In addition, exhibitions are opportunities for disseminating knowledge and reflecting ideas, and for promoting debates about social, political and moral issues. They can also be sites where ownership of ideas occurs and where authenticity is expressed. However, these practices have been questioned especially in the late twentieth century when museums came under the scrutiny of a range of critics, including post-modern and post-colonial perspectives. In response to the numerous criticisms and challenges of the last few decades, boundaries between disciplines within cultural institutions are shifting or dissolving and academic discourses are

becoming more self-conscious and self-critical. Amongst other changes, relations between museum institutions and their audiences are becoming more inclusive and participatory as museums move towards exhibition practices that do not treat their audiences as passive receivers of knowledge. This project argues for exhibitions that are able to transcend existing conventions and that are able to deal with unequal power within museums. I propose that these possibilities are created in participatory exhibitions, which I discuss later.

Problems of representation which need to be taken into account are discussed by Michael Ames in *Glass Boxes and Cannibal Tours* (1992) where he argues that in the past museums have been the “self-appointed keepers of other people’s material and self-appointed interpreters of others’ histories” (Ames 1992: 140). Ames points out that the problems of representing others are evident in who controls historical collections and who stands to gain from representations of history. In the representation of others, exhibitions generate unequal power relations between the museum professionals and those they represent. For curators today, the challenge to transfer ownership of knowledge and the power to represent themselves to those represented stimulates discussion of authenticity, of who represents whom, of authority and authorship, and of the re-appropriation of traditional knowledge in present times. Much of the criticism aimed at museums now is about their control over the right to manage and interpret the historical and material culture in their care. In this context the role of the curator – and what Ames calls the “political implication[s] of interpretation” – becomes a crucial consideration (Ames 1992: 140).

From the outset, curators are mediating the knowledge disseminated through exhibitions. “The very existence of an exhibition assumes an initial judgment of value” (Kratz 2002: 91). But the curator is not the only interested party investing value in the material on display. There is a complexity of overlapping interests converging in an exhibition space that comes from the community, the researchers, the curators and designers and others as well as the exhibition viewers. Exhibition viewers bring to exhibitions their own expectations and understandings. They are the interpreters of exhibitions and have the potential to generate a critical dialogue in the exhibition space (although in most exhibitions the impact of the viewer’s response to an exhibition has been limited to the mere fact of their presence or absence). However, such exchanges between different groups are what make up the politics of representation that permeate exhibitions.

1.1.1 Museum conventions and the power of display

The politics of representation are essentially an account of the ways that representations are interpreted and understood, by different people, in different contexts and with different histories. Thus “the expectations, understandings, and interests that an exhibition inspires are embedded in specific histories and shaped through a number of cultural conventions and institutions” (Kratz 2002: 2). Exhibitions are communicative vehicles and communication is fundamental to the

politics of representation, as Kratz states: “These politics may concern power, knowledge and resources but they are carried out through the communicative forms, with exhibition representations as one explicit topic” (Kratz 2002: 92). Cultural exclusivity pervades exhibitions in hidden ways, not only by means of particular genre conventions meaningful only to those “on the inside”, but also in the detailed coding of language itself. This section deals with these subtle forms of power relations and communication.

On an environmental level, exhibitions create subtle manifestations of meaning through visual and spatial forms of communication. Similarly, museum conventions and cultural codes contain the underlying motives and intentions of curators and institutions. Many museum theorists, some of whom I draw on in this paper, discuss exhibitions with an emphasis on their historical, political and sociological content (see Clifford 1997, 1988; Ames 1992; Karp, Kreamer & Levine 1992; Karp & Levine 1991; MacCannell (1976) 1989 amongst others). In addition, other museum theorists discuss the hidden codes of representation and communication that embody the power relations in exhibitions (Kratz 2002; Lindfors 1999; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998).

“Communication and the politics of representation identify fundamental conditions of exhibition ... they are inextricably linked and exist through each other” (Kratz 2002: 92). This section investigates how museum conventions and cultural codes are exclusionary and are controlled by social and political positioning. Addressing the problems of power relations inherent in exhibitions is a recurrent theme in this paper.

Much of our knowledge and understanding is coded in experience and action. In my experience, exhibitions are highly mediated and coded events in which visual and spatial exegeses communicate on many levels, and in which it is possible to create illusions of authenticity. For example, different museums, such as art galleries, history museums and science museums, have their own ways of using and presenting their collections (Karp 1991: 11). Different genres of exhibitions employ their own interpretive conventions, coding and methodologies of representation that are distinctive and evoke their own histories, confirming their own legitimacy (Kratz 2002: 93). Thus through their distinctive codes, museums are demonstrating, and at the same time protecting, the objectives of their institution.

However, in the past, many museum curators have not acknowledged that they operate within their own interpretive framework. Armed with the tools of visual and spatial display they can, and do, manipulate the perceptions of their audience. Many museum scholars even see spaces in which representations take place, from the display of objects to ritual and performance, as multi-dimensional productions (of experience) (Kratz 2002: 93; also Karp & Levine 1991; Karp, Kreamer & Levine 1992). In other words, in exhibitions, ideas are expressed physically with form, which becomes the carrier of meaning. Through engaging with form, viewers experience exhibitions through their body senses (sight, sound, smell, touch and kinaesthesia) as well as their

intellects. Representations that engage the viewer through body perception are powerful agents of communication.

What emerges from the above is that museum professionals ultimately have much control over the production of knowledge and identity in their institutions. Karp states that, “From one point of view the most powerful agents in the construction of identity appear to be neither the producers of objects nor the audience but the exhibition makers themselves, who have the power to mediate among parties who will not come into face-to face contact” (Karp 1991: 15). Indeed, as discussed in the previous section, it becomes possible for exhibitions to engage with discourses and social issues with the objective of bringing about shifts in political and social consciousness.

What I am suggesting is that even as exhibitions depend on visual and spatial language, it is not a language that can be easily formulated by rules and fixed meanings. For instance, even body language can be interpreted in different ways by different people. Also experience has shown that audience reactions are not predictable and different people and cultural groupings approach aesthetic expressions with differing purposes and do not necessarily perceive exhibition representations as the curators might have intended. Here lies the danger of non-participatory curatorial control, for as meanings are invested in exhibitions, so audience interpretations may divest curators of their first authority over the material they interpret. Consequently, the interpretative processes of an audience can be and often are unpredictable. Multiple voices, social diversity and cultural difference are social realities that complicate communication in exhibitions.

To sum up the complexities of relations in exhibitions, I quote from Kratz who states that “people with different interests, backgrounds, and expectations engage with exhibitions, and with one another through exhibitions,” and that “these negotiations become part of various politics of representation” (Kratz 2002: 3). She further states that: “An exhibition might relate to multiple issues and be caught up in several debates over representational forms, meanings, and uses. These diverse politics of representation involve people with different kinds and degrees of knowledge, engagement, power, and influence; they are inherently uneven. Communication and politics of representation are conditions of possibility for exhibitions and interconnected as analytical themes” (Kratz 2002: 3).

1.1.2 Cultural codes and social distinction

To extend the discussion of communication between people that use different codes and kinds of knowledge, the pervasiveness of cultural codes and social distinction cannot be overlooked. While systems of communication are essential to exhibitions – as they are to communities – they operate in complex and subtle ways. As we know there are often problems of misconception and misunderstanding between socially separate groups as differing codes of perception create different understandings. The case of art is a good example.

If cultural perception and articulation are products of upbringing and education and familiarity is a prerequisite to understanding a work of art, only those individuals who have the codes and language manage to understand the work of art (Bourdieu 1984, 1997). Similarly, but on a more subtle level, the exclusionary nature of social groupings is structured through the coding of social meanings, which are formulated by the processes of cultural production (Bernstein 1990). Hidden in cultural codes are the defining political relations and the cognitive devices that produce cultural differentiation.

Pierre Bourdieu, in *Distinction: a Social Critique on the Judgement of Taste*, (1984) states that understanding art, or communicating through art, is an act of deciphering or decoding. He asserts that class distinctions in society affect the way people differentiate and interpret works of art and culture in galleries and museums, and that cultural perception and articulation are products of upbringing and education (Bourdieu 1984: 2).

Using an artwork as an example of a cultural artefact, Bourdieu argues that a viewer would require a certain familiarity with the culture of art in order to understand an artwork. He goes on to explain that fluency in cultural codes and language is best acquired from having a background in that culture. Thus comprehension of all the layered meanings in an artwork would be limited according to one's previous cultural experience or, as Bourdieu states, by those 'in the know' (Bourdieu 1997). This synopsis could also be applied to exhibitions.

Where Bourdieu emphasises the importance of cultural background, Bernstein takes cognisance of the hidden political relations in cultural codes. Basil Bernstein's work, *The Structuring of Pedagogic Discourse*, (1990) analyses the relationship between social class and the process of its cultural production and codes. He unpacks the connection between the social division of labour and the realisation of social meanings (by coding). He states, "class relations generate, distribute, reproduce, and legitimate distinctive forms of communication, which transmit dominant and dominated codes, and that subjects [people] are differentially positioned by these codes in the process of acquiring them" (Bernstein 1990: 13).

Thus in Bernstein's opinion codes are cognitive devices that produce cultural differentiation and are generally class-regulated in respect of dominant and dominated forms of communication. Codes, possibly more so than content or subject matter, contain and fortify ideology. Bernstein makes a correlation between the mode of production (objects and materiality) and the production of discourses (ideas and education). He maintains that whereas the division of labour regulates how differently things are classified and coded; social relations and practices, such as education, generate different forms of communication. Bernstein formulates a model in which he exposes the invisible processes that generate and regulate codes, and the recognition and realisation of codes, which exist within and between hierarchical forms of communication and power relations. This

hierarchy of forms of communication is assumed through the process of selection, which is a process of exclusion. Given Bernstein's analysis it follows that exhibition makers within their agency of educational and cultural production, formulate the very codes that include and exclude their potential audiences. Furthermore, this process of selection, interpreting and producing is the means by which the social positioning of all the subjects – dominant and dominated – is revealed, reproduced and recreated (Bernstein 1990: 17).

For curators it is important to acknowledge that exhibitions are manifestations of identity and ideology that can easily exclude viewers that are outside its cultural constituency. Visual language and codes utilised in exhibition displays portray the social positioning of the curator as well the relationship with their projected audience. This often becomes a problem in a situation where an exhibition was made by members of one social class on behalf of an audience of another social class. Bourdieu states that cultural tastes are distinguishers of social class, and that even amongst the educated, it is found that enjoyment of culture is increased through having been brought up with it, more than through having learnt it (Bourdieu 1997: 46). However, exhibitions are also able to create possibilities for positive cultural exchange and development. Kratz comments on the transformative potential of exhibitions. "If exhibitions are occasions and means through which such issues [as identity and difference] are explored, they might also become opportunities both to recreate and reformulate identities, values, and social or political priorities and allegiances (Kratz 2002: 3). Even within asymmetrical contact zones, different groups can establish reciprocal relations of exchange through means of struggle and negotiation.

1.1.3 Emerging cultures and cultural difference

Cultural hegemony is a form of domination practiced in many countries. Museums, as centres for cultural expression, reflect this form of domination as discussed previously. Thus, as I have shown:

"Representations are interpreted and understood in different ways, depending on the people, contexts, and histories involved. ... Precisely how power, knowledge, and engagement are related in politics of representation, and how such unevenness is reproduced are questions that always need to be examined. In relation to museum exhibitions, we might begin by asking how settings such as exhibitions help to produce and modify certain kinds of unevenness".
(Kratz 2002: 222–3)

To illustrate how power relations and meanings embedded in the politics of representation influence and constrain curatorship, I discuss two discourses which challenge prevailing systems of domination (which included colonisation, modernism and globalisation), and which present alternative frameworks for cultural production. One focuses on the potential development of emerging histories or cultures (Clifford 1988), and the other promotes the value of a heterogeneous society based on cultural difference (Giroux 1993).

Firstly, in James Clifford's (still pertinent) view, ethnology and museum practice should no longer be concerned with describing "distinct, whole ways of life", but rather should be presented as a "series of specific dialogues, impositions, and inventions". In his book, *The Predicament of Culture* (1988) Clifford refers to the "predicament of culture" as the crisis in which ethnology finds itself in a time of "scattered traditions" and "conditions of rootlessness and mobility" (Clifford 1988: 3). Clifford presents a new context for contemporary ethnology and anthropology. He sets ethnology against a backdrop of post-colonialism and globalisation, in which the concept of developing cultures is characterised by travel and encounter. That is, Clifford recognises that societies are not stable and that people and cultures are constantly on the move, generating new experiences and challenging existing boundaries. He recognises that separate and differing histories and identities presently exist in a context of increasing inter-connectedness and that colonial relations are being contested, and previously marginalised people are able to represent themselves on a global stage.

What Clifford's 'predicament of culture' identifies for museum practice is the contest over ethnographic authority and the museum's right to speak on behalf of others. Clifford focuses on existing boundaries between cultures and the nature of encounters across them. In this scenario what is being experienced is a world composed of a multiple layering and overlapping of traditions in which differences are less and less distinct.

Clifford's approach to a new ethnology proposes a reversal of previous attitudes of domination by not relegating non-Western peoples and objects to an increasingly homogenised past (Clifford 1988: 246). He provides positive examples of museum collections being significantly influenced by indigenous communities, indicating how older cultures emerge in new forms, circumventing former conflicts with dominant others. He cites examples of collected cultural artefacts being appropriated into present day currency as "newly, traditionally meaningful" (Clifford 1988: 248), and previously collected archival documents being appropriated for contemporary teachings on local histories. These re-appropriations change notions of authenticity as artefacts are re-authored and given new relevance.

Henry Giroux in *Living Dangerously: Multiculturalism and the Politics of Difference*, (1993) examines a different aspect of cultural domination. He focuses on the perpetuation of unequal class power relations in cultural production and exchange. Giroux analyses cultural relations from the context of the Western pedagogic canon. He asserts that much of cultural production continues to strengthen the power relations of the dominant classes, and that the power of knowledge exists in the discourses of representation (style, form, and authenticity), which continues to oppress, marginalise and exploit dominated classes. He explains that this is achieved by placing political issues in the realm of the aesthetic and personal, and that this method of "depoliticising politics", makes people believe that they have no control over their political lives, and that issues of

identity, culture and agency have no bearing on their material wealth or social position. Meanwhile dominant groups, while commanding these issues through representation and the media, are concealing their agency and power (Giroux 1993: 35–6).

To further his analysis, Giroux discusses how modernism has dismissed the collective as a political category. “It ignores how individuals are constructed within complex social formations, and instead constructs a unified identity around the theory of a free and independent individual” (Giroux 1993: 63–4). For Giroux, these notions of personal freedom are problematic for disempowered groups.

Both criticisms are directed at dominant groups’ tendency towards hegemonic exclusivity. Whereas Giroux emphasises the perpetuation of disempowered social classes, Clifford believes that the disempowered are not simply replaced but emerge in new forms. On the positive side Giroux suggests that in opposition to modernism, discourses such as feminism, postmodernism and post-colonialism have emerged to offer new strategies which redefine “notions of hegemony, resistance, and struggles over forms of self and social representation” (Giroux 1993: 37). Similarly, Clifford rejects the view that disintegrating cultures, once whole and authentic (hegemonic past), are now rootless and fragmented, absorbed by the “progressive monoculture” (hegemonic present). He favours a more ambiguous experience that is transformative and inventive creating “new orders of difference”. As Clifford further explains: “It is easier to register the loss of traditional orders of difference than to perceive the emergence of new ones ... Throughout the world indigenous populations have had to reckon with the forces of ‘progress’ and ‘national’ unification. The results have been both destructive and inventive. Many traditions, languages, cosmologies, and values are lost, some literally murdered; but much has simultaneously been invented and revived in complex, oppositional contexts. If victims of progress and empire are weak, they are seldom passive” (Clifford 1988: 15–16). In other words, in places where traditional cultures have been expected to disappear in the face of colonisation and religious conversion, instead more complex and ambiguous historical and cultural forms have emerged out of older forms.

In an effort to destabilise cultural hegemony and other disempowering relations I argue for a new form of curatorship that is open and inclusive and that produces experiential exhibitions that support cultural diversity and emergent cultures. The reason for this is that museums are a locus for cultural expression and are powerful agencies in the construction of individual and collective identity. Especially now, in a post-apartheid South Africa where we need to redress the legacies of colonialism and apartheid, museum practice and curators are still inevitably engaging with the dynamics of domination. I believe that, like Clifford and Giroux, we need to offer a self-critical account of curatorship that seeks to reverse the processes of institutional domination in a way that stimulates open exchange and debate, and that empowers the audience on an individual and collective platform.

1.2 New models for curatorship

As the disciplines of ethnography, anthropology and museum practice have come under the scrutiny of post-modern and post-colonial criticism, debates over the politics of representation have proliferated in the cultural arena and academic and museum practices have made theoretical and conceptual shifts (Kratz 2000: 219–23; see also Clifford 1997; Ames 1992; Greenblatt 1990; Karp *et al* 1991, 1992). In this section I go on to explore new ideas developing in museum practice. Indeed, museums are not only sites that propagate cultural domination. They are also positive spaces for dialogue and the exchange of knowledge, and in which representation and meanings can be contested. As museum exhibitions respond to new demands there is a growing trend for museums to connect with their audiences by becoming more interactive and participatory, thereby including their viewers in dynamic and experiential ways.

1.2.1 Museums as ‘contact zones’

One new conceptual shift that has changed the format of museum spaces, is that of the museum as an adaptive and flexible space in which cultures and collections are reclaimed and boundaries transgressed. In some instances, exhibitions are developed to generate cultural contestation through public debates and other forms of cultural exchange. In *Routes: Travel and Translation in the late Twentieth Century* (1997) Clifford portrays museums as ‘contact zones’. He discusses how, in societies that are in constant motion, people meet and engage with each other in contact zones, and that cultural encounters are exchanges that happen as a result of people and culture being continuously in motion. Like Clifford’s concept of emergent cultures, “cultures in transit” de-emphasises homogeneity. Cultural exchanges and transgressions engage both dominant and marginalised (or minority) groups, bringing together languages, traditions, places, memory, as well as differing attitudes and aesthetic styles. He states: “I do not accept that anyone is permanently fixed by his or her ‘identity’; but neither can one shed specific structures of race and culture, class and caste, gender and sexuality, environment and history. I understand these, and other cross-cutting determinations, not as homelands, chosen or forced, but as sites of worldly travel: difficult encounters and occasions for dialogue” (Clifford 1997: 12).

Clifford further suggests that the success of a contact zone is dependent on a spirit of reciprocity based on notions of exchange. However in our present experience, contact zones, more often than not, represent asymmetrical power relations. This is even more true outside of the museum space, for example where contact zones are formed within a city or region that is characterised by social divisions structured by class or other forms of dominance. Within asymmetrical contact zones groups still establish reciprocal relations, but they become sites of struggle and negotiation.

1.2.2 Self-reflexive museum practice

Another shift in museum practice is to be self-reflexive. This means overtly “authoring” exhibits and making visible the processes and decisions that resulted in the chosen interpretation of objects and practices.

This self-reflexive practice confronts such curatorial dilemmas as the representing of 'others' to 'ourselves'. As I have discussed, museums through their processes of collecting and interpreting, are actively involved with the re-creation and reproduction of meanings. Michael Ames (1992) suggests that museums can break out of their need to only be representing the culture of others, by including as part of exhibitions the interpretive work of the curators and documentation of their processes of research and collecting. Through anthropological self-analysis museum practice is subject to its own scrutiny and objectification. "By presenting both sides of the interpretive equation ... the 'anthropology of museums' illustrates how people over time reveal themselves through the ways they interpret or recontextualize others" (Ames 1992: 142). Probably the most important advantage about self-reflexive practice is that it overtly presents an opinion or interpretation rather than appearing to present the truth.

1.2.3 The life of an object

Considering the extent of the life of an object on display is another reflection of museum practice proffered by Ames, because museum objects themselves accumulate historical and anthropological importance as they move from one context to the next, from owner to owner, passing through different sets of values. In terms of this way of thinking, objects have multiple layers of meanings (historical or social relevance) beyond their present status as they are capable of conveying significances of past, present and future. Investing the museum object with meaning is an act of empowering the object. Ames states that "objects are ... expressions of power relationships. Reconstruction involves repowering the object, investing it with the authority and privilege of those currently possessing, who then impose upon it (and upon those whom it represents) their own histories" (Ames 1992: 144). As an object is re-authored each time it is re-curated it is being repowered thereby ever increasing its value and a new lease on life.

Likewise Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett explains that ordinary objects that lack their own beauty and power can be invested with visual interest through the ideas and imagination of the curator and viewer. In fact many museums today focus more on the presentation of ideas using objects only as illustrations of ideas. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett describes this shift in museum practice towards ideas-driven exhibitions as being more like a library than a museum of objects, in which curators "objectify texts and textualize objects" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 31). This means that curators are treating objects as a narrative, that is they are able to tell a story, and likewise they are putting interpretations and other written narratives on display just as they would put objects on display.

Stephen Greenblatt suggests that "cultural artifacts do not stay still, that they exist in time, and that they are bound up with personal and institutional conflicts, negotiations, and appropriations" (Greenblatt 1990: 161). Although the changing contexts and multi-layered circumstances of objects often represent contradictory social forces, they can be understood as belonging to several

circumstances each with its own history, as well as being connected in its present context. Greenblatt describes how cultural meanings are fashioned and refashioned by the complexities of their historical transactions. Objects are not isolated items in the cultural sphere, but belong to and are made from the “collective, social energy” (Greenblatt 1990: 165) and thus reflect a more varied and complex social order that is its resonance.

1.2.4 Redefining authenticity

In recent times museums have shifted their exhibitionary practices and priorities so as to increase audience attendance and generate income through promotion and marketing. To increase audience attendance curators have had to become more sensitive to viewers' expectations and compete with other kinds of leisure activity. Museums are becoming places of entertainment as well as education. The result is that museums have increasingly more in common with spectacle and theme parks than with anthropology and history.

Object-orientated exhibitions, in most cases, no longer have the power to pull in the crowd. For better or worse, museums have found that they need to draw on the tourist industry to bring in necessary revenue. Museum curators are now creating new, more dynamic exhibitions. Museums are becoming ‘cultural destinations’ that concentrate a variety of experiences and attractions into a single location (Kirshenblatt-Gimblet 1998). For example, exhibitions substitute original objects for reproductions that are manipulated and transformed to create enhanced experiential effects and illusions. Michael Ames describes it as a movement towards experiential exhibitions that “substitute the authenticity of the visitor experience for the authenticity of the ‘real’ object” (Ames 1992: 158). As a result exhibitions now aim to offer increasingly exciting, dynamic and multi-sensory experiences. For example, large exhibition productions that combine information presentation and multi-media and interactive experiences are called ‘blockbusters’ and have become popular with both major museum institutions and audiences alike. For example, the latest exhibition, *The Arthur Ross Hall of Meteorites*, at the American Museum of Natural History, is publicised on their website homepage as “a cutting-edge hands-on exhibition space”. Other ‘blockbusters’ which I visited at the AMNH in 2000 and 2001 were *Fighting Dinosaurs: New Discoveries from Mongolia*, billed as “Dinosaurs Like You’ve Never Seen Before!” and *The Genomic Revolution*, described as the “most comprehensive exhibition ever presented on genomics” (www.amnh.org/).

