

## Assembling the New: Studying Change Through the 'Mundane' in the Museum as Organization

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### Abstract

Change is highly valued within the museum sector and related literatures. Despite this emphasis, it is claimed that the field struggles to adequately understand and explain change processes, and that new critical and methodological tools are needed to move discussion forward (Peacock 2013). This paper offers one possible route by developing an anthropologically informed, ethnographic approach to studying the museum as organization. Illustrated through selected empirical materials from the case of the refurbishment of the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum in Glasgow, the paper focuses on a period immediately following this major capital project. It argues that change is implemented and sustained by the many different players and practices constituting the inner life-worlds of museums as organizations. By analyzing the mediatory capacities of, what in some frameworks might be considered, 'mundane' everyday activities (such as maintenance work and tour-guiding) the paper seeks to expand understandings of what shapes the dynamics of change in museums.

**Key Words:** change, everyday practice, organization, ethnography, Kelvingrove

### Introduction

According to Sociologist Paul du Gay (2003) change is highly valued in organizational management contexts. It is 'frequently represented as an unalloyed good' and it is a 'serious criticism to accuse an institution or an individual of being incapable of adjusting to - or, better still, "thriving on" change' (664). Like the public service contexts he examines, the museum sector is equally characterized through calls for 'reinvention' (Anderson 2004) or 'transition' (Hein 2000). Over the past three decades, a complex configuration of critical scholarship, identity politics, and socio-economic contexts has challenged fundamental ideas about what role museums should play both now and into the future.

It is beyond the scope of this introduction to comprehensively outline these challenges, which have temporal, regional, and institutional differences.<sup>1</sup> Yet, within the United Kingdom (UK) (the context in which this paper is written), catalysts for change have emerged from the 'new museology' or 'critical museum theory', identity and public culture politics, increased museum professionalization, emergence of new and digital media, and the new economies. Calls for change typically seek to redress exclusionary legacies to create more accessible and inclusive museums guided by social values and a participatory politics; or what is often discussed as harnessing the 'social agency' of museums to contribute to programmes of 'inclusion' and 'equality' (e.g. Sandell 2003; Kinsley 2016).<sup>2</sup> The current austerity climate and planned exit from the European Union present contemporary environments widely seen to pose new uncertainties to which UK museums must respond to secure future relevance.

Within such contexts, professionals are encouraged to engineer transformation, take risks, and embrace opportunities for reinvention. This is accompanied by a rise of programmes targeting the museum workforce and organizational change. One current example is the UK Museums Association *Transformers* programme. By encouraging participants to work towards

'radical change', the programme provides an opportunity to 'test out new ways of working that contribute to healthier, more resilient, diverse and adaptable organisations'.<sup>3</sup> The ability to change (at individual and organizational scales) is promoted for future survival. Seen widely to be a necessary and good thing, change appears to take on what may even be called a 'moral imperative' (Osborne 2003). Change is a – perhaps even *the* – dominant value guiding contemporary practice.

While lively discussion characterizes current scholarly and practitioner literatures, it is also claimed that the field struggles to adequately explain the process of change in museum organizations and that expanded understandings or 'mental models' are required (Peacock 2013: 235). This paper begins from this shared standpoint to argue that existing approaches foreground certain interpretations at the expense of others. Focusing discussion on evaluating impacts of formal change programmes, often driven by official 'change makers' (programme directors, specialist consultants, museum managers), risks overlooking the ways that the many different players and practices that constitute the rich inner life-worlds of museum organizations contribute to the dynamics of change.