1.3 Participatory museums

Participation and interactivity in exhibitions have become standard components of most museums today. Early initiatives towards creating interactive environments in exhibitions were to involve and educate children within the museum environment. Museums have provided for children's needs through performances and storytelling. Later discovery rooms, interactive technology and research labs became essential to any large-scale institution. Many museums now use interactive



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SonicVision: How Do You See Your Music? - The American Museum of Natural History, in collaboration with Moby, is launching a groundbreaking digitally animated alternative music show called *SonicVision*.

Halloween Celebration - Join us for loads of Halloween fun, including trick or treating, live performances, craft activities, roaming characters, and more!

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DISCOVERY TOURS



The latest major exhibitions at the American Museum of Natural History are billed on their website homepage, www.amnh.org/

Two "blockbuster" exhibitions that I viewed at American Museum of Natural History in 2001. The *Hall of Biodiversity* is a permanent exhibition (left) and *The Genomic Revolution* was a temporary exhibition (right).

websites to promote their institutions, exhibitions and other services.

The American Museum of Natural History, New York, for example, presents many programmes for children and school pupils to experience 'hands-on exploration' of the Museum (www.amnh.org/). The South African Museum in Cape Town likewise offers interactive experiences for children such as in the "Discovery Room" where "children can touch and explore objects that elsewhere in ... a wonderfully stimulating environment, offering a different experience to each visitor" (www.museums.org.za/sam/edu/). A scanning of a variety of other museum websites reveal this to be a general trend.

Technological interactivity in exhibitions was first developed in science museums and 'exploratoriums' as innovative methods for educating young people by demonstrating simple laws of physics at the push of a button. The Museum of Science and Technology in Pretoria, for example, boasts being the oldest 'hands-on' science museum in South Africa. Their aim is described on their website as "creating awareness and understanding of science and technology ... by informally educating the visitor in a stimulating and participative way" (www.fest.org.za/museum.html). This museum also promises viewers an "experience" in "new dimensions".

While 'participation' and 'interactivity' in exhibitions were first initiated as educational for children in science museums, they have since become essential catch phrases for the promotion of museums in the tourist market. Museums lure their audiences with promises of ever more extraordinary experiences. For example, (as stated on its website) the Rose Center for Earth and Space at the American Museum of Natural History promises to "whisk you on an incredible journey", to "excite your senses with an amazing journey", and ultimately to experience the "unparalleled ... realism ... where visitors will be transported to the beginning of time and space, experiencing a dramatic, multisensory re-creation of the first moments of the universe" (www.amnh.org/rose/).

The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa presents itself as a national forum for the exploration of cultural identity. It too promises the very latest interactive spaces including for children, such as "state-of-the-art time travel and virtual reality thrills". Te Papa offers a "range of educational and cultural services" in a "bicultural ... customer focused ... entertainment ... commercially positive" programme with a "vision of national identity" that is "part of the living city – an active member of the wider community" in "hands-on, interactive spaces" for children and adults to "become fully involved" in "highly interactive" spaces that are "brought alive through the use of technology" (www.tepapa.govt.nz). Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett describes Te Papa as a museum strikingly different to conventional museums in that it focuses on involving the viewer in a process of self-reflection. She describes it as a place where what you see "is not the

DISCOVERY ROOM



The American Museum of Natural History's new **Discovery Room** offers families, and especially children ages 5–12, a gateway to the wonders of the Museum and a hands-on, behind-the-scenes look at its science. Every major field of Museum science and research is represented in the **Discovery Room**, from anthropology to astrophysics. Children, accompanied by adults, can explore an array of puzzles and games, artifacts and specimens, scientific challenges and investigations:



south african museum

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Discovery Room at the South African Museum

The Discovery Room is the heart of the Museum. Here children can touch and explore objects that elsewhere in the Museum are protected by glass cases. This room is a wonderfully stimulating environment, offering a different experience to each visitor. Activities relating to the displays in the Museum are enhanced by interaction with specimens in the Discovery Room. Here a child can see the world through the lens of a microscope, discover treasures in a sandpit, have a bird's eyeview of a colony of ants, feel a whale's teeth, shake hands with a skeleton, and so much more! All activities have been specifically planned to include foundation phase outcomes of literacy, numeracy and life skills, and are all offered in English or Afrikaans. If you would like to plan and discuss any possible ideas or activities which do not appear on our current programme, I would be happy to assist you.



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MUSEUM OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY IN PRETORIA

The Museum of Science and Technology is the **oldest hands-on science museum in South Africa** and is celebrating its fourth decade this year. But this is not your traditional 'look but don't touch' museum, but is a museum geared towards the 21st century.

The main goal of the Museum is creating awareness and understanding of science and technology and how rapid progress in these fields ultimately influences all of us and therefore why becoming technologically literate is so important. This is achieved by informally educating the visitor in a stimulating and participative way.

At the Museum you can experience **Sciensation**, a magic Chem/Phys show with a new dimension, or experience the wonders of the galaxy in **Starlab**, one of only a few inflatable planetariums in the country. You can also take a guided tour through the Museum which boasts a display of hands-on science models and exhibits covering areas such as physics, biology, mechanics, and space exploration. Visit our **Hall of Holography** to understand the connection between lasers and real 3D images ... or if you need to get in touch with the lighter side of things visit **Optikon** and discover the world of optical illusion.



Many museums have "hands-on" Discovery Rooms for early learners. American Museum of Natural History – www.amnh.org/ (top), South African Museum – www.museums.org.za/sam/edu/ (middle) and Museum of Science and Technology in Pretoria – www.fest.org.za/museum.html (bottom).

collection, not the exhibition, but you see the visitors, like yourself, responding ... you come to find yourself at Te Papa” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2001).

But it is the intersection of living history, community projects and participatory processes that is of particular interest to this project. Community museums have come to refer to those museums that are associated with cultural work and living history within communities. Generally speaking, living museums are concerned with memory and oral testimony and are often formed in alternative cultural spaces that reflect the complexity and diversity of cultural expression (Kavanagh 2000; Rassool 2002). Innovative community museums, such as the District Six Museum in Cape Town, have created a model of curatorship that engages the community in interactive participatory involvement with the museum and exhibition. Former District Six Museum Director Sandra Prosalendis described the Museum as having “broken with the traditional ideas of museums and collecting [and] created and implemented the concept of an interactive public space where it is the people’s response to District Six that provides the drama and the fabric of the museum” (www.districtsix.co.za/). The District Six Museum is also described as an “independent site of engagement, a space of questioning and interrogation ... as a hybrid space of research, representation and pedagogy, through which relations of knowledge and varied kinds of intellectual and cultural practice have been brokered and mediated between different sites, institutions and sociological domains” (Rassool 2002).

Other living museums include the Age Exchange Reminiscence Centre in Blackheath, London (www.age-exchange.org.uk/) which is an example of how a community project uses participatory processes to work with and engage communities and visitors in projects that are creative and productive. This project was founded in 1983 as a professional theatre group. It has been extraordinarily successful in its inter-generational work bringing older people into contact with the younger generation. The Age Exchange works in all fields of reminiscence including living memory, health, theatre, education, publications and exhibitions. Similarly the Lower East Side Tenement Museum in New York is a participatory museum that seeks to accomplish a connection with their community by “stimulating dialogue” through “history-based community outreach and service programs, restoration philosophy and approach, living history program, and its creative use of history as a tool for citizen engagement” (www.tenement.org/). Many other such museums exist. For instance, the International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience has brought together museums from around the world in order to promote “a new role for historic sites around the world as forums for civic dialogue and action”, as well as “to establish historic sites to help rebuild societies recovering from human rights abuses” (www.sitesofconscience.org).

1.3.1 Performance and display

How museums connect with their audience through their performative nature is discussed more

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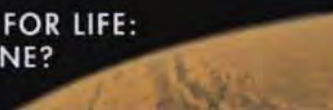
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Three-dimensional virtual space shows starring American celebrities Harrison Ford and Tom Hanks are top-billed at the Rose Center for Earth and Space, New York – www.amnh.org/rose/.

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I went to visit the Age Exchange in Blackheath, south of London, in 2000 – www.age-exchange.org.uk/ (above and left).

District Six Museum homepage – www.districtsix.co.za/ (below).

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District Six was named the Sixth Municipal District of Cape Town in 1867. Originally established as a mixed community of freed slaves, merchants, artisans, labourers and immigrants, District Six was a vibrant centre with close links to the city and the port. By the beginning of the twentieth century, however, the history of removals and marginalisation had begun.

The first to be 'resettled' were black South Africans, forcibly displaced from the District in 1901. As the more prosperous moved away to the suburbs, the area became the neglected ward of Cape Town.

In 1966, it was declared a white area under the Group areas Act of 1950, and by 1982, the life of the community was over. 60 000 people were forcibly removed to barren outlying areas aptly known as the Cape Flats, and their houses in District Six were flattened by bulldozers.

The District Six Museum, established in December 1994, works with the memories of these experiences and with the history of forced removals more generally.

See the District Six Timeline

*Gone Buried
Covered by the dust of defeat –
or so the conquerors believed
But there is nothing that can
be hidden from the mind.
Nothing that memory cannot
reach or touch or call back.*

Don Maltara, 1987

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The Museum is a mouse click away with the [Virtual Tour](#)

The Lower East Side Tenement Museum – www.tenement.org/ (above) and the International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience – www.sitesofconscience.org/ (below).

International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience

Explore what the past can teach us

about pressing social issues that challenge us today.

Travel to our extraordinary historic sites and hear their stories...

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generally by Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett in *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*, (1998) which describes exhibitions as performance spaces. She asserts: “Exhibitions are fundamentally theatrical, for they are how museums perform the knowledge they create” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 3). According to her there are two types of exhibition displays or performances. One type is like that traditionally found in museums, which depend on the “drama of the artefact” in which the objects are the actors and the labels are the script. These displays offer viewers insight into and interpretations of the subject matter. The second type of display is designed to be experiential. They are modelled on real life experience and convey, very powerfully, illusions of authenticity. (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 3–4)

Although it is feasible to discuss the performative qualities of objects on display, for the purposes of this project, I am most concerned with the performances of human subjects on display, both by reproduction and by live performance, with regard to their objectification that is common to ethnography and cultural tourism. I go on to discuss human subjects on display with regard to some of the differences between museums displays and cultural performance. In the next section, I discuss how living museums such as the District Six Museum also act as performance spaces. Later in this document I resume this focus of the human body on display when I discuss how the viewer acts in relation to human figures on display, and try to illustrate this visually.

While many museums present the human body as an artefact of history, it is usual for reproductions of the body form to be put on display. It is generally accepted that the display of living people is not associated with the conventional museum space. However, the exhibiting of living people of exotic cultures and traditions has a history going back to the early nineteenth century including festivals, theatre, zoos, circuses and world fairs. The London Museum, for example, was reputed to have “a wide range of live exhibits, human and animal” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 42). As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett shows, there has been a long tradition of creating theatrical backdrops for the exhibition of live subjects, both live exotic animals and humans, in lecture rooms and museums, both alive and dead, both as curiosities and educational specimens. Visiting exhibitions such as early panoramas became a substitute for travel, consisting of a reconstructed landscape, travelling commentary, and other trophies of discovery and capture (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 44).

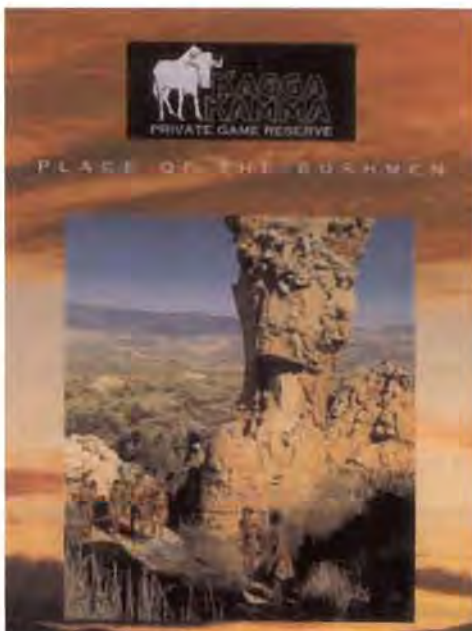
One significant and highly publicised example is that of Saartje Baartman. Baartman, a young Khoi woman, was taken to Europe in 1810. She was later displayed under the name of “The Hottentot Venus”. In London her show was one of the most successful at the time. Her presence in London coincided with extensive exhibiting of what was considered to be the most anomalous people in so-called ‘freaks shows’ although she was seen more as an ethnographic ‘type’ than a ‘freak’. According to Strother, ethnographic exhibits of living people flourished in the nineteenth century and the promoting of Baartman as a ‘type’ as opposed to a ‘freak’ was indicative of this

change (Strother 1999: 24–31). Baartman provides the example of the first major ethnological exhibition of the nineteenth century (Strother 1999: 35). Following her death her skeleton and other parts of her body were preserved and her body cast put on display in the Musée de L'homme in Paris. She was removed from display in 1982 (Strother 1999: 1).



Saartje Baartman's remains were returned to South Africa for burial in April 2002 after nearly 200 years in exile. "The 'Hottentot Venus', an object of sexual curiosity in Europe, was the subject of many artists who have used various medias to champion her plight" (SABC News, April 22, 2002 – www.sabcnews.com/).

Recently tourism has taken audiences into locations not only in distant lands but also into socially distinct areas in the same city or urban area. For example Kirshenblatt-Gimblett observes, "Slumming, like tourism more generally, takes the spectator to the site ... whole territories become extended theme parks. ... A neighbourhood, village, or region becomes for all intents and purposes a living museum in situ" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 54). In South Africa, excursions to townships, and cultural villages have become widely included in tourism packages.



In the 1990s, at Kaggera Kamma Private Game Reserve in the Cedarberg a San community performed as 'authentic Bushmen' for tourists (left). At the same time they lodged a (successful) land claim for an area in the Kalahari Gemsbok National Park. Today this same community sells their wares to tourists on the side of the road outside the Park – now called the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park (below).



The changes that have transformed museum practice are a result of increased travelling, globalisation and the expansion of the tourist industry. Museum practice is responding by attracting new audiences and promoting themselves as tourist destinations. Exhibitions are fundamentally theatrical because they perform the knowledge they create (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998). Human subjects also become objects on display when they perform as themselves. Another permutation of objects on display is when human subjects submit themselves to objectification. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett writes: "The inherently performative nature of live specimens veers exhibits of them strongly in the direction of spectacle" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 34).

Sites where people "perform themselves" are traditional world fairs, folk-life festivals, and opening one's home for tourists (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 18). There has been a long tradition of creating exhibitions of living culture, such as the nineteenth and twentieth century world fairs, and more recently folk-life festivals and living museums. In the 1900s visiting exhibitions such as early panoramas became a substitute for travel; now tourism takes audiences into alien locations not only in distant lands but also to socially distinct areas in the same city or urban area.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett describes the fascination of viewing other people's ordinary lives on display. She says that the experience of observing the exotic other "force[s] us to make comparisons that pierce the membrane of our own quotidian world, ... to be spectators of ourselves" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 48). Her theory is that observing others in their ordinary lives creates an experience that reflects favourably back on one's self. The divisions in the self that accompany this self-reflection, by virtue of it being a public performance, serve to reinforce and inflate the importance of the self. In fact, ethnographic objectification or making the ordinary into the spectacle – what Kirshenblatt-Gimblett calls the museum effect – works whenever life is represented. However, as she points out it is mostly those on the margins of society, separated geographically or by class, who are more often the subject of the ethnographic or tourist gaze. In the case of the District Six Museum, people are performing themselves, however both insider viewer-performers (ex-residents of District Six) and outsider viewers are encouraged to be part of the whole "District Six experience". Another example where the subjects of a museum are performing themselves is on Robben Island where ex-prisoners act as guides on the Robben Island tour.

It must be recognised that unlike the detachment of the artefact in the museum exhibit, the ethnographic factor in performance cannot be detached from its source. The human factor in performance holds together the process of its making with the product of the event. The one cannot exist without the other. In both situations artefacts and humans become objectified. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett identifies the problems of this objectification: "That we objectify culture has long been recognized; festivals, however, also objectify the human performers and implicate them directly in the process. This is an inherently problematic way to confront cultural questions,

for spectacle, by its very nature, displaces analysis and tends to suppress profound issues of conflict and marginalization” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 72–3).

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett further suggests that there is a transformative dynamic between an audience and a performance. The performance, like the museum artefact, is removed from the authenticity of the original traditional culture. “Live displays, whether re-creations of daily activities or staged as formal performances, also create the illusion that the activities you watch are being done rather than represented, a practice that creates the effect of authenticity, or realness” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 55). But it is not real. As real life is transformed through the mechanism of display, it becomes a mode of representation whereby the performance or the display interfaces with life, but is not life. This loss of authenticity is a challenging aspect of representation that has an effect on curators, viewers and performers.

Another difference between the display of objects in museums and the live display of culture is the different sensory experiences of the audience. Whereas a conventional museum experience is usually a highly controlled often mono-sensory experience, a cultural festival is a far more embodied, multi-dimensional experience. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett is correct in saying that museum spaces have a tendency to engage with one sense at a time for each art form. Cultural performances and especially festivals, on the other hand, offer “an environment of sensory riot”, in which “all of the senses – olfactory, gustatory, auditory, tactile, kinaesthetic, visual – are engaged” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 57–8). Recent developments in museum practice, however, as discussed above in new models for curatorship, are becoming much more multi-sensory, interactive and multi-faceted. In fact, as my supervisor has pointed out, many recent exhibitions have created exhibition environments that can only be described as a “total bombardment of the senses in a truly ghastly way” (Skotnes pers. comm.).

1.3.2 Community and living museums

Community or living museums which are concerned with contemporary culture have potential for creating experimental and imaginative environments which provide opportunities for communities to be actively involved in creating their own identity and heritage. Ideally living museums are about sharing experiences and engaging with memory for the purpose of confirming community and identity and strengthening cultural practices and custom. A powerful way of doing this is by using memory and personal testimonies to represent the past. This creates an individual yet multi-faceted base on which museum practice and exhibitions can be built.

A good example of a living museum is Melbourne’s Living Museum of the West Inc. (www.livingmuseum.org.au/). It is a community museum set up in 1984 with an experimental brief to use innovative techniques so as to involve the local community in researching, documenting and presenting the heritage and history of a previously overlooked mix of sub-

cultures. “The mix has created a unique cultural context that might even seem surreal to those who live in a more homogenous culture. It has in fact given rise to a cultural dynamic that challenges more conventional forms of interpretation. ... The Living Museum is best known for its outreach programs and close involvement with the community it serves. Community participation can take the form of involvement as a volunteer, as a participant in the Museum’s research and oral history programs or through more informal contact. For example, many local historical researchers regularly come to share information or talk about their own research. By depositing copies of their research and publications in the Living Museum’s Resource Centre they provide help for other people doing connected research” (www.livingmuseum.org.au/).



Melbourne's Living Museum of the West Inc. – www.livingmuseum.org.au/

In this section I am interested in looking at the factors that made the District Six Museum, in its role as a community museum, successful in creating an exhibition that has proved to be truly generative by providing, amongst other things, opportunities for people to feel and express their memories and at the same time reclaim their past and history. It has also attempted to create an environment in which it is possible to act with critical self-reflexivity, transparency, diversity and equity. In this case the District Six Museum represents marginalised and disempowered people who were, as a community, forcibly removed from their homes and dispersed to the outskirts of the city. In this respect the specific needs of the community museums that I examine below might be different from the needs of other exhibits with other agendas.

Museum practices that express transformation create the potential to capture the positive imagination of its audience. A ‘living museum’ that is organised to serve a particular community and which represents that community and is active in contemporary culture, has great potential for creating new experimental modes of exhibiting and imaginative environments. The District Six Museum is an example of such a community museum that emerged from within community organisations to serve specific community needs. In this museum, the primary curatorial

intentions were about the work of memory and healing, and with the recovery of histories. Through its curatorial frameworks, the District Six Museum has provided the community of District Six with the possibility to restore its connection to its past through memory, and through these processes to reconstruct a collective, complex and diversified identity. The interactive framework that characterises the District Six Museum is one that provides for active viewing wherein the visitor is encouraged to interpret and engage in a personal and essentialised relationship with its exhibits. For example, staff members who are ex-residents of District Six are present to welcome visitors as they enter the museum. Visitors are introduced to District Six with stories and personal testimony. Ex-residents in the exhibition space, as visitors or staff, perform a double role. On the one hand they are performing themselves as subjects of the District Six story, and on the other hand they are performing the exhibits and stated aims of the museum. They facilitate viewers' engagement with the exhibition by encouraging them to respond to the exhibition by contributing their own memories, thoughts and feelings. In this way the viewer too becomes part of the museum performance by becoming a subject of the narrative in the curated space.

The District Six Museum is an example of a museum that does not so much represent a community as help to create a community. Unlike the traditional colonial museum – where the act of viewing objects is a passive one of receiving information – the District Six Museum uses objects to create a space in which viewing is active where the audience can engage in an interactive way with the space, the museum, the staff and each other. Museum trustee Ciraj Rassool says “it is the core business of memory work and its processes of inscription, performance, annunciation and theatre that are the life’s blood of the Museum’s work” (Rassool 2001: ix). The exhibition is made up of images, narratives, visual symbols, which act as points from which the visitor can respond with memories and meanings (Delpont 2001). By adding or depositing into the museum or exhibition, each individual contributes parts to the whole. In so doing they become part of the exhibition, the museum and the community. For people to see themselves as part of history and on display is a potent act of empowerment and, in the case of the D6 Museum, a cathartic healing. It is, therefore, important for the exhibition framework to absorb and include as many individual voices as possible. Thus the District Six Museum exhibition is described as a proliferation of voices and a multi-layered densification of display and exhibits. “As memory, District Six is of course not a unitary text. It is told in a multiplicity of ways, even within itself” (Soudien 2001: 101).

The character of the Museum reflects the character of the collective memory of District Six. Memories and stories of District Six flourish in the museum and in the exhibition are depicted with all their passion and exaggeration without attempt to moderate the tendency to be excessive. Myths and romanticisations of ‘life in District Six’ are intertwined with memories of place and collectively form the identity of the community. For example, as Soudien notes, in “many

descriptions, the District is portrayed as a place of permanent laughter ... Exaggeration is clearly an important component of the area's oral tradition" (Soudien 2001: 99).

1.3.3 Working with memory

It seems that participatory exhibitions evolved in connection with living and community museums. It might also be fair to say that museums dealing with a traumatic past are well suited to experiential exhibitions that are able to generate catharsis and healing processes by eliciting emotional responses through sense perception, while also able to facilitate participation by integrating personal memories and contributions of those about whom the exhibition concerns. Experiential exhibitions in South Africa with which I have been involved, and that have sought to express and contend with human injustices include the District Six Museum and *Miscast: Negotiating Khoisan History and Material Culture* (which I examine in more detail in Section 2.5 of this paper) amongst others.

International museums dealing with human trauma have also focused on developing programmes that are participative and experiential. For example the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles, which opened in 1993, "was founded to challenge visitors to confront bigotry and racism, and to understand the Holocaust in both historic and contemporary contexts" (www.museumoftolerance.com/mot/about/). It is also an experiential and participatory museum that describes itself as a "high tech, hands-on experiential museum that focuses on two central themes through unique interactive exhibits". The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum exemplifies what an experiential exhibition is. It is an institution that interprets Holocaust history and is a memorial to the millions of people murdered during the Holocaust: "The Museum's primary mission is to advance and disseminate knowledge about this unprecedented tragedy; to preserve the memory of those who suffered; and to encourage its visitors to reflect upon the moral and spiritual questions raised by the events of the Holocaust as well as their own responsibilities as citizens of a democracy" (www.ushmm.org/).

Experiential and participatory exhibitions that represent trauma through living memory have become a new and effective model for curatorship. Although working with memory creates effective experiential exhibitions, working with memory also involves a new set of problems for the curator. In this section, I discuss some aspects of memory and trauma that relate to the creation of exhibitions and memorials. There are problems, as well as possibilities, in remembering and forgetting the loss of community and identity. Positive possibilities exist because memory is available in the present to create a favourable future (Terdiman 1993). The role that curatorship plays in the reconstruction of memory therefore does not necessarily replicate the past, but can rather create a new reality that liberates from the past a more creative present.

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Final Governor's debate held at the Museum of Tolerance, seated (LtoR): Cruz Bustamante, Democratic candidate, Peter Camejo, Green Party candidate, Tom McClintock, Republican candidate. Table on right: (LtoR) Matesa Gold, LA Times; Azucena Gomez, Telemundo; Frank Mottak, KNX. Seated in back, Paul Moyer, KNBC Moderator. Standing at podium, Arianna Huffington, one time candidate who subsequently withdrew her candidacy.

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Museum of Tolerance – www.museumoftolerance.com/ (above).

Every visitor to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC receives an "Identification Card" of a victim of the Holocaust. My Card (left) was that of Eva Heyman (13.02.31–17.10.44).

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum – www.ushmm.org/ (below).

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1.3.4 Characteristics of memory in museums

Whereas memory is at the centre of most museums and memorials, problems of forgetting are inherent in working with memory. Museums, monuments and memorials act as mnemonics for memory. However, formulating a fixed representation of memory, ironically, furthers forgetting since the memorial itself takes the place, to some extent, of individual memories. As James Young suggests monuments, by “shouldering the memory-work, ... may relieve viewers of their memory burden” (Young 1993: 5). With a structure of its own the memory-narrative acquires its own past, present and future, which exists separately from the original memory or experience. It replaces or obscures the original memory and in this way initiates its own process of memory loss.

There are further characteristics of memory of relevance to curators. Personal memories of the past are complicated and reflect a combined effect of an individual and his or her collective identity. Memories are particular to an individual but they also represent the individual's relation to the collective (Halbwachs 1992). Memories are also unstable. It is not uncommon for a person's memories to change over time, on reflection, with some prompting or new information. Memories are also not necessarily remembered in sequential form unless attached to a narrative over time. In reality memories are formed in isolated bits, remembered in relation to certain events and attached to some sort of structure. Moreover memories are created in a sensory context and maintain their connection to sensory stimuli (Kavanagh 2000: 14).

Curators of exhibitions thus work with memories that are liable to fail, that contradict and that are subject to social norms and pressures. Memories change perpetually to keep up with present-day needs. Falsifications are common as are exaggerations, fabrications and omissions. These are as much a result of painful experiences as they are of repetition and revision (Kavanagh 2000). Relationships of power exist between those more dominating representations of the past and those that are more marginalised. Whereas written history has generally supported the ruling authority of its time, other histories have been more often found in oral accounts. Many alternative histories remain unrecorded and still exist as a potential counter to hegemony. Oral history, which is embedded in memory, is becoming more and more important to historians, and, while ‘history’ maintains an ambivalent attitude towards memory, many historians are asserting the importance of oral history as a way of contrasting dominant power relations of the official records. Memory is thus a crucial source for history despite its inaccuracies and distortions as it contains personal and emotional truths of the story not presented in official documents (LaCapra 1998).

For curators, one of the positive outcomes of the contrasting of official history and memory is that this has had a ripple effect in the way in which curatorship is viewed. Museums can work more interactively and inclusively with people's memories and testimonies and this is shifting the boundaries and balance between academic knowledge and social knowledge in exhibitions. Working with testimony also poses a new challenge to curators in their role as interpreter of the past because,

as LaCapra states, “it raises the issue of the way in which the historian or other analysts becomes a secondary witness, undergoes a transference relation, and must work out an acceptable subject-position with respect to the witness and his or her testimony” (LaCapra 1998: 11).

To sum up, memory resides in the individual but influences the collective memory. Halbwachs argues that people access their own memory in relation to the collective memory and that cultural knowledge is the result of socialisation and the shared nature of remembering. Collective memory engages with individual memory in a framework through which individuals can formulate their identity (Halbwachs 1992). The production and representation of collective memory fosters a sense of belonging, identity and pride. Furthermore, memory and oral testimony has become an important ingredient in representations of the past in museum exhibitions.



Reflections of the viewer's body can be viewed alongside reflections of other bodies on display in the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg.



The Apartheid Museum arbitrarily assigns visitors the right to enter through either the “Whites Only” or “Non-whites Only” entrances. I entered the “Non-whites Only” entrance.

SECTION TWO

2.1 The choreography of display

Having looked at some of the pressures on museum practice in general, my focus in Section Two shifts to look at precedents of experiential exhibitions and how the human body performs in experiential exhibitions. In this section I explore how the human body and exhibition spaces interrelate. Firstly, I will consider some broad notions of how the sentient body perceives, responds and moves in relation to its spatial environment. I consider how the body ‘feels’ space and how body perception constructs meaningful places. The interaction of ‘body spatiality’ with form, whether in the theatre, in architecture or in an exhibition is the substance of the choreography of design. Secondly, I discuss the spatial qualities of sound and sound installations in exhibitions and museums. I go on to discuss the development of panoramas, dioramas and museum dioramas as exemplary display genres which, by using three-dimensional spatial environments and visual realism, have created powerful experiential exhibitions. By spatial environments I mean an environment that has been constructed to encompass the viewer in the surround and to which the viewer can relate in all directions. A spatial environment would be an entire space in which the viewer is located and in which the viewer perceives visually as well as spatially – that is experiences the space through all their senses.

Panoramas and dioramas are the progenitors of what we know as museum dioramas. I, along with thousands of other visitors, have always regarded ‘habitat display’ dioramas found in most natural history museums most compelling. These hyper-realistic staged dramas present real life in a combination of science and art. I am including an overview of panoramas and dioramas in this study because I consider their influence significant in the evolution of spatial exhibitions. Even more than contemporary museum dioramas, the early panoramas and dioramas are noteworthy because, although they engaged with the audience both physically and spatially, they were imagined and designed to create a choreographed experience. Toby Kamps describes dioramas as “uniquely visceral”, to which one responds physically: “They engage our sense of depth perception and, with it, a bodily awareness of space, which encourages us to make the imaginative leap into their constructs” (Kamps & Rugoff 2000: 6). Rugoff connects these early examples of “perspectival illusionism” in panoramas and dioramas as comparable with virtual reality: “Like today’s virtual reality simulations, such displays were not meant to actually deceive the viewer so much as to offer a compelling substitute for the real world” (Kamps & Rugoff 2000: 13).

I go on to look at two highly politicised and much discussed local exhibitions in which the human body is on display and subject to objectification; viz. the *Bushman Diorama* (or latterly the *Khoisan Karoo camp circa 1800*) exhibited for 40 years at the South African Museum, and *Miscast: Negotiating Khoisan History and Material Culture* at the South African National Gallery in 1996. I show that the human form evokes an emotional response from the viewer because the

viewer's own body is brought into an empathetic and personal relationship with the exhibit. I am also looking at these examples because I find commonalities between them and the District Six Museum exhibition which I discuss in Section Three, and where I argue that the District Six Museum is an example of an experiential exhibition space in which ex-residents, who act as both the subjects and interpreters of the exhibition, can be objectified by viewers. However the viewers are drawn into an active and experiential participation with the display and the people, and contribute to the whole by their engagement.

2.1.1 The body in space

As we move through space, through our lives, we are constantly subjected to environmental and built forms which act on us by physically containing and limiting the way in which we move. In this way we are directed by these forms. As our bodies encounter the world our bodies and our movements are in continual dialogue with our buildings. It is my hypothesis that because body perception and body image are active components in the interpretation and understanding of three-dimensional forms, they have potential to be ingredients of spatial exhibition design making up the 'choreography of display'.

People express their use and engagement with space by developing meaningful environments. Understanding just how the body responds to space (and how space responds to the needs of the body) is fundamental to understanding architecture and spatial design and as such a point of interest in connection with experiential exhibitions. I suggest that there is a commonality of the viewer experience with architecture, theatre, art installations and exhibition design because all of these are witness to the drama that is generated by the interplay of the body moving through space and time. I discuss some projects that were conceived to intersect and engage with the viewer's sentient body. For example, the Bauhaus theatre explored ideas that integrated body spatiality with constructed forms on stage, and Ilya Kabakov's art installations demonstrate his ideas about the choreography of participatory exhibitions.

When we consider space, we recognise that the volume of space, rather than being perceived as a void, is a positive substance through which one moves. Other forces also move through space; sound, aromas and light fill space, and electric, magnetic and gravitational forces act on space, having a cognitive effect on both body and mind. In relation to the human body, the quality of form, colour and space are given meaning. For example, dancers talk about space "being real stuff" and dance and drama students are taught to move and interact in various ways with parts of space so that the "dancer and the space animate one another as partners" (Bloomer & Moore 1977: 58). Oskar Schlemmer of the Bauhaus describes the human body on stage as "obey[ing] the law of the body as well as the laws of space", the actor, he continues, "follows his sense of himself as well as his sense of embracing space" (Gropius & Wensinger 1996: 25). The range of how one moves through an exhibition, building or stage creates complex patterns of space and

time relationships. Well designed spaces involve the participation of a person in a way that evokes experiences in which one becomes aware of ones own movements in relation to other elements and other people's movements. I believe that it is through this kind of body awareness that we engage directly with spatial experiences and this dynamic creates the potential for experiential exhibitions.

2.1.2 Body, memory and architecture

In this section, I investigate how the human body and architectural form – as in the built environment – are in continual interaction with one another, and how individuals and communities are both affecting and being affected by their environments.

Bloomer and Moore, in *Body, Memory and Architecture* (1977), present an argument about how the human body interacts with architectural space, memory and identity. They point out that discourse on the interaction between the built environment and society seldom considers architecture as a “sensual social art responsive ... to the unique perceptual and emotional capacities of the human being” (Bloomer & Moore 1977: ix–x). In reaction to this, Bloomer and Moore present an argument that the human body is our most immediate source for three-dimensional experience. They say that this is because our primary three-dimensional experiences are sensed through the body (at a young age), feeling spatial dimensions therefore originates in the body experience. They explain that the body develops a full spatial sense through an integrated response of the whole body that is a synthesising of all its sense perceptions. This means that the whole human sensory system is engaged with detecting and interpreting information from its surrounding environment. They argue that although the notion of ‘body’ is usually limited to the physical body, more importance should be given to understanding the mind or psychological abilities of the body. Furthermore, they present an alternative understanding in which space perception is not only sensed through sight, but also through the body’s ‘haptic system’ (touch perception, proprioception) and ‘basic orientation’ in space, as well as the mind’s psychological ‘body image’.

The ‘haptic system’ (as described by Bloomer and Moore) means the sense of touch throughout the whole body. It includes all aspects of sensual detection both inside and outside the body. The ‘haptic system’ interfaces directly with the three dimensional world. How this works is that the body has internal sensors (proprioceptors) which perceive the body’s own position and movement (kinaesthesia). Body perception compares this information to information received from the world outside. The ‘basic-orienting’ system is the actual body positioning, in relation to itself and to the environment. It measures up and down, left and right, establishes ground plane, maintains body balance and mobility. ‘Body image’ refers to a psychological model of body perception, which relates to a person’s sense of his or herself in the world. It is the combination of the physical and psychological sensory system – along with other contextual factors such as culture, ethics,

morality and other social conditions – which forms our complex human perceptual organism. Psychological perceptions, in conjunction with physical equivalents, contribute to knowledge formation by constructing values based on body experiences such as positive and negative, strong and weak, past, present and future, as well as anthropomorphic interpretations and other body based metaphors.

But what does body spatiality and body image have to do with experiencing exhibitions? Exhibitions are spaces in which people reconcile memory and personal identity. Bloomer and Moore refer to body spatiality as “an internal world which is not only distinct from and within an external world, but which is centered around ‘landmarks’ and bodily memories that reflect a lifetime of events” (Bloomer & Moore 1977: 45). In other words, memories connect us to our internal space of self as well as to our connection to the external world.

Spatial encounters, whether in the city, house or journeys inbetween, elicit bodily responses. People sharing such spaces develop similar bodily responses which leave their mark on the environment. Therefore places people use, such as the home or the city, acquire expressions of their particular use and experience. Consequently, as body spatiality encounters and engages with the environment, common experiences become reflected by the environment. This happens on both ends of the scale in the built environment. Broader social experiences are reflected in the urban landscape as well as in the home. Similarly, the city on a macro-scale, is made up of elements that represent experience at a personal level. A human scale in the built environment can provide a sense of intimacy which is empowering to the individual because it helps create a perception of the whole, the centre and the boundaries of place (Bloomer & Moore 1977). Through the simultaneous experiences of commonality and the particular experiences of heterogeneity, built forms in our landscape are representative of both the collective and the individual.

As I have argued, body spatiality responds to built form. However, not all buildings elicit positive body responses and, in fact, often elicit negative responses. Individuals respond positively and imaginatively in the environment when the body is inspired to move with form. Buildings that create potential transactions between body, imagination, and environment without controlling or dominating are characterised by feelings of humanness, or are said to have human identity.

In society, individuals and communities create meanings through social dialogue, and memory and identity form intrinsic social aspects of human interaction and expression. The interpretation and expression of one’s identity and worldview is formed in relation to and with reference to one’s sense of self and one’s environment. Through the mode of body spatiality, people express themselves by developing meaningful environments, creating spaces with an identity, a sense of ‘place’ and belonging that reflects themselves. Collaborative computer systems analysts Steve

Harrison and Paul Dourish (1996) describe the distinction between ‘place’ and ‘space’ as they use it in the virtual world of computer systems. They describe ‘space’ as the three-dimensional environment in which objects and events occur, and in which they have relative position and direction. In this environment our common orientation is an invaluable resource in presenting and interpreting activity and behaviour. ‘Place’, on the other hand, is a space that is invested with understandings of behavioural appropriateness, cultural expectations, and so forth. We are located in space but we experience in place. Place derives from a tension between connectedness and distinctness (Harrison & Dourish 1996).

The body moving through space, whether in an exhibition, in a building or city, a stage or even computerised virtual space, produces a complex arrangement of space and time dynamics. Yudell explains that well designed spaces have the potential of inspiring actual or imaginary participation from an individual which encourages personalised experiences. Space becomes an energising field as one becomes aware of one’s own movements in relation to other people’s movements and other elements in the space. Conversely, built forms can also create disorienting spatial associations. Disorientation results in stimulation of the senses which intensifies experience and awareness, but at the risk of causing more stressful experiences (Bloomer & Moore 1977: 66–68).

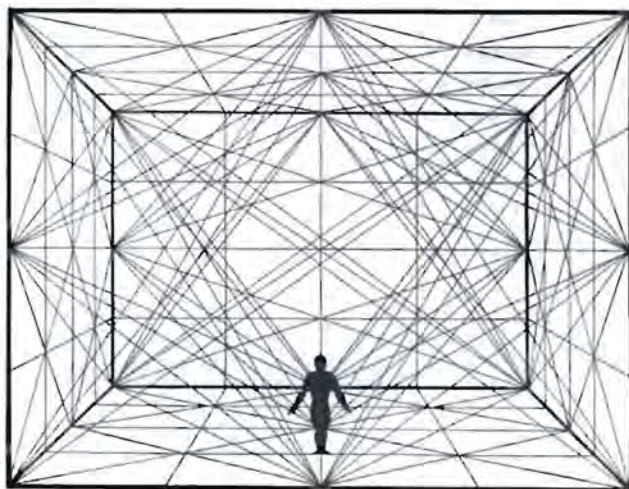


“The Caryatids of the Acropolis, undaunted by their burden, seem ready to step out into the mortal world” (Bloomer & Moore 1977: 56).

2.1.3 The body on stage

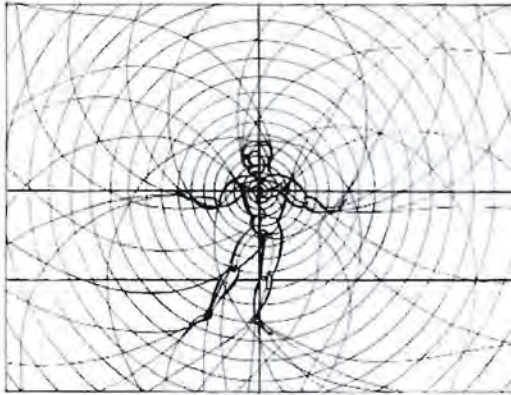
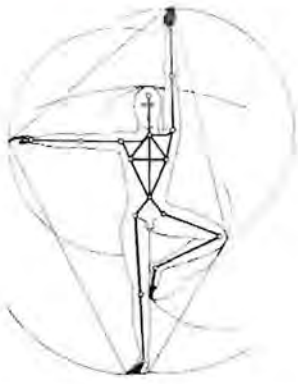
As a reaction against increasing technological advancements and abundant use of visual form, the Bauhaus movement in the 1920s proposed to finding a new working correlation between artistic creation, human perception and the phenomenon of form and space. Oskar Schlemmer, stage designer at the Bauhaus, whose work is described by Gropius as having “transformed into abstract terms ... observations of the human figure moving in space” (Gropius & Wensinger 1996: 8–9), observed that “the appearance of the human figure ... from the very moment at which it becomes a part of the stage, it also becomes a ‘space-bewitched’ creature ... automatically and predictably, each gesture or motion is translated in meaningful terms into a unique sphere of activity” (Gropius & Wensinger 1996: 92).

The stage is the environment on which the dancer performs. The Bauhaus developed a theory about the stage as an abstraction of how the human body interacts with space. Schlemmer saw the stage as a synthesis of form, motion, sound, colour, light and scent that is a “representation abstracted from the natural and directing its effect at the human being” (Gropius & Wensinger 1996: 18). Architectonic space too, according to the Bauhaus, is made up of colour and form, as object and volume, which is then occupied by the human body. Form, colour and space are thus invested with meaning in relation and in comparison to the human body.



(above left) “The laws of cubical space are the invisible linear network of planimetric and stereometric relationships” (Gropius & Wensinger 1996: 23).

(above right) Dancer from *The Triadic Ballet* (1912, 1915, 1922, 1923) originated by Albert Burger, Elsa Hötzel and Carl Schlemmer, showing the “laws of motion of the human body in space” (Gropius & Wensinger 1996: 27, 36).



(top) "[T]he geometry of calisthenics, eurhythmics, and gymnastics" (Gropius & Wensinger 1996: 23–24).

(above) "The laws of organic man ... reside in the invisible functions of his inner self ... their center is the human being, whose movements and emanations create an imaginary space" (Gropius & Wensinger 1996: 24–25).

To develop this awareness of the relationship between body and environment a performer acquires a complex sense of his or her internal body and by controlling the smallest movements maintains awareness of all parts of the body in relation to each other and to the whole. "The laws of organic man, on the other hand, reside in the invisible functions of his inner self: heartbeat, circulation, respiration, the activities of the brain and peripheral nervous system. If these are the determining factors, then their center is the human being whose movements and emanations create an imaginary space" (Gropius & Wensinger 1996: 25).

The idea of how a dancer is connected to the space of the stage is comparable to the way in which a viewer responds to the spatial contours of an exhibition space. In this project, I am mainly concerned with the experience of exhibition spaces. I have argued that through body spatiality and body perception we engage most directly with our environment, whether in the built environment or theatre stage, and I suggest that this goes towards an understanding of experiencing exhibition spaces. I have looked at ways in which the body, space and form interact with each other and I have shown that human perception and the lived environment are reciprocally involved and that this is a genesis of representation.



Figure in Space with Plane Geometry and Spatial Delineation.

Photograph: Lutz Fehle



Spatial Delineation with Figure.

Photograph: Lutz Fehle



Figures in Dramatic Gesturing (Schilder).

Photograph: Gropius

(Gropius & Wensinger 1996: 93)

2.1.4 “Total” installation

Understanding the role of the viewer as performer and participant in an exhibition space is central to this project. Exhibitions are experienced temporally as well as spatially as discussed in previous sections. In this section I examine the exhibition space as a theatre; a stage that is set to be the context through which the viewer enacts the script as the main participant. The dramatic event is choreographed and involves the viewer as performer moving through space in an experience that unfolds over time. The following descriptions of the artist Ilya Kabakov’s installations expound the formal elements that make up an exhibit wherein the viewer is choreographed by the artist as the central element and participant of experience.

In his lectures compiled in *On the “Total” Installation* (1995) Ilya Kabakov covers many issues and aspects of what he calls the “Total” installation. He describes his installations as ‘whole’ environments, which are created to surround completely the viewer and in which the viewer is totally immersed. He often draws comparisons of his work with the theatre and stage (as well as painting and to a lesser degree to architecture). For example Kabakov prescribes everything in his installations as produced for and directed at the viewer. The impression that the viewer should have should remind the viewer of the stage in the theatre. “In this sense the “Total” installation is a place of halted action, where some sort of event was occurring, is occurring and may occur” (Kabakov 1995: 246).



The *Palace of Projects* (2000) by Ilya and Emilia Kabakov at the 69th Regiment Armory, New York. I visited this installation in which Kabakov and Kabakov created a spiralling architectural space which housed exhibits that dealt with the progression and non-progression of ideas and projects.

According to Kabakov, an installation should go further than the theatre experience in so far as in an installation the viewer is not a passive participant. In a Kabakov installation the viewer becomes an active participant and the actual performer in his own experience. Within the installation, the viewer moves about freely, finding interesting things to examine and shifting points of view. Although, as Kabakov points out, the movement around the installation is seemingly by choice and whim, it is entirely this dynamic that the artist must anticipate and must, as far as possible, be preemptive with an orchestrated choreography (Kabakov 1995: 275).

Kabakov understands his installations as pertaining to both the visual arts and the temporal arts (such as theatre) because the installation has the ability to change over time and, as he describes it, although it has physicality and is stationary, the viewer experiences it by moving through it. “It is [the viewer’s] migration around the installation that creates the temporal-spatial aspect ... its drama, as opposed to its spatial structure” (Kabakov 1995: 311). According to Kabakov, to create the drama, the installation needs a spatial plot, which “the viewer must feel ... with his whole body” (Kabakov 1995: 295).

Creating drama with plot and narrative in an exhibition space is one of the main demonstrations of body spatiality and movement that Kabakov helps to define. I am drawing on his theory because his installations cause the viewer to become the performer. The viewer’s movements are the medium through which the exhibition narrative unfolds. Kabakov creates dramatic effects in his installations evoking responses from viewers that they feel as they move around, engaging with the various objects and exhibits. Although no two viewers will ever experience the installation in exactly the same way, there are common points of engagement and similar responses especially in and about familiar surroundings.

The concept of choreography brings together time and space. While physical elements in space are static, by moving through space over a duration of time one experiences space as a changing landscape of elements and objects. Constructing an exhibition as choreography means creating the whole experience as an interplay of motion, space and time. Kabakov explores aspects of experiencing time. He explains that the viewer encountering any work of art will have two kinds of “interrelationships with time”. The one is time that passes as a separate dimension outside of the viewer, the second is “time which flows through him given the encounter with a work of art and which he experiences subjectively” (Kabakov 1995: 281). Examples of genres where time flows past the viewer are those where the viewer is subjected to an imposed time frame, such as the cinema, theatre or sports stadium. He describes time that flows through the viewer as being more perceptible in the way that it has physical presence, and that it is experienced with clear distinctions of past, present and future. In Kabakov’s installations notions of past and future times are connected through the relative placement of the objects in the space or exhibition landscape, while present time is personified by the viewer standing in the space, or moving around it (Kabakov 1995: 281).