Responding to the Special Issue theme, I address this omission by arguing for new methodological and analytical tools. I offer one possible route, by developing an anthropologically informed approach, illustrated through selected empirical materials from a study of Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum in Glasgow. By focusing on a period immediately following its redevelopment, known as the Kelvingrove New Century Project, I explore how the 'new' Museum continued to be made through the everyday work of staff – including vis-a-vis what other frameworks may consider 'mundane', 'insignificant', or 'relatively minor' activities. Ethnographic fieldwork revealed how newly introduced professional values, beliefs, identities, and practices were not only implemented but remade through such activities. The article thus argues for open-ended understandings of change as occurring over a longer timeframe than any single moment – and as emerging from the practices and techniques of a more varied range of players, including what is already in place – than discussions of capital museum projects typically acknowledge. To contextualize this argument, I first consider what existing 'stories' have been told about change in the museums literature, before looking to alternative theoretical and methodological frameworks.

### **Reviewing the Literature: Stories Told About Change**

When reviewing current literatures, it is clear that different models and metaphors – or the 'stories we tell' (Brown et al. 2009) about change in museum organizations – frames how change is understood, explained, and ultimately identified. One dominant story told about museological change calls for what might be considered (to use du Gay's (2003) terminology) 'epochal' transformation. Such accounts frame change in 'epochal' terms by referring to whole-scale transformation taking a linear trajectory through clearly defined schematic periods: 'before' and 'after', 'old' and 'new', 'pre' and 'post'. This is evident in the way that such calls often contrast dualisms of characteristics. For example, Anderson's (2004: 2) seminal, yet schematic, account of the transition from the 'traditional' to the 'reinvented' museum through a set of characteristics including (amongst others) 'elitist' to 'equitable', 'collection driven' to 'audience focused', and 'focused on the past' to 'relevant and forward looking'. Here du Gay's (2003) observation that 'epochal' discourse foregrounds certain understandings potentially at the expense of others is useful. The epochal approach risks suggesting that change is a rather more neat process than more grounded accounts indicate (Gurian 1995; Janes 2009, 2013; Alberti et al., 2017). It may also set up 'all or nothing' explanations where transformation is understood to be a sequential move from one state to another with predetermined outcomes. One effect is the polarization of debate. Witcomb (2003: 2), for example, recognized that depending on what values and practices a museum identifies with it is positioned as 'new' or 'old', 'relevant' or 'irrelevant', 'elitist' or 'popular'. Moreover, epochal accounts are typically reductionist by flattening various 'economic, social and organizational changes to one or two "overarching" and fundamental characteristics' (du Gay 2003: 666). Doing so draws attention to specific change agents while overlooking others; exemplified by Gurian's (2010: 3) positioning of directors as focal change agents, 'the indefatigable visionaries who know how to go from idea to operation', whose 'will'

produces change. Perspectives like this risk, in du Gay's (2003: 666) words, 'rendering certain potentially significant, if (seen from the heights of the epochal mindset) often seemingly banal, contextual details unimportant or invisible'.

Other 'stories' told about change acknowledge that while directorial visions, architectural or design plans, or mission statements shape the change process, a more varied range of agents and techniques have capacity to mediate desired outcomes. Change is not something that simply flows into a museum from elsewhere but must be 'invented, implanted, stabilized, and reproduced' (du Gay 2003: 666). One effect of such accounts is to highlight the complexity of change by recognizing not only how it is made to happen, but also the ways in which it is constrained, what Peacock (2013: 236) calls processes of 'maladaptation'.

A landmark example is Robert Janes' (2013, 3rd edition) reflections on leading (as then President and CEO) the Glenbow Museum in Calgary through a whole-scale transformation, which sought to involve a wide range of staff in the process of organizational change, in the book *Museums and the Paradox of Change*. Primarily, the book is concerned with recounting the management-led transformation of Glenbow and its effects by foregrounding staff perspectives (from curators, to financial officers, to researchers). It has been heralded for providing a more comprehensive reading of, what Janes calls, 'the messy, paradoxical and non-linear reality of organizational change' (2013: xx), particularly by discussing resistance to the process. Since his book, both scholarly and practitioner texts have continued to offer nuanced readings, including drawing attention to the ways that change processes increasingly extend beyond museums to include community partners (Lynch 2011). In the UK, this is exemplified by a recent series of practitioner-focused reports evaluating change programmes funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation (Lynch 2011, Bienkowski 2016). Reflecting on his Directorship of the Our Museum: Communities and Museums as Active Partners programme, Bienkowski (2016: 15) concludes that transformation comes from 'lots of small, incremental changes over a longer period of time' rather than 'a single, large, one-off project'.