Kabakov designs his installations by recreating an image of the cosmos as a whole world that revolves separately around each viewer. In this way each viewer plays the central role in their subjective experience, performing their narrative and playing out their plot – being the animator of the exhibition landscape.

2.2 Sound in space

In the following sections I look at the way sound is used and incorporated in exhibition spaces. I believe that sound has a very strong physical and spatial presence. My premise is that understanding the kinds of resonance that sound finds within space can assist in producing experiences that will connect the body directly with space. To demonstrate how sound works with the body in space, I look at the relationship of sound and space in studies of musical harmonics and how contemporary electronic sound has a very different sub-structure and, perhaps, a different relationship to space. I also draw on the experiences of sound installations by artists Ilya Kabakov and Bill Viola, and go on to analyze various sound installations in Cape Town.

2.2.1 Sight versus sound

The first point to make is that there is an opposition between sight and sound in spatial environments. It is clear that sight is dominant in the apprehension of objects, including buildings, usually at the expense of the other senses. It follows that our preconceptions give dominance to vision and that we have a biased understanding of perceptual experiences because sight has dominated the cultural landscape while other senses such as hearing have more often been left uncritically in the background. However, I would like to discuss sound as an integrated component of our body-space experiences. Indeed, sound is a powerful component of spatiality and spatial relations and thus an important component of experiential exhibitions.

Kabakov's assessment of music and sound in installation points to the difficulty in theorising the use of sound in art installations as "... the subject itself does not subject to analysis ... because not a large enough path has been travelled yet in this matter" (Kabakov 1995: 304). Architectural theorist, Juhani Pallasmaa explains the opposition between sight and sound: "Sight isolates, whereas sound incorporates; vision is directional, sound is omnipresent. The sense of sight implies exteriority, whereas sound creates an experience of interiority. I regard an object, but sound approaches me; the eye reaches, but the ear receives. ... Sight is the sense of the solitary observer, whereas hearing creates a sense of connection and solidarity." (Pallasmaa 1996: 34-35) In his paper on the sensual qualities of space, Pallasmaa has critiqued the way that sight has dominated our perceptions of architecture in the Western context. He argues, having considered that spatial and other representations and artefacts flow out of human experience, that the dominance of sight affects our relations to the world and our concepts of knowledge. He goes further to argue that this creates a problematic for holistic views on architecture and that a more balanced understanding of the senses would create better living environments.

In a similar vein, Bill Viola, new media artist, has expressed his concern about the West's inclination to understand the senses in discreet and separate terms and to counter this tendency, he aims his artworks at "putting [all the senses] back together". Using multimedia technologies, he has explored "the phenomenon of sense perception as a language of the body and avenue to self-

knowledge” (Viola 1995). Viola explores the relationships between time and space in his installations through encounters with video and sound which activate thought and consciousness. He states that “perceptions over time equals thought” (Viola 1995: 150). Expanding these ideas, Viola reasons that where a conscious space for thought exists there should be sound. He considers sound as a material thing that exists in relation to space and describes his concept of “field perception” as an “awareness or sensing of an entire space at once” with “all the senses ... unified” (Viola 1995: 150).

Thus, sound as expressed in the medium of space involves the full range of senses which perceive in a passive and receptive way rather than the projected fragmented way of vision.

2.2.2 Sound resonating with space

We experience many phenomena of sound in various extraordinary forms that evoke imaginative response. Referring to Gothic cathedrals and Greek amphitheatres, Viola points out that: “The science of acoustics is the study of sound in space. It assumes strong architectural associations” (Viola 1995: 155). Both Viola and Rudolf Wittkower in his study of Renaissance architecture see a close association between the qualities of space and sound. Wittkower outlines the influence of Ancient Greek musical scales on architectural proportion during the Renaissance. The appropriation of musical proportion was not just a direct translation of musical harmony into architectural harmony but a recreating of universal harmonies, like those developed in music, that could be used architecturally. The analogy of musical and visual proportion was not just theoretical speculation but based on a belief in the harmonic mathematical structure of all creation. Wittkower quotes Alberti as having stated that “the numbers by means of which the agreement of sound affects our ears with delight, are the very same which please our eyes and minds” (Wittkower 1988: 109).

Perceptions about sound in the contemporary context, however, are dramatically different from 15th and 16th century Europe mainly because most sound recordings are electronically amplified. Bill Viola explains that although the physical attributes of electronic sound is a type of drone it still adheres to musical and harmonic principles. He considers that this new perpetual drone – such as the video image which perpetually repeats its same frequencies without rest – has changed our cultural perceptions and has even shifted the way in which we think. He associates the electronic drone to Indian harmonics rather than European harmonics: “Western music builds things up, piling notes on top of notes, forms on top of forms, in a way one would construct a building ... It is additive: its base is silence, all musical sounds proceed from this point. Indian music, on the other hand, begins from sound. It is subtractive. All the notes and possible notes to be played are present before the main musicians even start playing, stated by the presence and function of the tambura [a drone instrument]. ... [W]hen the primary musicians play, they are considered to be pulling notes out of an already ongoing sound field, the drone” (Viola 1995: 160–1).

It is sound's harmonic composition that can be used to complement space. Sound as a plastic element is active in the resolution of space and is able to captivate the audience and define experience. Thus sound is an activator of space as well as a medium of information and memory.

2.2.3 Sound in exhibitions

With the advent of multi-media display systems, sound has become an integral component of almost all museum exhibitions and many art installations. However modern museum spaces are generally bland non-acoustic spaces which do not produce good sound quality. It is difficult to contain sound in open plan spaces and therefore hard to integrate sound installations in an exhibition without it spreading across the space and interfering with other exhibits. Using sound in exhibitions is still relatively new and curators and exhibition designers are still experimenting with using it effectively.

I shall examine some examples of sound installations in art and museum exhibitions. The first examples demonstrate how sound adds to and complements spatial exhibitions. Both Ilya Kabakov and Bill Viola optimise the use of sound in their installations with considerable expertise. I go on to review various museums in Cape Town (by way of local examples) that have incorporated sound installations in their exhibitions. Museums use sound installations in a more literal way than art installations. Many museums use sound to recreate experiences or evoke memory from the past, other museums simply present sound as material from their archives. I describe some local sound installations that I have visited, which show different modes of using sound and how sound interacts spatially in different ways with the viewer.

Kabakov has used sound in three different ways. Firstly as a counterpoint to the visual; secondly in unison with the visual; and thirdly as a replacement of the visual. In all three installations sound is united with sight and space, in a choreography of form, movement and narrative. Kabakov uses sound as a plastic element to animate the formal resolution of his installations. In *Labyrinth. My Mother's Album* (1990) he describes how the viewer first perceives the sound with "peripheral consciousness", while the visual imagery is in the "central range of attention". The audio arrangement in his installation is pyramidal, in that it starts and ends very softly and on the periphery of perception, but increases its intensity towards the centre where it becomes the focus of attention. In the beginning the visual images are more active than the audio. In the middle the shift of balance favours the audio and then towards the end it shifts back to the visual. The changing aspect of the audio in relation to the visual and to space and time, creates the dramatic intent of the composition (Kabakov 1995: 305–6).

In *The Communal Kitchen* (1993) Kabakov has added sound (in this case voices) to the composition of the installation in a way which acts "in unison with the spatial and textual elements", acting as another formal element "according to the principle of superimposition,

doubling ... the effect produced by each of them individually” (Kabakov 1995: 307). In *The Empty Museum* (1993) Kabakov replaces the visual with the audio. This installation takes place in a room in a classical style art museum in which he has removed the paintings but has left light spots on the wall where the painting would have been. Classical music (Beethoven) plays loudly filling the space with sound, but because it is a suitable substitution it creates an easy transition from the visual sense to the aural sense without causing distress to the viewer (Kabakov 1995: 307).

Bill Viola uses sound as an integrated component of space. In his many installations the source of sound is often from the actual objects, sometimes exaggerated or amplified, clearly emanating from the focal point of the installation. For example, in *An instrument of Simple Sensation* (1983) the sound of a beating heart (on video) is conducted along a tensile wire which vibrates in a continuous drone and is amplified to fill the space with “its subtle and complex sound”, thus connecting in a tangible way, the beating heart image in electronic and acoustic form (Ross & Sellars 1997: 78). In *The Talking Drum* (1979) Viola combines single drumbeats with the reverberating qualities of an empty swimming pool. He works the drumbeats into a merging continuous noise bouncing off the walls of the empty space thus exploring the complex rhythmic interferences of sound waves with architectural space. “At first, it is only apparent to listeners that the character of echoes has changed, but then gradually they become aware of the new sounds contained within the individual drumbeats. The more the drum is beat, the more the shadow sounds are heard” (Ross & Sellars 1997: 70).

Viola’s video and sound installations are beautifully crafted visual, spatial and aural creations, directed at providing the viewer with an almost spiritually transcending experience. In David Ross’s description of *He Weeps for You* (1976) the viewer “emerge[s] from the experience ... literally changed. Recognizing a drop of water as both a lens and a metaphoric mirror alters our awareness of our place in the world and our relationship to time and materiality” (Ross & Sellars 1997: 28–9).

2.2.4 Sound installations in Cape Town Gateway Museum, Waterfront

The Gateway Museum building is organised around a central courtyard. The exhibition spaces are arranged in rooms and passages around the central courtyard space on three floors. The different spaces are visually permeable with many openings, some partially separated with light steel mesh screens. The exhibition displays are mostly of three types. The most immediately apparent is the series of posters, with explanatory image and text boards, which are displayed on a system of stainless steel cables and pulleys. A second display technique is the trolleys, which have drawers, which can be opened to reveal artefacts. The third technique is the audio-visual projections, audio and audio-visual archives on headphones and touch-screen monitors. There are a couple of points

I will make in regard to how the Gateway Museum sound installations synthesise body and space.

The Gateway Museum exhibition does everything to encourage the viewer to engage physically with the exhibits from the way the building is designed to flow easily and openly to the interactive computer monitors. However, I found both the physically engaging activities of moving the posters around by the pulley system or opening and closing drawers in the trolleys, to be stilted and self-conscious. The poster pulley system looks good but does nothing to further one's insight of the display and is therefore meaningless. The opening and closing of drawers gave me the distinctive irritated feeling of looking for something that I had misplaced and could not find.



Life-size projection (left) and poster displays (right) at the Nelson Mandela Gateway to Robben Island, Cape Town.

The first audio-visual installation is the introduction to the Nelson Mandela Gateway and Robben Island Museum tours. It is in a darkened, passage-like room off the entrance foyer. It consists of a slightly larger than life-size panoramic video projection of a stage on which ex-detainees give testimony of their prison experience. As a viewer, my experience in this room was similar to being in the front row of a theatre. I found it easy to believe in the life-size projections, and was moved by their performance. The sound, the image and the darkness together dominated both the space and were encompassing. My imagination easily filled in for the implied scenario creating a 'real' experience transforming my sense of the immediate reality. However, as in a theatre experience, the viewer is a passive participant. The exhibit is thus unable to create a more meaningful experience that would result from the body of the viewer being more actively involved.

Besides one audio-visual projection upstairs, all the other audio-visual installations are interactive touch-screen monitors. Computer monitor technology in exhibitions are at risk of being flat and alienating. I believe that a viewer's ability to stay focused on a low-res monitor for an extended period is incongruous with being inside a three-dimensional, vibrant and often exaggerated spatial

context. The layout of the Nelson Mandela Gateway creates a series of quite disparate exhibition rooms connected by empty passages. The physical installations are quite sparsely laid out and the audio-visual monitors are stationed in the rooms and passages. Again I found the choice of materials physically alienating (the audio-visual technology reminded me of a dentist's surgery). It took me some time before I engaged with the touch-screen monitors. The first few I encountered were indeed boring and empty of information – like the passages they were in, however, the monitors upstairs, I realised, contained a wealth of archival information, documents, sound and video. For me, the most interesting audio installation was the Radio Freedom archives. Here the viewer puts on headphones and can listen to extracts of their choice, while browsing through the touch-screen menus or simply looking out over the harbour views. With the headphones on one's senses are immersed into an aural world. The authentic sounds of actual events heard in this separated space engages powerfully with one's own memories. I found this experience really moving on both an emotional and a physical level as what I heard brought back sentiments and anxieties from my own past. Because the headphones are attached to the audio station the viewer is made to be still and focused and this allows the power of imagination to engage with and interpret the audio content. The power of sound to affect the body in a spatial sense, and because it is removed from other senses, creates a sensual and bodily experience. This kind of installation requires an in-depth involvement rather than just a passing glance.



Video archive stations (left) and one of the sound installations (right) at the Nelson Mandela Gateway to Robben Island, Cape Town.

Cape Town Holocaust Centre

By contrast, in the Cape Town Holocaust Centre exhibition the sound installations and the visual displays are neatly synchronised. As one moves down the corridor the introductory displays of Jewish life before the Holocaust, the viewer first hears traces of sound from further down the exhibition. The sound track is clearly militaristic and more specifically Nazi propaganda to those who know. They set up an expectation and the body anticipates what is to follow in the exhibition. The soundtrack slowly increases as does the display of the rise of the Nazis to power, the latter materialising into full-blown Nazi activity and the Third Reich. Moving onwards through the exhibition the narrative turns towards the victims of the Third Reich. The first soundtrack fades

and, at its softest moment, is replaced by new sounds of someone singing a sad Jewish folksong. Approaching the singing the visual displays shift towards the lives of Jews suffering under Nazism including the ghettos, mass murders, the 'final solution' and deportations. As one enters the death camps the singing sound has died away and the viewer is left in silence. Moving onward the narrative and display turns to rescue and liberation. Again the viewer starts to hear voices, this time of witnesses and survivors. In the end one comes to a small auditorium which plays a video recording of survivors in Cape Town giving testimony to their experience.

The experience of sound in this exhibition works in co-ordination with the spatial organisation in a way that sensitises the viewer to the powerful and horrific content of the exhibition. The sound installations guide the viewer through the spaces by gently tugging them onwards while keeping an awareness for what has just been. The sound is complementary, rather than competing, with the written and visual narratives. In this way its pyramidal structure is similar to Kabakov's *Labyrinth. My Mother's Album*, starting on the periphery of perception, increases and decreasing again creating a dramatic passage through time.

The Jewish Museum

In many respects the Jewish Museum succeeds in being the antithesis to the Holocaust Centre. The exhibition focuses on celebrating the achievements of South African Jews. The exhibition space is loud and gregarious. The mixture of sound effects can only be described as a cacophony. Each exhibit in the space has its own soundtrack. I counted eleven different sound sources in the main exhibition space, with as many video monitors, each playing loud enough to drown out its neighbours. The resultant experience for the viewer is like that of a bustling marketplace and,



unsurprisingly, the exhibition emphasises the success of Jews in commerce and the economy. The problem with this illusion is that, generally, there are only one or two other people present. However, the lack of real people is compensated by the abundance of pulsating technology and talking heads. Although the many multi-media components of the exhibition do create a lively atmosphere, I found the overall experience more like being in a shopping mall than a place highlighting the expression of a community or an archive of knowledge. Because body spatiality responds powerfully to sound, too much aural stimulus and interference is spatially confusing, disorientating for the viewer and not conducive for personal reflection.

Sound domes and plasma-screen video-banks at the South African Jewish Museum, Cape Town.

The Whale Well in the South African Museum

On entering the Whale Well the viewer unexpectedly experiences a difference in body spatiality which is brought about by the change of scale of the space in comparison to the rest of the museum. The massive suspended whales and whale skeletons offset the relative smallness of one's body. Spatially speaking, standing in the large voluminous space is like standing at the bottom of the deep sea, with the large forms of whales above and around you. This effect is created, not in an obvious or literal way, but rather by spatial suggestion. As one stands gazing around in awe of the massive whales, one becomes aware of ambient sounds, soft, high-pitched and resonating. Too subtle to dominate, the sounds nevertheless permeate and integrate the space. The result is an elegant synchronisation of form, space and sound, creating an illusion of whale calls that rise and fall with the motion of the whales and the rolling sea.

The source of the sound is a yellow booth attached to the side of the space, which reminds me of something on a ship's deck, or later when I sat in the booth, immersed in the amplified sounds of its Perspex shelter, I realised it was more like an underwater aquarium viewing platform. Although the sounds are exquisite, the viewer is cut off from the spatial experience described above. Just listening is mono-sensory and does not have the capacity to hold the viewer's attention for very long.



The sound booth in the Whale Well in the South African Museum, Cape Town, looks and feels like a submerged observation capsule.

The District Six Museum

The District Six Museum has several sound installations that are integrated with the physical exhibits adding actual voices to the texture of the exhibition. The various sound installations, which employ sound domes to contain the sound to a specific area, are not over-powering spatially and at worst create a droning background noise to the exhibition space not unlike the the droning noise of the city. However, I do not think that they attain the depth of participation and subjective experience that is the stated aim of the exhibition and that is achieved with other exhibits. I review the District Six Museum exhibits and sound installations in more detail in Section 3.3.

But more importantly to this discussion I found the most extraordinary sound experience I reviewed this year was the most recent installation at the District Six Museum. The Museum presented, in the main exhibition space during its opening hours, the live performance of Mac Mackenzie playing his own contemporary innovations of a distinctive Cape-style jazz called Goema. A live sound installation is unusual in a museum space, but the quality of the sound created a rich and vibrant atmosphere reminiscent of the old District. Mackenzie plays his music, sometimes with other musicians, as workshops in progress. Unlike the static and permanent sound installations, Mackenzie engages and involves the viewers with his music, which adds to and complements the already highly participatory museum experience. His real sound and presence adds even more lustre, authenticity and atmosphere to the whole District Six Museum experience.



Robert Sithole (left) and Mac Mackenzie (right) play in the District Six Museum.

2.3 Panoramas and early dioramas

Panoramas and dioramas emerged in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century in Europe and the United States as new forms of art and entertainment in an era characterised by radical shifts in political and class structures and concurrent with new consciousness and new ways of seeing (Oettermann 1997). I will focus on two aspects in the development of panoramas. The one is the experience of the horizon as the symbol of new possibilities and as facilitating the rendering of multiple perspectives in painting. The other aspect is the spatial and temporal dimensions which make up the choreography of the panoramic experience.

The panorama is regarded as independently innovated by several European painters around the same time in the 1780s. But it was Robert Barker who received the patent for it in 1787 and who made the panorama into a popular public attraction. Barker created the first panorama of Edinburgh, first in a half circle and later in a full circle. The technological breakthrough that Barker accomplished was to create a painting of 360° (sometimes called a cyclorama) on a curved canvas in multiple perspective (Oettermann 1997: 101).

Besides its technological breakthroughs the panoramas also represented and reflected other important changes and achievements that were happening at the same time. Stephan Oettermann (1997) argues that the advent of panoramas and the discovery of the horizon was bound up with major shifts taking place in society: The discovery of the horizon, the liberation of the eye, and at the same time the era's diffuse sense of imprisonment all have a perfect counterpart in the panorama: while seeming to offer an unconfined view of a genuine landscape, it in fact surrounds observers completely and hems them in far more than all previous artistic attempts to reproduce landscapes (Oettermann 1997: 21). At that time, offered as the latest in travel tourism, panoramas were carefully orchestrated to create a most impressive illusionistic experience. Panoramas would commonly represent patriotic battle scenes, cityscapes and picturesque views of exotic landscapes.

2.3.1 Seeing the horizon

Oettermann traces the discovery of the horizon as a scientific concept around the fifteenth century, referring abstractly to the territory that lay beyond the known. The horizon also represented the physical limits to sight expressed in painting as new perspectives of vanishing points, as well as orders of spatiality and three-dimensional compositions. By the eighteenth century gazing at the horizon had become a highly desired and sought after experience, especially with the educated classes. Observation points, both in the landscape and in the cities, were very popular sites to visit and many good viewing points were built just for this purpose. According to Oettermann, the panorama was an artistic response to this desire to experience the horizon (Oettermann 1997: 8—12).

The emergence of the panorama coincides with the emergence of the middle classes and the democratisation of political systems in Europe. Concepts of the horizon and the unobstructed

views (and the possibilities of beyond) as represented in panoramas symbolised the political hopes and utopian visions of the people; what the panoramas expressed, was the freshly acquired ability of the bourgeoisie to see things from a new angle, in both a literal and metaphorical sense. And in contrast the panoramas also expressed the limitations of human vision; the eye cannot range beyond the frame, because there is no frame (Oettermann 1997: 20—21).

Like other inventions of the time, such as the telescope and the microscope, which extended the possibilities of vision beyond the natural eye panoramas taught people to see in a new and different way which integrated the concept of horizon and beyond. Furthermore, panoramas, by means of their 360° view, allowed people to see the world from a newly developed multiple perspective or democratic position. Whereas single perspective images are to be viewed exclusively from one position, multi-perspective images can be viewed from various positions thus being inclusive and democratic, which had good and wide appeal at the time. Adding to this, panoramas were events that were open to the public. The democratisation of perspective led to a shift in subject matter of panoramas, which focused more on political events and other current events (Oettermann 1997: 32). For example Barker's second panorama in 1792, was a sweeping view of the cities of Westminster and London, notably taken from the roof of a flour mill factory (Oettermann 1997: 101).

THE
ATLANTA
CYCLORAMA

3,962
sq. ft.

Bill Campbell
Mayne



The Battle of Atlanta can become a day at the Atlanta Cyclorama. Presenters give a three-dimensional panorama with music and narration, the painting of the Battle of Atlanta, however captures a pivotal moment in the history of our nation. Visitors witness the drama of an absorbing human story that took place on a hot July day in 1864.

The major feature of the Cyclorama is the massive painting in the round and three-dimensional dramatic. The six-story building also contains a museum with a fascinating collection of Civil War artifacts, weapons, diaries, maps and photographs. Several teach-across-computer trace the daily action of the war on all fronts during the Union Army's advance through Georgia. Audio multi-lingual translations of the Battle of Atlanta narrative are available for foreign visitors.

The main floor of the Cyclorama is dominated by the "Iron Horse," one of the steam locomotives used in the Great Locomotive Chase in April, 1862. A display near

the "Iron Horse" depicts the chase, also known as Anderson's Raid, which began in Kennesaw, Georgia, when Union soldiers seized a locomotive called the General. The General was pursued north by Confederate soldiers on the Train until the General was abandoned near Ringgold, Georgia. The Train has been a popular attraction in the Cyclorama since 1917.

Someone braver, history buff, Civil War scholar and students should visit the Cyclorama Book Store. The book store offers a wide range of Civil War related, memorabilia and booklets on topics from military strategies to recipes from the 1800's.

The Cyclorama experience is offered from 9:30 am to 5:30 pm daily, June through September, October through May, hours are 9:30 am to 4:30 pm. The Atlanta Cyclorama is a facility of the City of Atlanta Bureau of Cultural Affairs and is located in Grant Park, all locations 20 near downtown. For more information, call 404-624-1071.

*The Cyclorama is available for alternative viewing. Call 404-624-1071 for information on using a specially designed Atlanta website for your private group or special event.
**The Cyclorama is closed on New Year's Day, Martin Luther King Day, Thanksgiving Day, and Christmas Day.



I was captivated and enthralled by the scale and drama of the Atlanta Cyclorama, the only full-size panorama I have actually seen.

2.3.2 Space and time in panoramas

Generally panoramas were housed in rotundas specially built for their purpose. The large circular canvas would be hung around the inside periphery of the building. The viewers' observation platform would be in the centre. The height of the canopy above the viewing platform was low enough to conceal the top edge of the painting as well as mechanics and lighting of the painting. The lower edge of the painting is obscured by the edge of the railing or by the inclusion of a sculpted three-dimensional foreground to the painting. The atmosphere inside the space would be dimmed while the painting was lit by a strip of skylights above the viewing canopy and additional lighting that was provided. The route that the visitor would take to enter the rotunda usually led them through a darkened passage below ground-level and up a spiral staircase, so that their experience was intensified by the stark separation from the outside world and into the sudden and illuminating appearance of the panorama. Nowhere is it possible for the eye to shift outside the frame and compare the artistic illusion with the real surroundings. After a few minutes, when the memory of the city outside has begun to fade and the eyes have become accustomed to the twilight inside the rotunda, visitors can easily believe they are looking from a pavillion on top of a small hill at a landscape receding on all sides into a distant haze (Oettermann 1997: 51).

Thus as Oettermann makes clear, the aim of the panorama was to reproduce the real world so skillfully that spectators could believe what they were seeing was genuine. ... The painting had to surround observers and envelop them completely, so as to exclude any glimpse of their real whereabouts. An entire pictorial environment was created for visitors to pass through (Oettermann 1997: 49).

2.3.3 Dioramas

Panoramas, however, attracted some criticism because of their lack of motion or moving parts, which people felt detracted from its realism. In fact, it was observed that the more realistic the paintings became, the more exaggerated was this deficiency. Consequently various attempts were made to create motion in the panorama genre, for example the moving panorama, which scrolls past the seated audience.



Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre, who later invented a form of photography called daguerreotypes, created a diorama in Paris in 1822, the first of numerous successful productions. In a way Daguerre's dioramas were a response to the inertness of panoramas. It consisted of two adjoining rooms like stage-sets between which the seated audience platform could swivel. Each set was made up of a stretched canvas, painted on one side with opaque and translucent paints, set behind a darkened 'picture tunnel' that hid the edges of the picture. The illusion created by the diorama was essentially a light show on a painted screen representing the passing time of day, from darkness to light and back to darkness. Effects of the passing of time were created by adjusting the lighting in front and behind the transparency.

Daguerre's dioramas were dramatic, satisfying the audience desire for "consumable art" which was described by one admirer as "those things, so completely false, are for that very reason much closer to the truth" (Oettermann 1997: 79). The darkened room with a singular focus on the display enhanced the solitary and intimate experience of each individual in the audience. Barbara Maria Stafford (2001) describes the early dioramas as "everything that the monumental panorama was not: a conspicuously mixed genre, both dramatic and fanciful, changeable, and, above all, intimate" (Stafford 2001: 99). Dioramas succeeded in creating a mass media event that surpassed its forerunner, the panorama.

The *Bourbaki Panorama Luzern* (orig. 1881) depicts an event of the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71) when France's Eastern Army, under the command of General Bourbaki, crossed the Swiss border and gave up its arms. The Panorama which was rebuilt in 2000 can be visited online at www.bourbaki.ch/



The 'double-effect diorama' was a further improvement that re-created the experience of motion in image. By painting on both sides of the canvas, and by carefully orchestrating a variety of colour and lighting effects, such effects as flickering flames and shifting figures, began to animate the illusion of movement on the screen. This technical breakthrough "of movement on a two-dimensional surface was such a sensational innovation that people couldn't get enough of it" (Oettermann 1997: 80). Panoramas and dioramas continued to be popular attractions up to the end of the nineteenth century.

2.4 Museum dioramas

I included the overview of panoramas and dioramas in this study because they are the progenitors of what we know as museum dioramas and have influenced the way I think about spatial exhibitions. Especially panoramas, which were imagined and designed to create a total experience, they are totally immersing in the way they engage with the audience both visually and spatially. The demise of panoramas was because they leave the viewer with a sense of frustration because of an uncanny lack of motion which, intensified by the combination of such exaggerated realism, denies the full illusion.

The modern day habitat dioramas in museums of natural history, although not directly descended from Daguerre's dioramas, also have their origins in the nineteenth century. Museum dioramas or habitat dioramas developed concurrently in Europe and the United States probably out of much smaller and singular museum 'habitat' exhibits, which showed small animals, especially birds in a reconstructed and pictorial environment. Two pioneers of habitat dioramas were Swedish taxidermist, Gustaf Kolthoff, who opened his Biologiska Muséet in Stockholm in 1893, and Carl Akeley, taxidermist and inventor, who created the dioramas in the African Hall in the American Museum of Natural History in the 1920s (Kemp 1998). These old habitat dioramas still enthral museum audiences today.

The combination of realism and romanticism is the key to the alluring quality of museum dioramas. Much like the panoramas of the nineteenth century (and virtual reality of today) museum dioramas are able to shift temporarily the viewers' perception to another realm. While museum dioramas may be romantic in content the style of presentation is mostly realistic. Albert E. Parr, who was director of the American Natural History Museum from 1942 to 1959 and a senior scientist until his retirement in 1968 wrote extensively during this period about the principles of habitat dioramas in museums. Amongst his discussions he argued that the function of the diorama for educational purposes is its presentation of "truth" and "realism" while the dioramas' romanticism is to inspire and stimulate the imagination (Parr 1963).

Generally speaking museum habitat dioramas consist of realistic, life size displays constructed in special niches behind a glass panel. They are highly coded displays consisting of a fabricated



A pride of lions depicted in an African savannah is one of many exquisite dioramas in the Akeley Hall of African Mammals in the American Museum of Natural History, New York.

foreground of natural objects, plants and taxidermied animals composed into naturalistic scenes. The three dimensional foreground is merged seamlessly into a realistically painted background with panoramic views that extend to the horizon. These dioramas usually contain an abundance of scientific information as well as being designed and painted by outstanding artists. They are described as “scientific demonstration and public appeal coexist[ing] in perfect harmony” (Kemp 1998: 753). However, Rugoff describes dioramas as a kind of voyeurism of an idealised natural world. He suggests that dioramas, untouchable behind glass, have an unreal “ghost-like quality” which is “an isolated and inviolate space that is profoundly remote from that of the viewer” (Kamps & Rugoff 2000: 13).

Parr describes the habitat as an educational tool that tells us about the species in relationship to its environment. This worked well with the smaller animals such as birds but the representation of larger mammals not only needed much larger display cases but also introduced sweeping landscape vistas. The panoramic views became the dominant element within the exhibits at the cost, however, of the intimate character of tightly focused exhibits (Parr 1959). The ‘composite’ habitat diorama, like the one created in 1893 in the Biologiska Muséet in Stockholm, is of much greater scope and more reminiscent of the earlier panoramas. These extensive environments “combined many habitat groups of a variety of species and environments, synthetically assembled to form a continuous display ... surround[ing] a central observation tower” (Parr 1959: 123–4). According to Parr, this construction is not at all natural but is presented as realistic and is certainly enchanting as it envelops the viewer rather than separates the viewer behind a glass windowpane.

Barbara Marie Stafford notes that the lack of movement in the museum dioramas does not match the desire for movement of the earlier dioramas: “Paradoxically, the embalmed displays in the modern museum offer a window onto the natural world bereft of the animation that the original diorama worked so assiduously to create” (Stafford 2001: 102). This idiosyncrasy of habitat dioramas is what Parr refers to in his paper “The problem of arrested movement in static exhibits”

(1961) in which he asks the question “how much ‘frozen time’ the average viewer is able to accept in a museum without a loss of illusion, or even faith in integrity of presentation” (Parr 1961: 379). Parr cites two examples that he considers beyond the “safe limits of arrested movement contained within a static exhibit” (Parr 1961: 379). One example shows two Alaskan moose in battle in The American Museum of Natural History, the other shows a cheetah mid-air as it leaps onto a fleeing duiker in the museum of Malmö, Sweden. Other examples he cites also evoke the drama of movement but without failing to be convincing. Parr concludes, albeit with some trepidation, “that complete illusion requires some sort of reasonable proportion between the length of time during which an animal actually could hold the posture and the length of time it takes the visitor to register his impression of the entire exhibit in his mind” (Parr 1961: 382).



The critical moment captured by the pouncing cheetah (Malmö Museum, Sweden) is contrasted with the more continuous motion of the stalking Canadian lynx (American Museum of Natural History, New York).

For the purposes of this discussion, the matter of realism versus romanticism in habitat dioramas is relevant. Although habitat dioramas may be romantic in content, the style of presentation is mostly realistic. Parr contrasts the gory, puss-oozing portrayals of animal deaths in some dioramas, against sanitised versions where the ‘lifelike’ scenes are devoid of visual offensiveness. “In one instance, we have death in all its ugliness, and scavenging as nature’s nauseating way of garbage disposal. In another museum scene, death is beautiful, and scavenging a polite and fastidious meal that would pass the scrutiny of any meat inspector” (Parr 1963: 177).

Parr argues that although the obligation in educational representations is truth and realism the appeal of romanticism to present more spectacular dramatic effects and the artistic rendering to inspire “our contemplation of beauty in the environment” both satisfy and stimulate the imagination (Parr 1963: 180). Parr states: “The romanticism of style that spurs the imagination has none of the dangers of the romanticism of contents that blurs the truth” (Parr 1963: 184). However, Parr also argues that the positive exclusion of human presence in habitat scenes is testimony to the romantic notion that opposes any modern technological progress and that romanticism “represents a wistful withdrawal of nature from the affairs of man” (Parr 1963: 181). These factors and the dangers of sentimentality and sensationalism, according to Parr, should be guarded against in the construction of habitat exhibits.

2.5 Bodies on display

The incongruities of opposing meanings found in the display of habitat dioramas become even more disturbing when the human body is put on display. In the next section I look at two examples of the human body on display. They are the (commonly known as) *Bushman Diorama*, which was on display in the South African Museum (1959–2001); and *Miscast: Negotiating Khoisan History and Material Culture* (1996) which was a temporary exhibition at the South African National Gallery situated close by in the same precinct and which was conceptualised as a challenge to the dehumanising effect of the *Bushman Diorama*. In both, the body is a meaningful object of representation that affects the viewer in a number of ways that are neither simple nor wholly predictable. I investigate how the symbolic roles that bodies on display reflect the underlying curatorial processes and ideologies prevalent at the time. For example, the problem with the *Bushman Diorama* is that although its fame is widely acclaimed for its fine technique and visual beauty (Rose 1961) its presence is more complicated than first appearances would suggest and it raises many important issues about museum practices, such as the unequal relations of power at play, generally in museum ethnology and specifically in the display and representation of others' cultures (Davison 1990, 1991, 2001; Skotnes 1995, 1996ab, 2001; Skotnes & Payne 1995). These issues are highlighted by the problems of firstly objectifying the human body as a museum artefact and then by subjecting them to further objectification by the public gaze. Exhibits of human figures are intensely curious and are also obviously subject to voyeurism. I also discuss how the body is a powerful carrier of emotional knowledge and that the presence of the human figures trigger empathetic, emotional and psychological responses from viewers who identify with the exhibits through their own bodies, memories and experiences.

In the first instance the museum casting project was a process in which human subjects became numbered objects to be displayed in their near nakedness as “physical specimen[s], to be appropriated by the public gaze” (Davison 1991: 156). Later when the casts were remade in a habitat type diorama, the dramatic effect of the diorama presented an even more powerful representation of bodies as visual objects. The casts – recast in their new landscape – came alive like human actors. The *Bushman Diorama* was caught between the problematic representation of its human subjects and its capacity to transport viewers into a compelling (whether desirable or undesirable) imaginative experience.

Miscast: Negotiating Khoisan History and Material Culture went one step further in creating an experience for its viewers. This exhibition confronted the viewer in a highly aestheticised manner. Using body relations as its central metaphor it engaged and challenged the audience physically, visually and spatially, intellectually and emotionally. The layout and design were carefully choreographed to manipulate relational spatial arrangements, juxtapositions and overlaying of elements which were combined to create a series of experiences for the viewer and which brought into focus the viewer's own processes of viewing and objectifying.

2.5.1 The *Bushman Diorama*

The *Bushman Diorama* depicts the 'way of life' of a group of people indigenous to southern Africa known as the San or 'Bushmen'. The diorama is presently closed to the public, however it can be viewed on the Internet on a site on the current debates around the diorama (www.museums.org.za/sam/resource/arch/bushman.htm). The *Bushman Diorama* is primarily made up of plaster casts which were modeled as part of an anthropological project documenting the physical characteristics of the Bushmen and 'Hottentots' then believed to be a separate human race close to extinction. I draw mainly on Patricia Davison's work – as she has been directly involved with the Museum and the exhibits – for her account of the casting process and the subsequent exhibits of the casts at the South African Museum (1990, 1991, 2001).

According to Davison, the initiative to preserve the physiognomic example of a supposedly disappearing race came out of an intellectual discourse that legitimated the study of racial types as a branch of science, the casting process was therefore performed meticulously, "carried out in the interests of scientific rigour" (Davison 2001: 13). The original casting project was initiated by Dr Louis Péringuey, Director of the South African Museum, and actualised by James Drury, the Museum modeler, during the years 1907–1924. "Drury and his team set out for unknown parts in search for tribes of Bushmen of undiluted blood" and to acquire "a study of the Bushman ethnologically, making note of their way of life, and obtaining moulds of their living bodies for future casting" (Rose 1961: 46).

The Bushmen casts were first exhibited in 1911, inside a large glass display cabinet. The label focused on their 'pure blood' and on their physical attributes such as skin colour, physical stature and steatopygia. "The casts were used to illustrate the typical physical characteristics of Bushmen as a primitive anthropological type occupying a low position on the evolutionary scale" (www.museums.org.za/sam/resource/arch/bushman.htm). In the 1930s, the Bushmen display was moved to the centreplace in the new ethnography gallery. Still in their glass case, the Bushmen casts were displayed like rarified specimens. Here "the figures were grouped according to geographical region and language, in an attempt to demonstrate theoretical links between physical type, language and culture" (www.museums.org.za/sam/resource/arch/bushman.htm). The physical body representing a human subject became the focus of public interest. The casts, and by inference the people they represent, stood to be examined in a manner that tended towards scientific deference and voyeurism; human subject and museum object. By now the casts had become important museum artefacts and had become the most popular and acclaimed attraction in the museum, and continued to be displayed even though their scientific underpinnings had been discredited.

However, the Bushmen exhibits were increasingly problematic as Davidson explains: "The paradox and the problems of the casts is that, although they are objects (artefacts of museum



The *Bushman Diorama*, www.museums.org.za/sam/resource/arch/bushman.htm

they have an immediacy of presence that gives them a semblance of being human subjects, treated in the manner of observed animals. Indeed many viewers have been convinced that the casts are not made of plaster but are the remains of real people who have been preserved by taxidermists (Davison 1991: 156). These presumptions and tensions persisted in the creation of the new *Bushman Diorama* (1959—60) despite various adjustments to clothing (1984, 1988, 1990), and the additional explanatory display added to counter criticisms of misrepresentation (1989). In the new Diorama the casts were now contextualised in a natural setting to show Bushmen as hunter-gatherers in their way of life (Davison 2001: 16). However, the problems persisted, according to Davison, because the flawed ideas of the casting project are embedded in the material presence of the casts. The casts were treated as museum objects, identified primarily by registration number, racial type and locality, it follows that the figures were not exhibited as individuals with a social context but as unnamed examples of an ethnic group (Davison 2001: 10—14).

Much has been written about misrepresentations of Bushmen in just about all disciplines and media (Gordon 1992; Schrire 1995; Mazel & Ritchie 1994, Buntman 1996; Bester & Buntman 1999; Landau 1996; Lane 1996; etc.), as well as misrepresentations of the *Bushman Diorama* at the South African Museum (Davison 1990, 2001; Skotnes 1995, 1996ab, 2001). In the *Diorama* the myth of the Bushmen as noble savage, children of nature, people of the past, and

pristine hunter-gatherers is perpetuated. These romanticised illusions conceal the unfortunate reality. Nothing of the intellectual culture of the Bushmen was on display (except for fragments of Rock Art in the adjoining room), nor was the history of violent conflict with the settlers and others nor the resultant disempowered and marginalised status of these communities. As Davison explains: The people depicted in this simulated environment were naturalized by the rhetoric of the display. Less picturesque aspects of Khoisan history that would disrupt the romance of the timeless scene were selectively excluded. The well-documented history of colonial violence and counter-violence was invisible (Davison 2001: 5). Nowhere in any of the museum exhibits I saw was any evidence of the history and lore, the photographs, letters, narratives, and drawings richly present in the museum storerooms or any acknowledgement of the horrible encounters between Boers and bushmen. Worse still, not a trace was found of bushmen literature, which gave expression to their worldview and the uniqueness of their individuality (Skotnes 2001: 312—3).

The dilemma of constructing the *Bushman Diorama* as a habitat diorama is that it distinctly associates the representation of Bushmen with that of wild animals. This is because habitat dioramas, which reconstructed natural environments inhabited with stuffed animals, are present in many natural history museums worldwide. Even though there is usually a clear absence of humans in habitat dioramas, this can be construed to be alluding to a wilderness untouched by civilization (Parr 1959). Davison states that it was indeed a response to the success of habitat dioramas in other natural history museums that the South African Museum decided to display the Bushmen casts in a diorama even though the association with animal dioramas, worsened by the precision of the casts, led to the casts to be mistaken as being real people (Davison 1991: 158). (There are many examples of humans being portrayed in habitat dioramas, but these are not usually situated in natural history museums.)

For my argument I focus on the particular alluring quality of the *Diorama* which I propose created a powerful relational dynamic between the exhibit and the viewer. It is really a carefully constructed, but fake, primitive other that the viewer encounters in the *Diorama*. Although the *Diorama* shifted the interpretative framework of exhibiting the Bushmen casts from one of scientific anthropology to an ecological perspective (Davison 1991) it still casts the Bushmen in a detached and innocent relationship with the viewer. The illusion of realism and authenticity of the noble, near-naked figures, and the romantic notion of an idealised and pristine world lost in time stimulates viewers to respond empathetically.

Constructing the myth of Bushmen as being gentle, harmless people as opposed to previous portrayals as being bestial and depraved, created, besides a complete denigration, a much more comfortable relationship with colonial delusions of innocence in nature as opposed to the reality of their social and political marginalisation and disempowerment. Like with photographic images

of landscapes the perception of suspended time creates a temporal and spatial separation between the viewer and the casts which activates the unchallenged projection of the Bushmen as other (Landau 1996). That is, while the aestheticisation of the *Diorama* presents an even more powerful way to dislocate and desocialise the Bushmen and objectify the casts as visual objects, the dramatic presence of human subjects in a museum display makes their presence more ambiguous. Based on Drury's original intention to reproduce the casts in positions of action (Rose 1961) the casts — recast in their new landscape — come alive as human actors. It is as if they are indeed present and therefore complicit in the unfolding drama. The label for the new diorama (1960) included the viewer in the dramatic moment: *A Cape Bushman Camp in the Karoo: This diorama shows some activities of hunter-gatherers. The viewer should imagine that a large flock of birds has flown overhead and attracted the attention of the group* (quoted in Davison 1991: 159). Even if the Bushmen display creates an illusion of being a representation of a real event it is deceiving because the cultural objects in the display are not of the same period of the casts and nor from the same region. Paradoxically, the diorama achieves its naturalism by being an entirely unnatural construct of museum practice (Davison 1991: 161).

In my opinion the alluring quality of museum dioramas and the *Bushman Diorama* is the combination of realism, romanticism and escapism. Rugoff suggests that the creation of an alternative but believable reality offers a compelling substitute for the real world (Rugoff 2000: 13). Much like the panoramas of the nineteenth century and virtual reality of today, hyper-realistic museum dioramas are able to shift the viewers' perception temporarily to another space. According to Parr (1963) the dilemma of the diorama is the incongruity between its success as an educational tool and its capacity to arouse emotional and imaginative responses. In other words, the *Bushman Diorama* is a retainer of knowledge which is complicated by the power relations inherent in its production and in its viewing. It is caught between its problematic representation of human subjects and its capacity to transport viewers into a desirable (or undesirable) and imaginative experience. The transporting nature of the *Bushman Diorama* is a relationship of power between exhibit and viewer that is problematic. Viewers' responses to the *Diorama* are complicated and, although often very personal and emotionally charged, differing points of view are also often motivated by political agendas. For example, public response, and particular San and Khoisan responses, to the closing of the *Diorama* for public viewing elicited a diversity of opinion about the *Diorama* in the press. According to the official South African Museum publication, defenders of the diorama felt that the *Diorama* affirms the San as the first people of South Africa (Events@SAM April 2001). Other views elicited from San representatives expressed that the *Diorama* serves not only as a record of San ancestry but also as a record of even the wrong things that happened in the past (Cape Times 30 April 2001). Representatives from Khoisan groups felt that the *Diorama* does not depict indigenous people as human and that the Khoisan are shown as animals (Saturday Argus March 31/April 1 2001).

But perhaps the problem that exacerbates this diorama is the extent of its popularity, of its subjective allure and its success as the Museum's greatest attraction to both local and international audiences. The *Bushman Diorama* inevitably makes a strong and lasting impression on those who witness it. This worsens its problems of misrepresentation. Furthermore the experience of the viewer is formed by the power relations of ethnographic practice which basically inscribe a separation of the viewer from the represented other which in turn acts as a means to, not only understanding, but to favouring one's self against what one is not (Davison 1990: 150; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 48). This self-reflection is experienced as a public performance wherein the viewer, being the main player, is complete with personal and political agendas that promote self-interest. Under such conditions, through its capacity to be experienced, the *Diorama* can be easily and dangerously misconstrued and, perhaps, can never be free from such undesirable power relations.

In 1976, at Laetoli in Tanzania, Mary Leakey found a 23 metres stretch of preserved footprints left by two individuals thought to have been australopithecines.

The American Museum of Natural History in New York has an absorbing diorama that records the moment of their passing. It depicts life-size recreations of a male and a female walking side by side across the ancient African plain. They are hairy and chimp-like in dimensions, but have a bearing and gait that suggests humanness. The most striking feature of the display is that the male holds his left arm protectively around the female's shoulder. It is a tender and affecting gesture, suggestive of close bonding (Bryson 2003: 393). Of course the entire scene is suppositional, the scientists taking creative licence to portray their version of our ancestral past.





The diorama situated in the basement of the Voortrekker Monument depicts 'everyday life' of the pioneers during the Great Trek.

2.5.2 *Miscast* exhibition

In 1996 Pippa Skotnes, with myself as assistant, curated an exhibition called *Miscast: Negotiating Khoisan History and Material Culture* at the South African National Gallery. One of the intentions of this exhibition was to “confront visually the diorama” (Skotnes 2001: 313). Skotnes describes the exhibition as dealing with the dichotomies of storage and display and with the representation of Bushmen as human subjects of colonial examination and objectification.