These kinds of literatures have shifted discussion from speculative 'epochal' theorizing to grounded reflection. Below, I seek to build on the perspectives they introduce, although I am less interested in seeking to evaluate change management programmes (or 'lessons learnt') than to consider how change is implemented and sustained through varied elements of organizational life – including the kinds of 'mundane' activities and longer time-frames than those usually accounted for in such programmes and/or their evaluation. While I thus share with Janes an emphasis on capturing the 'messiness' of change, my understanding of this concept is more closely related to those mobilized in the social sciences. For example, John Law's (2004) call for an expansion of methods to capture the 'mess' of everyday social and organizational worlds, which he indicates is their emergent and fluctuating properties (a conceptual approach I return to below). Supporting this interpretation, Peacock (2013) argues that we should view change as 'something emerging dynamically within the organization' (239), or as 'happening in and around our organizations all the time' (242). To develop such perspectives requires expanding existing theoretical and methodological approaches, to which I now turn.

### **Assembling Expanded Critical-Methodological Approaches**

My aim for theorizing change is to do so by remaining truthful to the shared understandings (on how and where change is made to happen) that I found expressed by Kelvingrove staff. It is also important to clarify that I do not seek to recount the diverse range of staff experiences, or the myriad ways that the redevelopment of the museum impacted on them. Partly because I have done so elsewhere (Morgan 2011), but also the range of possible reactions to change – from uncertainty and resistance to excitement and empowerment – are already well accounted for in the literatures introduced above. Rather, my aim is to take seriously the claim that 'if anthropology is a *science* [...] one would expect its subject matter to press back on analytical apparatus' (Maurer 2005: 2). Thus, I turn now to map out possible 'analytical apparatus' that may respond to the ways that empirical materials have started to 'press back', before turning, in the second half of this paper, to apply these frameworks to an analysis of selected ethnographic materials.

### *Museums as Organizational-Assemblages*

One approach that might offer expanded ways of explaining and understanding change in museums is assemblage theory. Developed primarily across the social sciences and humanities (e.g. Latour, 2005; DeLanda 2006), it may be located in a broader shift towards embracing 'non-representational' theory in museum studies (e.g. Grewcock 2014), and has gained some attention by heritage scholars (Bennett and Healy 2009; Macdonald 2009; Harrison et al., 2013; Waterton and Dittmer 2014; Jones and MacLeod 2016). Referring to both 'a process of bundling, of assembling' (Law 2004: 41-42) and the 'properties of specific assemblages' (Bennett and Healy 2009: 4), assemblage theory encourages a broadening of how we conceptualize the museum (Waterton and Dittmer 2014). Jones and MacLeod (2016: 208), for example, claim that the museum is 'an "assemblage" of people, material and practices in a dynamic state of making'. Waterton and Dittmer (2014: 124) in a similar manner understand heritage sites (in their case a memorial) to be 'constantly in a state of becoming', stabilized not only through the 'narrative' but 'the material elements that (re)compose it'. These understandings reflect DeLanda's (2005: 5) theorizing that assemblages are 'wholes whose properties emerge from the interactions between parts'. Seen through an assemblage lens, the museum as organization is understood to emerge from interactions between heterogeneous elements including the social and material, human and more-than-human (e.g. narratives, practices, bodies, buildings, objects, affects, sensory impressions, and other material entities). Analytic attention is directed to the interaction between such components to explore how these diverse elements are enrolled in processes of reconfiguring 'the museum'. Discursive, institutional, and social features are viewed as temporary and fragile stabilizations between components rather than as distinctive domains made up of unknowable forces.