The exhibition (which was jointly presented by the South African National Gallery and the South Africa Museum) contrasted and challenged the methodology of the South African Museum as an institution of science and their formal methods of display (in this case the *Bushman Diorama*). Skotnes achieved this by including, in her installation, instruments of early twentieth century physical anthropology displayed in glass cabinets. Shelves of cardboard boxes of “body parts” representing those that occupy the South African Museum and other museum storerooms were also put on display. Skotnes’ juxtaposition of ‘instruments of science’ with sculptural displays of bodies, testimonies and guns demonstrated a strong representation and memorialisation of the violent conflict between colonial forces and the Bushmen. The most striking exhibits in the

Miscast installation were the fibreglass moulds made directly from Drury's original plaster casts featured in the *Bushmen Diorama*. However, whereas in the *Diorama*, the body casts are dressed traditionally in animal skins; in *Miscast* the unarticulated fibreglass moulds were set formally, albeit nakedly, on under-lit pedestals while others were piled unceremoniously like dismembered bodies in unlit corners.

Because the exhibition was conceived within the genre of the art installation the curator and the audience respectively presented and interpreted the material on exhibition visually and spatially. The exhibition therefore was able to confront viewers using representations of the body to engage and challenge the viewer in ways that combined the physical aspects of the viewer's body set against the Bushman body through a set of visual and spatial relationships. In this way the exhibition was conceptualised and choreographed to be 'experienced' rather than just 'viewed'.

Skotnes and Payne (1995) have discussed the "unrecognised authority that resides with the curator" which embodies the "power relations that exist between the institutions and the exhibitions they host" (Skotnes and Payne 1995: 85) and the framing agency of the art gallery being able to transform objects into art works. They state that "the exhibition itself, as conceived of by its curator, is a site of creative construction and recontextualisation" (Skotnes and Payne 1995: 87).

In *Miscast*, Skotnes presented her ideas not in the literal way of natural history museums but rather as a composition of symbols and metaphors presented through visual and spatial language.



Such is the power of the human subject that even the modesty of these resin casts was preserved with paper napkins by the South African Museum when they were delivered across the Company Gardens to the South African National Gallery for the *Miscast* exhibition.

In this way it was possible that representations of the Bushman body were dealt with as both a political subject and as part of the conceptual language that gave meaning to the exhibition. By being in an art gallery *Miscast* was able to treat the artefacts, records and evidence from the South African Museum (and elsewhere) in a way that re-examined their complexities and ambiguities. The exhibition also examined processes of knowledge construction by presenting alternative ways of seeing that questioned and in some ways subverted the authority of the South African Museum. Skotnes writes that it was her intention to structure into the form of the exhibit a high degree of multivalence so it would be more about knowledge in the making than a representation of the already known (Skotnes 2001: 313).

Miscast was made up of and contained many disturbing elements, each expressed as powerful ideas and statements. Sidney Kasfir reflected that the technique of the artist was somewhat more menacing than conventional museum displays. In her review of *Miscast*, she considered Skotnes, in her capacity as an artist, to be using a powerful arsenal of visual strategies. Her interpretation was that the piled up body casts [were] not just a metaphorical statement about evolutionary theories of racial difference but a strong visual statement too. Displayed in that way ... they become highly charged political art, and part of a much larger corpus of work by white artists and writers in South Africa (Kasfir 1997: 3, 6).

Miscast demonstrated the problems which can arise when displaying sensitive histories using artistic metaphors and irony. Patricia Davison remarked that although *Miscast* used aesthetic and



The main exhibition space of *Miscast: Negotiating Khoisan History and Material Culture* showing the resin casts and storage shelves of cardboard boxes.

symbolic means to subvert the ethnographic stereotype of traditional bushmen, this tended to be lost on audiences unfamiliar with the genre of installation art and not socialized to appreciate irony or Western aesthetic discourse (Davison 2001: 6; also Lane 1996). For example, the shining translucent casts that were meant to reflect a positive spirit beyond the present while portraying the severity of violence and decimation, although meant to cause some discomfort, instead caused too much discomfort for many viewers as they found themselves gazing upon the naked bodies that repeated exactly the kind of voyeurism it was meant to prevent.

This links up with how the power relations that emerge and govern the presence of the body in exhibitions are exaggerated by using the human body as a visual object and as a symbol of power and powerlessness. Another aspect of power relations embodied in depictions of the human body addressed by Paul Lane in relation to *Miscast* is that within museum anthropology, and particularly with the use of the body on display, there is an inherent complicity to reduce people from human subject to museum object. This precedent, set by exhibitions of colonial representations in museums, is complicit in the disempowerment of indigenous people as can be seen in the many national and regional museums in southern Africa which perpetuate perceptions of the Khoisan as timeless hunter-gatherers with a lack of history. Lane noted the ability of the *Miscast* exhibition to challenge these continued methods of dominance in that it encourages us to think again about our motives for collecting and to consider whether the museum as institution is no more than a collective cultural mausoleum (Lane 1996: 7).

Reviews of the exhibition showed that the body casts elicited strong emotional responses that were not necessarily in concurrence with the curator's intentions. Amongst the exhibition reviewers Paul Lane wrote about a miscellaneous collection of moulded human torsos, disembodied legs and genitalia, looking for all the world like some macabre and slightly pornographic Greek statuary (Lane 1996: 6). Conversely, Carmel Schrire did not seem to object to the aestheticising of naked Bushmen bodies. She described the exhibits as being more inspirational, describing them as glowing shapes — golden bodies — pale and silvery — bearing a golden image of a headless person — a bold torso of a boy, chests of a man and woman back to back, a supine man, a woman at ease — all glow soft and bright — they are phoenixes, sprung bright and hopeful from the charnel storehouse, protectively encircling the pale heads that ring the stacked instruments of death (Schrire, Kozain & Abrahams 1996: 13—14).

Other reviewers are more circumspect about their reactions to the body casts, which I suspect shows, on the one hand a renouncement and disdain for the exhibits and, on the other hand, an opportunistic desire to use the exhibit to foreground other contemporary issues around power and identity. Rustum Kozain remarked that the exhibits tended to make him identify more with the exhibited. He wrote: For many minutes the boxes piled high — the colonial collection and codification of artefact and body — wrench at me. Then I circle the lit body casts, linger self-

consciously at the cast of a naked woman, and pass through into the other two chambers” (Schrire, Kozain & Abrahams 1996: 15). Yvette Abrahams spoke with anger about the casts and the exhibition: “It would have been impossible to miss the casts since they were on pedestals right in front of the big double doors leading into the exhibition, carefully highlighted to draw the eye. They had caught mine immediately, ... we cannot afford to upset ourselves over everything the whites do” (Schrire, Kozain & Abrahams 1996: 15).

Steven Robins claims that the public responses to *Miscast* by various Khoisan groups were in fact testimony to “claims of propriety over KhoiSan bodies” (Robins 1998a: 133). He explores the use of memory and body metaphors to foster national interest. Much of the ensuing public debate around *Miscast* centred on issues about the objectification and display of naked bodies. Discussions not only referred to the body casts of the exhibition, but also to the remains of Saartjie Baartman, and the presence of a group of ‘semi-clad’ Bushmen from Kagga Kamma who were engaged in the tourist trade. In Robins’ view representations of the Bushman body are appropriated to create agency by different parties, including Khoisan nationalists, claiming a Khoisan past and that *Miscast* was instrumental in “generat[ing] a multiplicity of competing readings and interpretations of KhoiSan historical memory and what it means to be KhoiSan” (Robins 1998a: 132–3).

In *Miscast* the body provided the exhibition’s central metaphor both conceptually and visually which evoked a personal and empathetic response from the viewer (much like with the *Bushman Diorama*). However, in *Miscast*, viewer response is intensified by having to also actually engage physically with the exhibition. For example, part of the exhibition directs people to walk on a floor which is printed with reproductions of colonial documents and attitudes towards the Bushmen. This had a contentious aim as walking on the floor was symbolic of ‘walking over others’, and forced the viewers to question their own complicity in this history. Thus the viewers by embodying the experience through their own actions are even more affected by the material on display. Witnessing the discomfort of other viewers in this exhibition as well as witnessing one’s own discomfort in front of others has the full effect of experience. Many viewers responded to the floor display with anguish mixed with revelations of truth and contrition. Others were angered and offended by the curator’s presumption of their feelings of complicity, and others felt the act disrespectful. Paul Lane expressed his discomfort: “At the realization of the content of the texts and images that were literally underfoot, I became increasingly uncomfortable. My movement around the room became restrained, yet there was no way of skirting around this material, no way of avoiding treading on it. Actual, physical involvement with the substance of the exhibition became inevitable. Perhaps it was because of this, that all of the shocking elements to the exhibition, I found this one to be the most disturbing” (Lane 1996: 7).

People comprehend exhibitions through their body senses as well as their intellects. Thus representations that engage the body are both emotionally and intellectually effectual. But audience reactions cannot be predicted and viewers approach aesthetic expression individually with differing agency and purpose. They do not necessarily perceive exhibitions as the curators might have intended. With all the emotional fallout, anger, passion and shame evoked by *Miscast* more people went to see it than any other exhibition at the South African National Gallery. *Miscast* created a confusion of codes and meanings by portraying science, archaeology, ethnography, anthropology in a form totally unusual to these subjects. Whereas many comments were congratulatory and saw it as “setting the record straight” in the vein of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission some of *Miscast*’s strategies to confront, expose and challenge were misconceived or misunderstood. What was clear from the public’s response and from the public forum that followed the opening of the exhibition is that there is no direct connection between techniques of representation and the intended meanings set out by the curator and its public reception and interpretation. “Exhibition responses and interpretations are never entirely predictable because exhibitions contain so many communicative possibilities and because visitors bring their own varied backgrounds and interests to them” (Kratz 2002: 94). Audiences experience exhibitions as a combination of recognising similarities and accentuating differences, reflecting their viewing experiences relative to their own sense of identity and particular politics of representation. “The decisive factor is the nature of their emotional and political attachment and distance to the subjects and objects on display” (Robins 1998b: 100).

As stated previously the Bushman body on display in the museum diorama was a romanticised and enjoyable vision of the Bushmen past. While many people, including some San groups appreciate this depiction as a memory of their own cultural heritage, as one San representative, Jesi Segole, explained: “That exhibition is about our old people and it is important that people know how our old people lived” (Cape Times, 30 March 2001). However the romanticisation obscures the depoliticisation of the people it represents as well as the motives with which it was made. On the other hand, *Miscast*, by exposing a version of the ‘bushman’ body that was directly linked to the casting process, as well as other related artefacts of human physiology, exploded the myth of the idealised hunter-gatherer. On a positive note, Hunter Sixpence, San representative from Northern Cape, stated: “Although we are shocked and it is painful, we think it is good that people see it. It strengthens our young people to stand up. This should never happen again...” (Hunter Sixpence, from a speech given at *Miscast*, 13 April 1996).

“Visitors experience exhibitions as a temporal flow as they move through them” (Kratz 2002: 93). In *Miscast* the layout and design was composed to manipulate the aesthetic experience of the viewer. Relational spatial arrangements, juxtapositions and overlaying of elements were combined in a choreography of experience bringing together the many elements on display with the perceptual spatiality of the viewer’s body. The impassioned responses that were recorded during

Miscast confirm that the exhibition spaces did indeed resonate deeply and emotionally with its viewers.

The purpose of this project has been to examine the relations that emerge and govern the presence of the body in exhibitions. I have shown that the human body is an emotionally charged visual object and a symbol of power and in both cases of the *Bushman Diorama* and *Miscast*, the human body on display functions in two ways. Firstly, the life-size replication of the human body evokes an intuitive bodily (including emotional) response in the viewer. And secondly, the human body becomes a powerful symbol and a physical embodiment of the political implications that underlie the objectification of the 'other'.

SECTION THREE

In this final section I focus on the District Six Museum as my main site of investigation. Here I show how some of the principles and theoretical viewpoints that I have introduced in this paper were approached and resolved through the design process in this exhibition. I present a brief history of my involvement with the Museum. I go on to present my understanding of the curatorial objectives of the exhibition *Digging Deeper* and an evaluation of the actual exhibition, exhibits and the overall museum space. My evaluation focuses on the experiential interaction between the sentient viewer and the exhibition.

3.1 The District Six Museum, Cape Town, South Africa. 1994—

On 11 February 1966 District Six, an inner-city area in Cape Town, was declared a ‘white area’ under the South African Government’s apartheid legislation, the Group Areas Act. Over the next 15 years 60 000 residents were systematically and forcibly removed, their entire neighbourhood, saving some mosques and churches, was bulldozed, the rubble dumped into the sea. Residents of District Six were resettled over the vast desolate area on the outskirts of the city known as the Cape Flats. Communities, extended families and friends were separated in the move often never to see each other again. The cohesion of a community was severed and almost utterly destroyed. This violent act against a community and against the city was often decried as ‘the rape of the Cape’. Meanwhile the emptied landscape of District Six remains mostly undeveloped. The site of destruction continues to confront Capetonians daily.

Two decades later in 1989 the District Six Museum Foundation was established. Community and civic organisations and cultural projects brought together leading community activists and academics formerly from the District. Their main objective at first was to form a museum “to preserve the memory of District Six ... [and] be able to contest the past and to use history as a means of mobilisation around the traumatic landscape of District Six” (Rassool 2001: vii–viii) towards a process of restitution and redevelopment of District Six for those who had been dispossessed by forced removals.

The Museum Foundation held several exhibitions over the next few years. The first was held on the Zonnebloem Estate, the second was held in Cavendish Square in Claremont, a third exhibition was held in a small hall in Newlands, and a fourth exhibition of photographs was held in the Buitenkant Street Methodist Church in 1992. In 1993 the Museum gained the full-time use of the Methodist Church building for a museum and opened its doors to the public in December 1994 with an exhibition called *Streets: Retracing District Six*. *Streets* was scheduled to run for two weeks but the Museum has never closed since and it was through the framework of the *Streets* exhibition that the Museum has developed. Additional exhibitions alongside *Streets* include *(Dis)playing the Game*, *The Last days of District Six: photographs by Jan Greshoff*, *District Six*

Revisited, Buckingham Palace, and Tramway Road. From 1998 to 2000 the museum building underwent renovation and redevelopment. The Museum moved temporarily to the Moravian Church in District Six with an exhibition called *Three Stories*. During this time the new exhibition *Digging Deeper* for which I was part of the curatorial team was conceptualised, planned and installed into the building newly renovated for the District Six Museum.

The District Six Museum is situated in a characteristic old Methodist church which had been the home to a congregation of many residents of the District. The building is situated on Buitenkant Street on the edge of the city centre. Both pedestrians and motor vehicles throng in the busy street outside. In the renovated museum visitors enter straight from the street through a glass lobby before entering the internal door. The inviting hues of the interior draw visitors immediately into the main museum space where they are welcomed by the museum staff and are introduced to the colourful, lively and abundant atmosphere of the exhibition. The space is double volume with a high ceiling of crafted timber. It has upstairs galleries running along the two sides and the front which overlook the central space, the pulpit and choir gallery. The space has a human scale. The columns and balustrade are cast iron Victorian style that would have been found along the narrow streets of District Six over which people would have looked out over the streets outside. The architecture of the Church resonates with the feeling of the old District Six.



The District Six Museum, Buitenkant street, Cape Town.

3.1.1 Working in the District Six Museum

My involvement with the Museum goes back to 1994 when I was first employed there to help coordinate the making of the *Streets* exhibition. I was a self-employed architect when I met Vincent Kolbe, an ex-resident and trustee of the District Six Museum, who insisted on taking me across the road to the Museum to see the street signs they had put up. I met Sandra Prosalendis, the director of the Museum, who decided immediately that I should help them get the exhibition together. Indeed my architectural skills came to good use. I drew up a spatial plan for the exhibition space and the street alcoves, built three archaeology display boxes, and devised a way of enlarging and printing the portrait gallery onto transparent film. I also accessioned and catalogued the beginnings of the photographic collection and generally helped implement the exhibition. Although I had done some prior exhibition work it was the first time I had been involved in an inclusively organised curatorial project. I was very excited about it. I thought that it contained everything I enjoyed about architecture but with more content. I enjoyed designing spaces and objects at a human scale where form could be resolved from the content and meaning of the exhibits. After my initial experience with the District Six Museum, I spent a year working with Pippa Skotnes on her *Miscast* project. After *Miscast* I have worked on many exhibitions and publications. My background as an architect benefitted me well for the shift to exhibition design and curatorial work. I have subsequently completed a Post-Graduate Diploma in Museum Studies in 1998 and, based on these experiences and my role as part of the District Six Museum curatorial team, I have undertaken this study for my Master's dissertation.

In August 1999 I was employed by the District Six Museum as project coordinator and as one of three curators to plan and produce the Museum's new exhibition *Digging Deeper* in the renovated building on Buitenkant Street. Although the initial opening date for the exhibition was in December 1999 it was at first postponed to April 2000. Eventually the Museum opened at the end of May, and finally the exhibition was officially opened on 24 September 2000. As one would expect, the scope and complexity of the exhibition also increased and intensified during this prolonged period.

3.1.2 Curating *Digging Deeper* at the District Six Museum

The curation of the District Six Museum and the *Digging Deeper* exhibition was, and continues to be, a complex and dynamic process involving curatorial and community input. In this process, although individuals or groups may be designated, for example, as the community, curators, designers, researchers etc., these functional roles in fact involved all the players in a constantly shifting and overlapping manner. Thus the Museum's curatorial strategies are the combined efforts of multiple players. My own role has been participatory and collaborative though my major contribution has come via my architectural and design skills and my ideas about curatorship and the body, as outlined in this project.

The Museum trustees are foremost responsible for the principle and ideological formulations and

general framework. One of the trustees, Peggy Delpont was the principal curator of both the *Streets* and *Digging Deeper* exhibitions. One of the most important aspects of the Museum is that the Museum and trustees are committed to an ongoing engagement with the community of District Six ex-residents. This has been possible through the involvement with various social groupings, workshops and reunions, as well as a partnership with the District Six Beneficiary Trust, the organisational body that acts on behalf of the community for land restitution and the redevelopment of District Six. It is therefore appropriate to assume the museum's curatorial objectives are generally informed by and in accordance with views held by the broader District Six community. Design and planning of the exhibition space was determined to a large extent by the desire to retain this equitable relation of power between curators and the audience.

For the *Digging Deeper* exhibition two co-curators, Tina Smith (who had also curated past exhibitions at the museum) and myself, were appointed for the duration of the project. The curatorial team consisting of Delpont, Smith and myself, had discussions and directives within a broader curatorial and research team of museum staff members and trustees in their various capacities. This included trustees Ciraj Rassool, Crain Soudien, Lalou Meltzer, museum director Sandra Prosalendis and staff members Valmont Layne, Colin Miller and Haajirah Esau.

As I have described the District Six Museum curatorial directives were developed from a complex and dynamic ongoing process involving the inclusive participation of three primary interest groups. Firstly, the museum community, ex-residents and others with whom the museum engages in many ways; secondly, the Museum trustees and staff who drive and generate the collections, education and other programmes; and thirdly, the curatorial team who interpret and mediate the museum objectives and exhibition. As a designer and part of the curatorial team I too was subject to, and operated in, this dynamic environment. Thus, my ideas about curatorship are shaped by many influences, as well as the practicalities of making integrated exhibits. The curatorial process was similarly influenced by my own experience of curatorship, my sense of space and the movement of the viewer through it. Having participated integrally as an insider, I am now looking back at the exhibition as an outsider to examine these processes and their exhibitionary outcomes.

In my evaluation of the *Digging Deeper* project I look at the curatorial strategies and objectives of the Museum in the light of an analysis of the final exhibition. To all intents and purposes this project was an intensely integrated effort by many players which I believe (with others) is key to its success. Of the three curators I was responsible for the budget, coordination and overall production. It was within these parameters that I was intimately engaged with all the processes and was in the unique position to experience as well as influence the actual transformation of ideas and curatorial intentions into the physical shape of the exhibits and exhibition space. I used my capacity as designer and my individual personal understanding of the exhibition to translate into physical form the ideas and discussion that were being formulated at the curatorial level. This

translation, from ideas into physical form and events, reveals my understanding of the design process and it is on this premise that I base my evaluation.

My basic contention is that the District Six Museum is extraordinary because it is experiential on a number of levels. Firstly, the Museum is formulated on a collaborative, inclusive and participatory process and secondly it engages the body in a way that is inviting and nurturing rather than confrontational. As my purpose in this project is to examine experiential exhibits that emphasise the body and spatiality through the use of space, light, sound, imagery and touch, I focus on aspects of the *Digging Deeper* exhibition which incorporate the movement and involvement of museum visitors within the exhibition. To understand the museum's processes I will outline the Museum's curatorial intentions and exhibitionary interventions. It is important to understand that in museum and exhibition practice, the curatorial intent sets the interpretive frameworks for the design. Thus the focus of my analysis is to evaluate the exhibition design in terms of how it succeeds in representing the Museum's curatorial objectives of engaging its audience and promoting inclusivity and exchange. But more specifically, in terms of the premise of this project, I look at the way in which the display spaces are choreographed to the viewer by engaging directly and spatially with the viewer's body.

3.2 Curatorial strategies and exhibition methodologies

From its inception the District Six Museum has been working with a number of principles and frameworks. These principles were the following: to bring to the surface, that is, to the perceptual senses of viewers, visible, aural and documentary traces, which reflected the content (collections), scope (diversity of work), and generative nature (development, production, outputs, actions, happenings) of the museum. In other words, the curatorial intentions such as memory work, interpretative processes, mobilisation of knowledge should give rise to the aesthetic forms developed in the exhibition. Moreover, the exhibition aesthetic had to remain fresh, rooted, questioning, integrated, reflecting the present and not reproduce or sentimentalise existing elements that were already established by previous exhibitions in the museum (extracted and summarised from curatorial notes and discussions).

Exhibitionary principles emerged that reflected the aesthetic principles and the broader curatorial concerns of the Museum. Firstly, it was deemed important that the exhibition should provide a means to facilitate progress, interactivity and growth. Participatory processes should be established as aesthetic frameworks within the exhibition framework. The aesthetic framework should be rooted in oral testimony and expression and should provide a generative space in which people can work with memory. The exhibition framework should be receptive to changes, layering and accretion which would generate a space in which interpretation occurs rather than a space that dictates a fixed interpretation. In addition, the exhibition needed to achieve this open, generative approach without appearing unfinished or unprofessional (which some thought had been a shortfall in previous exhibitions).

Further conceptual and design principles included a cross-disciplinary theoretical approach, as well as ideas such as textuality, materiality, multi-media, interactivity, accessibility, viewer participation, an exhibition that is shifting, growing, layering, open, questioning, opposing rigid representations, receptive, gathering, inviting contributions, responsive. Indeed it is because communication is so essential to exhibitions and because the codes that were developed in the museum's previous exhibitions were rooted in and reflected the social relations of the District Six community that we were able as a museum to communicate the quality of District Six that so resonated with its viewers.

Incorporated into the concept of 'digging deeper' were sub-themes that focused on notions of interiority, home and belonging, place and displacement. The conceptual framework of *Digging Deeper* was meant to generate an interrogating methodology that directed research projects of the museum as a whole as well as a representational framework in the exhibition. The concept of 'digging deeper' unlocked many areas of examination. Below is a summary of our curatorial intentions selected from my collection of curatorial notes and discussions and shows some of the interpretations that the exhibition sought to address and incorporate:

1. Memory and healing – 'digging deeper' into the collection and community, more understanding of the material, more space for the stories to emerge, to bring to the foreground some of the persistent themes, narratives and arguments, using the collections, contributions and resources of the museum to create greater depth and breadth to the exhibition.
2. Educational – 'digging deeper' under the surface of appearances, stereotypes, myths, barnacles, prejudices, to look beyond familiar images, to show complexities and diversity of human experience and the density and extent of collective practices in District Six such as religious, political, educational, cultural, etc.
3. Urbanity – here 'digging deeper' means getting beyond District Six, representing other areas of forced removals, seeing the city as integrated spaces in a larger framework. Showing District Six as a place without boundaries, being connected and inter-connected with the broader inner city, the mountain and the sea.
4. Interiority – 'digging deeper' into people's interior spaces, their homes and places, the particularity of practices, place and people bringing greater depth to portraits, biographies and life histories.
5. Self-reflexivity – 'digging deeper' into the ideology and methodologies of the Museum's work and its nature as a 'living museum', giving emphasis to 'happenings' and what is being said rather than what is on display; representing curatorial authorship in the exhibition.
6. Activism and restitution – 'digging deeper' back in time, recovery of untold histories; constructing District Six in the broader historical context of politics and apartheid legislations, as a microcosm of political, economic, industrial and labour history, particularly with a view towards processes of land restitution.

7. Collecting and archiving – ‘digging deeper’ into consolidating and preserving the permanent physical elements and collections of the Museum, to further a dynamic aesthetic framework and the productive participation of visitors, especially ex-residents and others affected by displacement.

I saw my role as the architect-designer in this process as dealing with my concern with space and spatial aspects of the exhibits and intentions to engage physically with the viewer’s body. Many exhibits were designed to relate the viewer to a human scale and were made by hand so that the texture of materials related to the human touch. Some exhibits were designed to be physically moved by the viewer, like the pivoting boards, while other exhibits were designed to be inscribed on like the *Floor Map* and the *Memory Cloth*. Exhibits were created so that the viewers move into them, through and past them, creating an awareness of the viewer’s body in relationship to the exhibits. The exhibition sought to engage the viewers’ attention not only through their visual sense but through a multi-sensory experience. My aim was, through the medium of the physical environment, to choreograph the exhibition so that the exhibits related directly and spatially to the viewer’s body.

Conceptually speaking there is no real distinction between the Museum and the exhibition. The exhibition is the Museum in action. It is the framework through which the public interfaces with the Museum. The objectives and strategies of the Museum are manifested and generated through the workings of the exhibition framework which is specifically constructed to perform these functions. For example, the Museum’s emphasis on the interpretive and expressive processes of aesthetic production, whether visual, spatial or aural, was developed through a principle of developing exhibitions through collaborations with artists, writers and performers.



The District Six Museum hosts a popular Square Dance every year. This one took place in the exhibition space. The floor map was removed for the occasion.

2.5 Bodies on display

The incongruities of opposing meanings found in the display of habitat dioramas become even more disturbing when the human body is put on display. In the next section I look at two examples of the human body on display. They are the (commonly known as) *Bushman Diorama*, which was on display in the South African Museum (1959—2001); and *Miscast: Negotiating Khoisan History and Material Culture* (1996) which was a temporary exhibition at the South African National Gallery situated close by in the same precinct and which was conceptualised as a challenge to the dehumanising effect of the *Bushman Diorama*. In both, the body is a meaningful object of representation that affects the viewer in a number of ways that are neither simple nor wholly predictable. I investigate how the symbolic roles that bodies on display reflect the underlying curatorial processes and ideologies prevalent at the time. For example, the problem with the *Bushman Diorama* is that although its fame is widely acclaimed for its fine technique and visual beauty (Rose 1961) its presence is more complicated than first appearances would suggest and it raises many important issues about museum practices, such as the unequal relations of power at play, generally in museum ethnology and specifically in the display and representation of others cultures (Davison 1990, 1991, 2001; Skotnes 1995, 1996ab, 2001; Skotnes & Payne 1995). These issues are highlighted by the problems of firstly objectifying the human body as a museum artefact and then by subjecting them to further objectification by the public gaze. Exhibits of human figures are intensely curious and are also obviously subject to voyeurism. I also discuss how the body is a powerful carrier of emotional knowledge and that the presence of the human figures trigger empathetic, emotional and psychological responses from viewers who identify with the exhibits through their own bodies, memories and experiences.

In the first instance the museum casting project was a process in which human subjects became numbered objects to be displayed in their near nakedness as physical specimen[s], to be appropriated by the public gaze (Davison 1991: 156). Later when the casts were remade in a habitat type diorama, the dramatic effect of the diorama presented an even more powerful representation of bodies as visual objects. The casts — recast in their new landscape — came alive like human actors. The *Bushman Diorama* was caught between the problematic representation of its human subjects and its capacity to transport viewers into a compelling (whether desirable or undesirable) imaginative experience.

Miscast: Negotiating Khoisan History and Material Culture went one step further in creating an experience for its viewers. This exhibition confronted the viewer in a highly aestheticised manner. Using body relations as its central metaphor it engaged and challenged the audience physically, visually and spatially, intellectually and emotionally. The layout and design were carefully choreographed to manipulate relational spatial arrangements, juxtapositions and overlaying of elements which were combined to create a series of experiences for the viewer and which brought into focus the viewer's own processes of viewing and objectifying.

2.5.1 The *Bushman Diorama*

The *Bushman Diorama* depicts the way of life of a group of people indigenous to southern Africa known as the San or Bushmen. The diorama is presently closed to the public, however it can be viewed on the Internet on a site on the current debates around the diorama (www.museums.org.za/sam/resource/arch/bushman.htm). The *Bushman Diorama* is primarily made up of plaster casts which were modeled as part of an anthropological project documenting the physical characteristics of the Bushmen and Hottentots then believed to be a separate human race close to extinction. I draw mainly on Patricia Davison's work — as she has been directly involved with the Museum and the exhibits — for her account of the casting process and the subsequent exhibits of the casts at the South African Museum (1990, 1991, 2001).

According to Davison, the initiative to preserve the physiognomic example of a supposedly disappearing race came out of an intellectual discourse that legitimated the study of racial types as a branch of science, the casting process was therefore performed meticulously, carried out in the interests of scientific rigour (Davison 2001: 13). The original casting project was initiated by Dr Louis P ringuey, Director of the South African Museum, and actualised by James Drury, the Museum modeler, during the years 1907—1924. Drury and his team set out for unknown parts in search for tribes of Bushmen of undiluted blood and to acquire a study of the Bushman ethnologically, making note of their way of life, and obtaining moulds of their living bodies for future casting (Rose 1961: 46).

The Bushmen casts were first exhibited in 1911, inside a large glass display cabinet. The label focused on their pure blood and on their physical attributes such as skin colour, physical stature and steatopygia. The casts were used to illustrate the typical physical characteristics of Bushmen as a primitive anthropological type occupying a low position on the evolutionary scale (www.museums.org.za/sam/resource/arch/bushman.htm). In the 1930s, the Bushmen display was moved to the centreplace in the new ethnography gallery. Still in their glass case, the Bushmen casts were displayed like rarified specimens. Here the figures were grouped according to geographical region and language, in an attempt to demonstrate theoretical links between physical type, language and culture (www.museums.org.za/sam/resource/arch/bushman.htm). The physical body representing a human subject became the focus of public interest. The casts, and by inference the people they represent, stood to be examined in a manner that tended towards scientific deference and voyeurism; human subject and museum object. By now the casts had become important museum artefacts and had become the most popular and acclaimed attraction in the museum, and continued to be displayed even though their scientific underpinnings had been discredited.

However, the Bushmen exhibits were increasingly problematic as Davison explains: The paradox and the problems of the casts is that, although they are objects (artefacts of museum practice),

dedicated to the rich and diverse life of what was District Six. But it is also a metaphorical space in that it represents District Six as a complex and integrated inner-city urban experience. Viewers become active participants in the recovery of the past and in reclaiming and proclaiming an identity in relation to place. “Each day it bears witness to poignant stories hitherto untold that are inspired by this environment and celebration ... where it is people’s response to District Six that provides the drama and the fabric of the museum” (Prosalendis *et al.* 2001: 75–6). Surrounded by the abundant fabric of the exhibition, much of which is reminiscent of the old District, the viewer/participant responds emotionally and physically with the space and exhibits by inscribing on the map where they lived and by writing on the cloth their thoughts and feelings. The viewer is viewed as he or she literally becomes an active part of the exhibition.

This is the experience of museum as theatre – the viewer as performer. The exhibition as a stage in a fabricated environment is much like the nineteenth-century panoramas in which the viewer is



“encouraged to make the imaginative leap into their constructs” (Kamps & Rugoff 2000: 6). But in the case of *Digging Deeper*, like Ilya Kabakov’s “Total” installation, the viewer is a active participant in a subjective experience which Michael Ames describes as ‘the authenticity of the viewer experience’ (Section 1.2.4). The District Six Museum, however, goes further than these examples. By active participation, viewers merge, becoming part of the exhibit, momentarily and simultaneously expressing themselves as viewer and as viewed. By making this personal and visual contribution to the exhibition the viewer becomes indelibly part of the exhibition fabric and thus able to engage in equal and reciprocal relation with the exhibition. In Section 3.3.1, I show how the exhibits, such as the ‘floor map’, the ‘street signs’, the ‘memory cloth’ and the ‘portrait gallery’, engage the viewer in a performative role.

In the second analysis, the exhibition is a journey, a process of discovery whereby the viewer moves through the exhibition spaces, creating his or her own chronology of experience. Here the curatorial objectives were to generate new public histories for District Six and Cape Town that were self-reflexive acknowledging sources of interpretation and reference. The exhibition comprises multiple viewpoints, constructing a multiplicity of ideologies that go towards a deeper understanding of its collections and resources, and which creates space for persistent themes, narratives and arguments to emerge. An example of this is that no previous exhibition in the Museum has displayed an image of a bulldozer. It was felt before that the horror of bulldozers was too real in people's minds and that it was more appropriate to express and rekindle happy memories of the past, even at the risk of romanticising the past, but that would promote emotional healing.

In *Digging Deeper*, however, it was a curatorial strategy to go beyond the romantic, to confront people with the painful realities. Part of this exercise, by portraying many differing points of view, examines and questions existing myths and stereotypes in the context of individual and collective memory. This is a complex part of the exhibition taking up most of the lower level of the exhibition. This section shows sentient viewers, as they move through the exhibition as a spatial



environment, witnessing the drama that is generated by the interplay of their own bodies moving through space and time. (Section 2.1.1) Viewers are able to perceive and construct meanings from their own memories and through their bodily response to form. By making visual and textual connections within the context of the exhibition, viewers create individual interpretations of the past. In Section 3.3.2, I review how the 'introduction panels', 'life histories' and 'political timeline' bring these concepts to fruition.

In the third analysis I present the viewer as self-reflexive as a dancer or an artist who experiences subjectively with themselves as the centre – or as Kabakov proposes – a whole world that revolves separately around each viewer (Section 2.1.4). Similarly, constantly subjected to the physicality of the exhibition the viewer moves, choreographed by the form of the exhibition, like a dancer engaging with space and form. The viewer plays the central role in his/her own

experience, performing his/her own narrative, playing out a plot and becoming the animator of the exhibition landscape.

These aspects of the exhibition experience focus on notions of particularity, subjectivity and interiority. Aspects of the exhibition's aesthetic framework combined with the materiality of the exhibits and artefacts create the possibilities of generating open interpretation with the interrelationship of the exhibits with the viewer's body. In Section 3.3.3, I show how the sentient viewer responds emotionally, intellectually and spatially to the environment, interpreting the material displayed and using the medium of their own bodies to manifest expressions. This section includes the *Memorial Hall* floor, *Nomvuyo's Room*, the upstairs galleries, the Museum shop, sound installations, 'collective banners', 'outside banners', and *Rod's Room*. These exhibits emphasise the integration of form, orality, textuality and visuality.

Overall, throughout the exhibition, a framework is developed to receive and insert into the exhibition the contribution of personal artefacts by ex-residents thereby representing a multiplicity of viewpoints and constructing a multiplicity of ideologies. The exhibition works with the interrelationship of both presenting and receiving, and acts as a generative framework for open



interpretation and visitor participation. The multi-faceted nature of memory is mediated through visual and aural aesthetics that is developed through a principle of collaborating with artists, writers and performers. Aspects of urbanity, to express a reflection of how District Six connected to the rest of the city, translated into a spatial arrangement forming routes, thresholds and intersections that are transgressive without being rigid or prescriptive. The exhibition space and display is dense and busy and stands as a microcosm of the integratedness and interconnectivity of urban living.

Furthermore, the exhibition framework allows different sequences of movement or chronologies to co-exist, merge and separate as the viewers move through the exhibition following their individual interests or inspiration. Multiple readings of the exhibition are encouraged by freeing the viewer to engage with the exhibition guided by their own interests and desire. From the perspective of the overall design it was important to envisage possible and probable routes

through the exhibition, in order to anticipate certain sequences of experience. What results, is that the whole spatial experience is absorbed from any place and can be reflected on with particularity of individual items. Many visual references and repetitions direct the viewer's attention across the space to other exhibits in a way that continuously shifts the viewer's perspective and encourages complex readings. In this way the viewer should not feel lost, the relative density and multi-sensory layering of experiences is balanced with an overall sense and ease of comprehensibility of the entire space.

Through these three spatial analyses I show how that *Digging Deeper* is a choreographed, experiential exhibition that effectively expresses its curatorial intentions such as memory-work, healing, inclusivity, interactivity, multi-sensory perception, complexity, exchange and dialogue. This is because these intentions can be shown to be associated with and evoked by the sentient body. By coding the curatorial objectives in the choreography of the exhibition, the viewer as performer becomes easily yet powerfully engaged in a multifaceted way that is both culturally meaningful and unique for each individual.

Incorporating the human body, however, as part of exhibition display is, as discussed in previous sections (Sections 1.3 and 2.5), fraught with problems of negative relations accompanying the objectification of people. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has described exhibitions as theatre experiences where objects become actors and where experiential viewing carries illusions of authenticity (Section 1.3.1). Human subjects on display are subject to the objectification of the ethnographic and tourist gaze even when they are performing themselves such as in the District Six Museum. The objectification of the 'other' is obviously more pronounced when viewers are from 'outside' of the museum 'community' such as the multitudes of tourists that visit the District Six Museum. This creates a tension in the Museum space that needs to be acknowledged. From my discussion of the *Bushmen Diorama* and *Miscast* (Section 2.5) I have identified that the human body on display is a powerful carrier of emotional knowledge to which viewers respond empathetically



and idealistically. This, in addition to viewer voyeurism, can create negative relations between the body-viewed and the body-viewer. Is the District Six Museum free from these relations? In this case the human body on display is not a simple one of the Museum representing others. It is also not like bodies being treated as visual objects in an alluring experience as in the *Bushmen Diorama*, or a situation that inscribes a separation of the viewer from the viewed, or, as in *Miscast*, where the human body is used as a symbol of power in political discourse.

Visitors to the District Six Museum, ex-residents and to some extent tourists as well, are welcomed and encouraged to become part of the exhibition experience. Often outsider visitors identify the story of District Six with their own histories and in this way by using their own personal experiences become viewers and performers of the District Six experience. The Museum staff include outsiders by inviting them to express themselves by writing on the Memory Cloth. This creates an environment that is open and inclusive. Those being viewed are viewers themselves and vice versa. In my opinion, the common participation of all viewers produces an equally reciprocated relationship between the individual viewer/performers.



Staff member Revina Gwayi embroiders the *Memory Cloth* in the exhibition space.





3.3.1 Memory work - museum as theatre, viewer as performer

The layout of the exhibition is shaped by the need for the museum space to reflect the relationship of District Six (here signified by the Museum) to the rest of the city. Aspects of urbanity such as inter-connectedness of spaces within the larger city, urban density and the transgression of urban and spatial boundaries are translated into a layered spatial arrangement in the exhibition forming multiple routes, thresholds and intersections that have created a spatial complexity, minimising rigidity or oversimplification. Even during its daily functioning as a museum the District Six Museum has had to be accessible to a wide audience, from ex-residents and others who spend long periods in the Museum to international visitors who spend only limited time in the Museum as part of a bigger tour of Cape Town, and thousands of school children and research students. The age of visitors ranges from the very young to the very old. The exhibition needed to accommodate a diversity of experiences in its space. The exhibition space is a multi-functional space that has been used for many kinds of events such as concerts, political meetings and even weddings.

The exhibition is made up of routes and transitional spaces connecting one location with another, one level to another, leading from one focus to another. The general movement of the viewer through the exhibition can take several courses. The physical relationship of the viewer in terms of body perception frames the viewer's experience. While the viewer responds to the spatial arrangement of the overall atmosphere and environment of the space, s/he also responds in turn to the sequence of experiences of each object encountered. Even though these sequences of experiences are arranged to create certain series of effects, an individual's route can unfold in many ways. This generates a rich and diversified experience in the Museum.



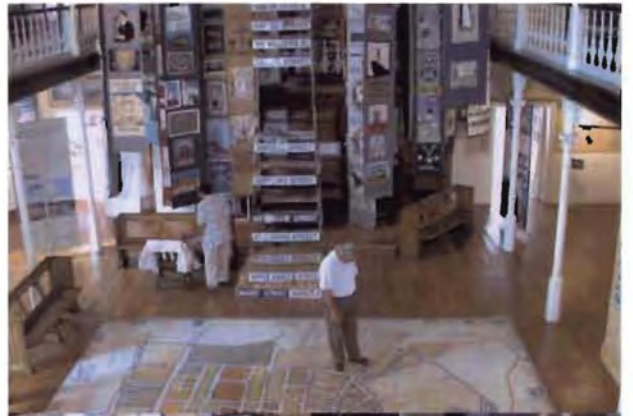
There are three elements continued from the first *Streets* exhibition which combine as the central theme and activity in the museum space. They were indeed, the very first three exhibits from the *Streets* exhibition and still form the core of the Museum today. These are: the street signs, the floor map and the memory cloth. Together they embody the aesthetic heart of the Museum, – one that is a receptive surface for the participation of visitors.



The centrepiece of the Museum is the *Floor Map*, a large map painting showing the streets of District Six before they were bulldozed and replaced by a new but empty grid. For ex-residents returning to the Museum, the map is the first site of engagement. The *Floor Map* acts as a stage in the centre of the double volume space. Here on the floor ex-residents of District Six are invited to inscribe the places in which they were born and lived. It is commonplace in the Museum to see people on their hands and knees pointing and gesturing around the map. The map becomes a stage backdrop for the re-enactment of people's lives, of physically retracing streets and routes, reliving the days of District Six. These 'performances' are powerful and transforming because they allow the viewer to lay claim to the past through the enactment of memory. Others around are drawn in to witness these significant and emotional moments which affect the entire space as the museum is transformed into a theatre performance. In terms of curatorial intention, the viewers actually reinsert their bodies into the streets of District Six.

The *Floor Map* was conceptualised and painted by Museum trustee and curator Peggy Delpont and includes elements on the border by artists Lionel Davis, Peter Clarke, Donald Parenzee and Rod Sauls.







The *Street Signs* are the most tangible actual objects of District Six and are the greatest signifiers of the old District. They are the original street signs from District Six that were collected and stored by the foreman of the government department responsible for the demolition. The signs were the first artefacts in the Museum collection and gave the opening exhibition its concept and title. As the most tangible evidence of the past they play an important role in the unfolding of memory. In the *Streets* exhibition the street signs were hung in three vertical columns at the edge of the Floor Map “signposting nothing now but memories” (Prosalendis *et al.* 2001: 74). In *Digging Deeper* the street signs are kept closely associated with the map, rising up out of the rubble, and out of the map, they symbolise transcendence from the past. Situated at the far end of the map, the column of street signs, takes the viewer’s attention, which has been focused on the ground, into the space above, connecting the viewer up and towards the portraits hanging in the gallery, and conceptually from the place of District Six to the people that lived there.

The *Street Signs* were assembled by artists David Brown and John Skotnes.





The *Portrait Gallery* consists of large portraits printed on translucent fabric that hang between the columns of the upper galleries overlooking the exhibition below. The portraits are of ex-residents; political leaders, writers and community figures as well others not so well known. The lightness and translucency of the over-sized portraits show them not only as leading figures in the community but in a way that is connecting and non-obscuring. When looking across the space the viewer reads the translucent portrait images over other images that are signifying place, thus “entering life histories into general depictions” (Smith *et al* 2001: 137). This method of layering

Blown up photographs for the *Portrait Gallery* were originally printed onto film transparencies for the *Streets* exhibition by a process I adapted from the architectural industry.



images over each other pervades the exhibition. As the viewer moves around the room the juxtaposition of the 'floating' *Portrait Gallery* in relation to other images shifts creating a sense of fluidity and ghost-like movement. This destabilising notion, sensed by the viewer, also expresses the importance of individual lives and their histories as being more complex than simply fixed or uncontested (Smith *et al* 2001: 141). The portrait gallery serves to witness, and silently applaud, daily experiences in the museum space.

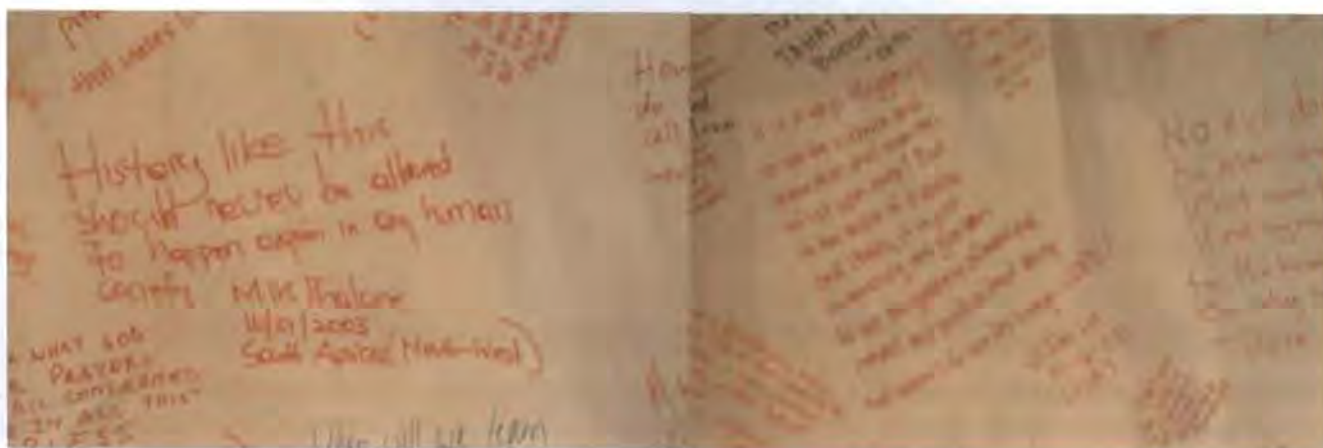






The *Memory Cloth* is the culmination of many thousands of messages inscribed on it by visitors to the Museum. The inscribed cloth has also been embroidered by many hands.

Looking back towards the entrance from the *Street Signs* there is a third element spanning the double volume space that connects the people celebrated in the gallery space, back to the map. This is the *Memory Cloth* – hundreds of metres of unbleached calico on which people have written their names, addresses, messages and memories with large felt-tipped pens. “The first aesthetic principle emerging from the participation of visitors was that of inscription ... So the inscribed name-cloths began to grow, and the principle of inscription and the emergence of voices as a generative force giving direction to the aesthetic form and function of the Museum became embedded in the life of the Museum” (Delport 2001: 36). The words on the Memory Cloth have been embroidered by the Museum to embody and preserve the original inscriptions. For the viewer, witnessing these written words, especially if formed by their own hand, fosters a strong kindred spirit and sense of belonging.





I originally designed the *Introduction Panels* for the Museum when it was housed in the Moravian Church where they were stationary boards, but with a view to the *Digging Deeper* exhibition I conceptualised them from the start as pivoting panels.

3.3.2 New histories - viewer journeys through space

The *Introduction Panels* are situated as one enters the exhibition space on the right between the front door and the Museum Shop. The Panels provide a overview to issues around the forced removals of District Six and other areas in and around Cape Town (42 sites are identified). The Panels consist of four double-sided pivoting panels standing side-by-side in front of an exposed original stonewall. Although basically didactic, they are also an interactive device that physically engages the viewer. The Panels are the first stop for tourists when they arrive at the Museum with tour guides. The guides particularly enjoy using the panels as props to animate their presentation of District Six as they dramatically turn the boards to reveal the before and after effects of the demolition. This is an opportunity for the empowerment of even the tour guides.

The double-sided panels also demonstrate the concept of multiple stories as they turn to reveal new information. They also invite the viewer to be a participant in the exhibition. By interacting with the panels, viewers feel familiarised and integrated in the museum space, which becomes animated by the movements created by their actions.



The *Political Timeline* and narrative was constructed as a response to a call for an alternative history to be written for District Six. The timeline is conceptualised as a spine on which to structure other key exhibition themes such as life histories, work environments and historical processes, which are recurrent in the Museum matrix. The Timeline research project aimed at recovering the history of political resistance and to generate new histories. The challenge of the Timeline was to create a documentary framework that allows a complexity of histories to emerge out of older forms. It needed to combine ‘official knowledge’ from archival and published sources with other multiple histories gathered from oral testimonies of individual and collective memory.

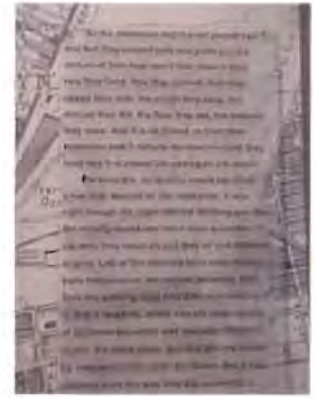


The chronology of the *Timeline* is constructed as part of a route through the exhibition. Whereas some visitors may go straight to the *Floor Map* or the *Introduction Panels*, other viewers may begin at the start of the Timeline and narratives. The *Timeline* is presented as layered text and image panels running along the side walls of the space, starting at the left hand side of the entrance and proceeding down the left hand side wall but also incorporating the exhibits on the opposite right hand side wall.





The Timeline is the culmination of many peoples discussions and input including Museum staff members and trustees, interviewers and ex-resident interviewees; researchers, academics and designers.



The main conceptual framework of the Timeline consists of a mapping project that tags people, places and events to dates. This included plotting interconnections of District Six to the city and eradicating notions of boundaries. The other conceptual framework was that of life histories (based on interviews) which focused around particular sites of interest and activity. The combination of these two themes created a political timeline that is a living history set in a geographical and historical context. Several threads are foregrounded which were accentuated by ex-residents and further researched by the Museum. The timeline followed the morphology of connections that existed between the landscape, the city and the locations of historical events.



The viewer understands the overall layout but is not confined to it. Within the broad chronology of the layout, the viewer moves freely from one interesting thing to another, shifting focus from detail to detail and to the overall effect. The viewer's own experience unfolds over time but is related to the chronology of the exhibition. In fact no two viewers have the same experience, however, there are many common points of interaction and many similar responses, especially to parts of the exhibition that are commonly known.



The *Timeline* begins with a large image of a ship docking in the harbour of Cape Town. The image marks an entry point, symbolically, marking District Six as a place formed through a series of immigrations of people to the Cape. The rounded surface gently draws the viewer to the display and forming the other side of the ship's 'gateway' is a low round platform on which sits a preserved part of the 'slave tree', and above hangs a VOC ship's bell that was used as a slave bell on the Van Breda Estate in Oranjezicht.



Colette Thorne was instrumental in the loan to the Museum of the 'slave bell' and 'slave tree' from the Cape Town Civic Collection.

From these 'beginnings' the display boards are divided into three horizontal bands. The upper level shows images of Cape Town and District Six before demolition and under three contextualising headings: "formation", "resistance", "demolition" and "restitution". The lower band is a historical timeline made up of narratives around culture, politics and resistance. The middle band emphasises aspects of the timeline displayed using photographs and texts grouped together around themes, places and events. The narratives are contextualised by background maps and aerial photographs that roughly span the time period of each section.





Corresponding to the display boards, standing in the aisle are two newspaper barrels made movable on wheels. Their circular shape reflects the other pivoting display boards. The barrels are made to a human scale, that is, they are roughly the height of a person and exist in space at the much the same scale as a person. The texts mostly newspaper cuttings pasted on the boards, are small print and encourage the viewer to get up close to read them, to move around them and even to touch them. Thus they are encouraging actual viewer engagement as well as flexibility in how the narrative is read. Additionally the round shape is optimum in a tight viewing space, the smooth curves allowing an ease of movement around and through them.

Different elements of the *Timeline* were conceptualised and designed by myself.





Between the “resistance” panel and the “restitution” panel, the chronology of the *Timeline* actually crosses the room to the “demolition” panels. The historical texts continue to “restitution” which depicts the political struggles against apartheid (and other social organisations) which in fact continued during the demolition of the District. The shift across the room in this way emphasises the transgression of conventional boundaries and limitations and challenges the viewer to consider the events of history from new points of view. It also seems appropriate to situate the decay and demolition of District Six alongside the ‘undisturbed’ interior of *Nomvuyo’s Room*.





Nomvuyo's Room was put together by designer Craig Carbutt.

Nomvuyo's Room follows Nomvuyo Ngcelwane's (author of *Sala Kahle, District Six: an African Woman's Perspective*, 1998) detailed description of her family's only living space. The viewer experiences the tight multi-functionality of domestic space with which many residents of District Six lived. Many are moved by the room's realism even though the experience is unfamiliar. Based on the specific experience of Ngcelwane, it represents a generalised experience of a common identity. The sound installation, consisting of extracts from public radio broadcasts from the 1960s, also brings a sense of familiarity to many.

Inside *Nomvuyo's Room* the viewer is physically separate from the hubbub of the Museum and can experience the quiet and calm of an interior space. But the viewer will be struck by the juxtaposition and brutality of the large bulldozer image just outside the room. The testimony of ex-residents on the destruction people's lives is displayed in large text besides the bulldozer.



At this point in the exhibition it is possible to leave the exhibition space for the *Coffee Shop* or the *Memorial Hall*. However the viewer may re-enter the central space, on the map where s/he can visually and spatially reconnect to the whole picture, perhaps pause or sit down before deciding which route to take next.

3.3.3 Interiority - the sentient viewer as the centre of display

Specific exhibits for exhibition were identified from discussions with ex-residents and contributors to the Museum. These sites represent places of significance to District Sixers in relation to everyday experiences of many people. These exhibits were conceptualised as Interiors, they were to focus on emergent histories that emphasise heterogeneity and cultural difference. They were centred on the lives of women.

The Interiors were curated and designed by Tina Smith and Peggy Delport.



Women washing clothes in the Platteklip River



Peninsula Maternity Hospital and Midwifery



Factory workers

Barbers and hairdressers



Dock workers



Hanover Street



Bloemhof Flats



Nomvuyo's Room was proposed as a realistic reconstruction of a typical District Six home. It was thought that it would invoke familiarity through realism while representing the internal affairs of the home.



The bulk of the exhibition narratives consist of family photographic collections, extracts from oral histories and different kinds of mapping which are put together under the concept of 'mapping place, people and portraits'. These make up the 'interior' spaces in the upstairs galleries.

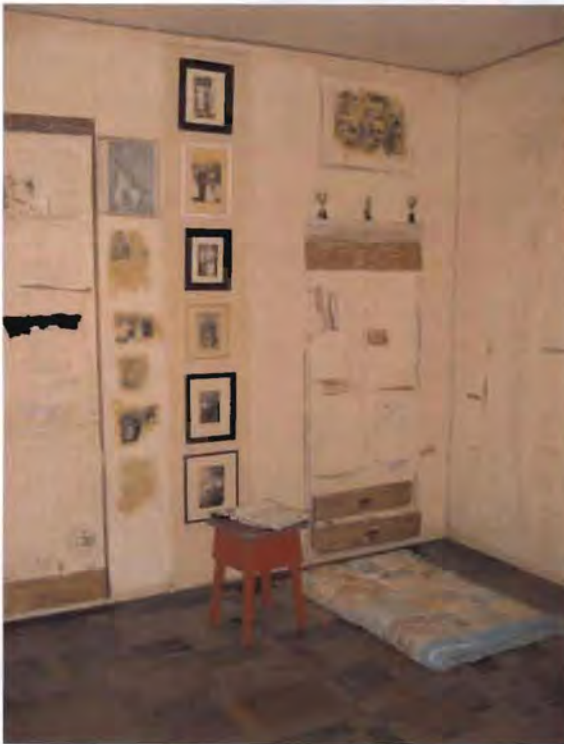
Photographs of people are located and connected to images of place. Extracts from interviews and photographs are selected from the museum collection. These are placed in front of enlarged background images of maps, sites or landmarks in the city.



The proliferation and densification of photographs on display is meant to give the sense of urbanity and close-knit community. Geographical and spatial precepts make up the design framework by using cartographic mapping, diorama-like interiors and enlarged photographic images as background texts on which to display a historiography of social, political and working life. The photographic displays upstairs and downstairs are connected to each other visually and spatially, cross-referenced and sometimes duplicated with different emphases or differing perspectives.



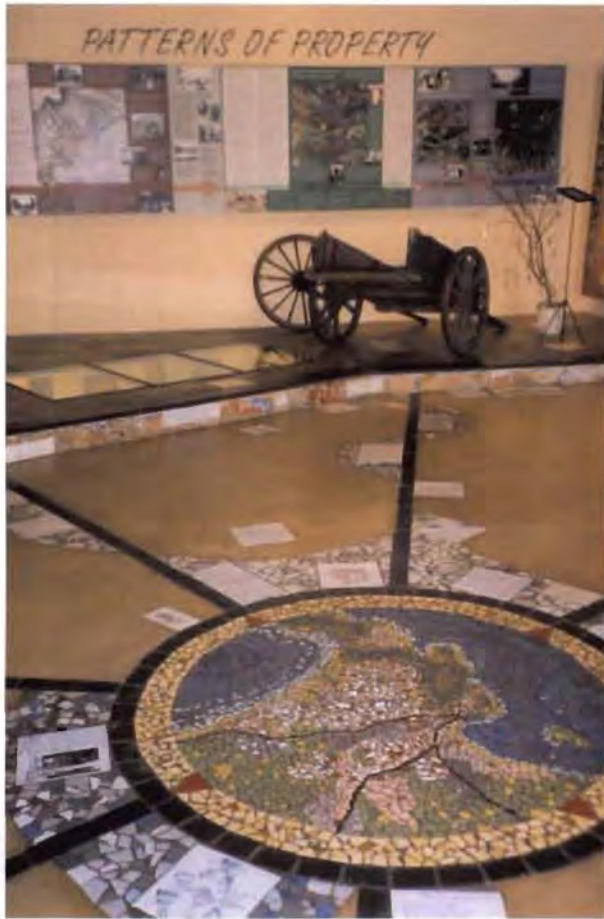
The *Collective Banners* are entirely hand made. The research, collecting, designing and making of these banners included literally hundreds of people from a wide spectrum of an extended District Six community. The curatorial concept of representing the symbols and visual elements of particular elements of practice, place and people that included, besides religion, other social groupings and collectives that were very much part of the District Six social fabric such as political, cultural, educational and recreational groups. This was a radical shift in the perception of collective social structures based on notions of diversity rather than on generalised stereotypes and hegemony. The multitude of familiar symbols created with a personal handcrafted quality resonates well with many viewers from a broad community.



Rod's Room is an artwork made by Rod Sauls, ex-resident of District Six, for his fourth year project at Michaelis School of Fine Art, and which was subsequently purchased by the District Six Museum for their permanent exhibition. *Rod's Room* is a contemplative internalised space which, unlike other exhibits in the exhibition that represent a collective voice, represents an autobiographical space in which the artist evokes his own reflections of District Six. As such it depicts the more ambiguous and ephemeral experience of memory. For the viewer, this experience of intangible memory is evoked by the artwork. To enhance this experience the curators built this room into the rafters away from the vibrancy of the main space.



The **Museum Shop** was a great opportunity to be styled into an exhibit itself. Corner shops or 'babbie' shops were part of everybody's daily life in District Six as they were elsewhere in the city. The *Little Wonder Store* was a distinctive District Six shop. Its original entrance doors (which have been installed in the Memorial Hall) along with a photograph of the owners Mr and Mrs Stern (which hangs in the Portrait Gallery) were donated to the Museum. Although the Museum Shop is not a reconstruction of the original *Little Wonder Store*, it is designed in the character of a 'babbie' shop. Here all viewers can be drawn into an authentic experience with this exhibit in the same way as they would engage with the shop in any other shopping experience.



The *Memorial Hall* is a new space for the museum and during the renovation process a new floor was to be laid. The curators saw this as a possibility for a floor exhibit. The main idea for the *Memorial Hall* was that it should be a space for temporary events and exhibitions that reflect the Museum's desire to be more involved with the greater city of Cape Town and is used to connect the Museum to other communities through outreach initiatives, educational programmes and research projects that generate temporary exhibitions. The floor exhibit incorporates two concepts. The first connects the space in the museum to the space 'beyond District Six', connecting to other communities that have experienced displacement, and to connect people back with the city. The second, represented by the *Writer's Tiles*, speaks about notions of 'place and displacement'.





Writers and poets that had a connection to District Six were invited to a series of workshops where they could inscribe their work onto ceramic tiles, which were fired and laid into the floor surface. The tiles were white ceramic inscribed with cobalt blue that is reminiscent of porcelain that permeated the trade routes of the eighteenth century.

Mosaics and tiles are embedded in the floor with the writer's tiles in a design that represents the District Six Museum as a locus point in a much larger geographical plane. The floor is designed with compass lines radiating out as on navigational maps marking distance and connection. The centre is a mosaic of the Cape Peninsula with two radiating circles representing near and far horizons.





The tiles are distributed in relation to the centre, either looking outwards or looking back towards District Six.



For the viewer the experience of the floor exhibit reflects back to the *Floor Map* in the main museum space. However, unlike the main museum space, in which one grasps the whole environment in the single space in the *Memorial Hall* the feeling is of a fragment of a bigger picture. The suggestion of the floor design is that the lines and circles in the design exceed the boundaries of the space. This has an interesting effect. It makes the viewer feel smaller, less significant, more isolated and alienated. This feeling is intensified by being physically in the wrong spatial plane to read the texts – the tiles being on the ground while the viewer is standing upright. The viewer is subsequently challenged to move beyond their usual constraints, to get down on the floor to read the tiles.

The *Memorial Hall* floor was designed by myself. The mosaic artists were Lovell Friedman with Sibongile Memani and Xolani Babu.

The *Digging Deeper* curators invited artist Sonia Geyer to create her expression of the archaeology of District Six based on a real site in District Six. A 'public archaeology' project had been facilitated by the University of Cape Town and the District Six Museum and the Museum had boxes of fragments collected from three sites on Horstley Street. The sculpture was placed in a sunken display case covered with glass on which viewers were able to walk.



The mosaic fragments of old linoleum and the sunken archaeological sculpture, like the written memories, show traces of what had been left behind.

Using the floor surface for an exhibit can imply several meanings. A literal meaning of walking on something can be interpreted as an action of disrespect. In *Miscast*, for instance, viewers felt conflicted by having to walk over depictions of Bushmen. While many understood the action as symbolic of the all-inclusive oppression of the Bushmen, others felt it was an outright shameful act while some felt personally insulted as if it were them on the floor. In the District Six Museum many visitors too hesitate and feel uncomfortable to walk on the *Floor Map*, but soon realise that being on the *Map* is part of the experience of the Museum like literally being on the streets of District Six. Like the *Floor Map*, the *Memorial Hall* floor depicts geographical space. But there are also many texts or poems that share people's deepest feelings. Viewers have to overcome the discomfort of treading on these words and feelings, which is reflected by having to overcome the physical discomfort of reading them.



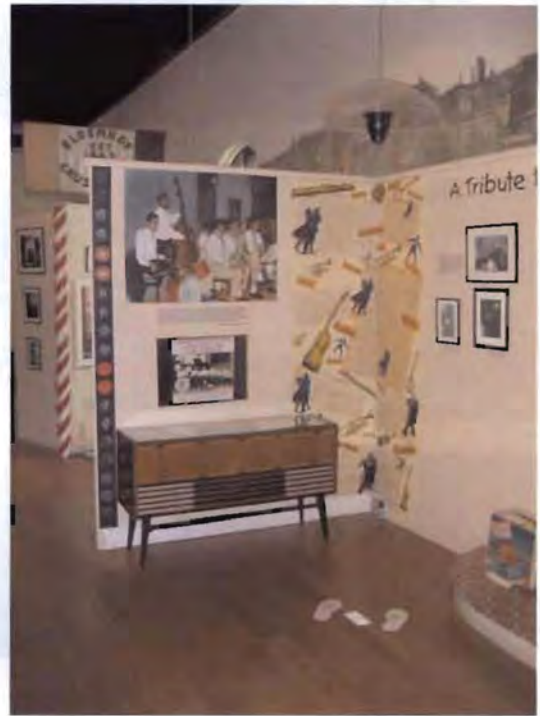
The Protea Village exhibition *A History of Paradise* seen in these photos is a temporary exhibition in the *Memorial Hall*. It was curated and designed by Donald Parenzee.



Six banner murals hang on the outside wall of the building. The banners are the first exhibit that the viewer encounters and offer an impression of the Museum inside. The banners represent the intention of the Museum to be encompassing and inclusive, to be without boundaries and to be reflecting the voice of ordinary people, and a broader community. The groups involved were: a Grassy Park Primary School, Streets – organisation helping street children, Community Arts Project, Cred – an organisation helping teenagers from prison, Ons Plek – shelter for homeless girls, and Philani – a textile project from Crossroads.



The idea for the *Outside Banners* was for community groups outside of the District Six community to engage with the Museum in a project in which they would then be represented in relation to the Museum and thereby connect with the Museum. They were asked to work with ideas of 'home and belonging' combining their experiences at home with their reflections on the Museum.



Many sound installations were developed to integrate the testimony of voices with the interior spaces. The Museum has an extensive oral history archive as much research had been done through interviews with former residents as well as many spontaneous recordings done on the museum floor. The intention was for many 'voices' to emerge through the exhibition and the sound installations add layers and multiple expressions to the exhibits. The sound installations were put together by Museum Sound Archive with sound engineer Fuad Adams.







The *Coffee Shop* is, in significant ways, the heart of the District Six Museum. Informal and friendly, it is here that the museum staff and visitors, including ex-residents, mingle and engage with each other. Shopkeeper Menisha Collins is the Museum's most energetic community organiser and it is in this space that many reunions take place and much reminiscence is heard. Here museum staff, ex-residents and visitors bustle around three small kitchen tables helping themselves to their refreshments, read the newspapers, have meetings and generally carry on their activities. This small space, in which no exhibits have ever been placed, is where the boundaries between exhibit and visitor fall away completely where there is no more distinction between viewer and museum artefact. This is where the most authentic community museum experiences most often happen.



CONCLUSION

In this project I have examined curatorial processes that are active in exhibition-making. The primary objective has been to identify those exhibits that choreograph the viewer in a powerful experience. This choreography, I have argued, is achieved by engaging the viewer's body on different levels. Firstly, these exhibitions relate to the sentient viewer through creating multi-sensory experiences. Secondly, the viewer is engaged by participating physically and actively with the exhibits. And thirdly, the viewer forms a collaborative relationship with the exhibition at a curatorial level by contributing to the experience of the exhibition in some way. I have both identified these strategies and realised my understanding of them through my own curatorial and design practice in a number of exhibition projects, but particularly through my work in the District Six Museum.

These strategies have been shown to be at work in many differing kinds of exhibits. Panoramas and museum dioramas, for example, excel in engaging with the viewers' visual and spatial senses by enclosing them in a three-dimensional virtual environment which generates emotional responses of wonder which stem from the drama and theatrical quality of the display. Interactive and participatory exhibitions, on the other hand, are able to elicit feelings of wonder *and* resonance by generating a personal experience for the viewer by his or her direct physical engagement with the exhibits and drawing on the viewers own experience to create the meaning of the exhibits. Exhibits, such as *Miscast*, compel the viewer to participate in the display by choreographing their bodies through the space (walking on images, confronting dismembered body casts), often against their will, and thus creating a powerful response. Another example is the Apartheid Museum which forms its experience for the viewer by creating an architectural environment which, by using rough materials such as brick, concrete, stone, steel and glass, reflects the brutality of the apartheid years. Furthermore its exhibition display consists mostly of video monitors which relentlessly bombard the body of the viewer with images of aggression and trauma that are aimed directly at the viewers' senses, as opposed to their intellects. In contrast, exhibits in the Age Exchange and the Tenement Museum, although also dealing with difficult subjects, are designed to be supportative to viewers by providing comfortable body-friendly environments.

In the District Six Museum the exhibition is a richly rendered atmospheric space that envelopes the viewers, both ex-residents and tourists alike, who are easily moved to an imaginative and emotionally powerful experience. Additionally, visitors to the District Six Museum are encouraged to participate further with the exhibition by contributing their personal memories and stories, adding to the Museum's collection and to the exhibition. This creates an atmosphere in which the collaborative relationship between viewer and curator is fully realised, creating an exhibit that achieves the maximum possible involvement and investment from its viewers.

It has not been my intention in this project to place a value on the differing curatorial approaches I have discussed in this project. Clearly the curator of *Miscast* was intending to provoke, the curators of the *Bushman Diorama* to create a space in which an idealised view of the past could be celebrated, in both cases significant engagement with the viewer's sentient body created powerful and varied responses. Indeed, the participatory model of the District Six Museum curators is not one that will work for every exhibition or display. It is clear, however, that the relations of power that I mentioned in Section 1.1 are best overcome when the viewers are also those who are encouraged to "perform themselves" through, as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett argues, a kind of *mise en scene* where the message is communicated through space, architecture, installation and performances (2001), and in particular, as I argue, the performance of the viewer becomes simultaneously a response to the exhibit and a part of it.

The success of the District Six Museum has been a result of a combination of many factors I have touched on in this paper that go towards creating powerful exhibition experiences. I have described the three-dimensionality of the central elements in the exhibition and how these are coordinated to reflect the viewers' body by their physical relationships and presence; the map beneath their feet, the verticality of the street signs and the memory cloth linking the portrait gallery that encircles above their heads. I have also described the linear mode through which the political narratives are shown that take the viewers' bodies as they move through the space creating for them a sense of a physical journey. On this journey they are able to experience notions of boundaries, thoroughfares and connectiveness. These are experiences that would be linked to multi-sensory experiences of public spaces that give the sense of the diversity and richness of the life that was District Six. Viewers can also experience the intimacy of the interior spaces which relate to the personal experiences of the home. The viewer alternatively experiences a variety of contrasting experiential environments of public spaces alongside private spaces, with all the accompanying sentient and emotional experiences with which these resonate.

Choreographing the viewer's body with the exhibits can generate meaning through spatial and kinaesthetic relations. Understanding this means that curatorship becomes less about the power invested in the curator and more about the relationship between curator and visitor. What the exhibition eventually means and how it is understood, has everything to do with this relationship.



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