This is an enticing framework for reflecting on museological change precisely because it enables building on directions established in the literatures outlined above. An assemblage approach directs attention, as Macdonald (2009: 118) has noted, to heritage 'processes' rather than 'products' by looking at the 'entanglements involved in their coming into being and continuation'. This sensitizes us to consider the ways that transformation is not only shaped by the anticipatory plans and designs of identified 'change-makers' and formal programmes, but is made and remade through the contingently situated activities and techniques of a diverse array of players, including those already in-situ. This includes the 'human' and 'non-human', 'technical' as well as 'social' processes (Macdonald 2009: 118). Moreover, through an emphasis on exploring what assemblage perspectives call the 'mediatory' capacity of such agents, or their ability to 'transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry' (Latour 2005: 39 cited in Macdonald 2009:n.2), at its core an assemblage approach embraces the indeterminate and unexpected, as well as the improvisatory and adaptive. This unsettles readings of change defined through discrete moments (e.g. of 'before' or 'after') to focus instead on processes of becoming, and is further heightened by an assemblage emphasis on acknowledging the ways pre-existing components might continue to be carried through processes of assembling. Thus blurring what in other frames might be considered moments of 'clear punctuations' like 'novelty or invention' (Macdonald 2009: 118). Taken together, these points understand change as emerging through the dynamic process of its making; a process that occurs through the ongoing activities, practice, interactions, and conversations constituting the organizational life-worlds of the museum, rather than a one-off event (Peacock 2013: 237).

### *Anthropological Ethnography*

If assemblage theory points towards particular critical readings of museums as organizations, it is equally important to consider what research methodologies these understandings (i.e. of change emerging through the dynamic process of its ongoing making) suggest, and how the affordances of particular methods can best accommodate such critical perspectives. Here I argue – and will further illustrate through empirical materials in the next section – that an anthropologically informed, ethnographic approach is well attuned to studying museums as organizational-assemblages.

Certainly, within the field of organizational anthropology an emphasis on complexity is apparent. This is a vast field and it is beyond the scope of this paper to account for either its development or key themes in any detail.<sup>4</sup> Yet it is relevant to highlight that ethnographic methods have been used to study organization change. It is even claimed, in Van Maanen's (2001: 244) review of this literature, that 'there is perhaps no other substantive area for which ethnography is more suitable as a method'. In general terms, ethnography is understood to involve a wide range of techniques enabling researchers to observe and participate in the everyday life of the context under study often, although not only (see Pink and Morgan (2013)), by immersing themselves through long-term fieldwork. This can include talking with people, observing and taking part in activities, touring sites, making photographs or videos, and reading documents.

A key theme to emerge across ethnographic studies is a critique of corporate management's and organizational theory's use of the 'culture concept', including in programmes of change management (Wright 1994; Heracleous 2001; Hirsch and Gellner 2001: 2-4; Corsín Jiménez 2007: Part V; Jung 2016). The 'culture concept' refers to the formalization of values and practices intended to act as a type of organizational 'glue' (Wright 1994: 2) by constructing a shared sense of purpose and identity (i.e. codified and disseminated through mission statements, employee handbooks, and so on). Ethnographic studies offer more nuanced perspectives, showing organizational members to be active rather than passive recipients of workplace 'culture'. The key point made by the anthropological literatures is that organizational members are not only shaped by, but shape, organizations through the 'incremental shifts and repositionings of the organizational order' that they make (Van Maanen 2001: 246). This emphasis on continuous meaning-making has been extended through a related theme in the literature, which is a processual approach to studying organizations (e.g. Wright 1994: 20-26). For example, in their introduction to an edited volume on doing ethnographic research in organizations, Garsten and Nyqvist (2012: 10) claim that organizations, far from being static entities, are 'continuously in the process of formation, under constant modification and reproduction'. The chapters in this book flag the behind-the-scenes work and effort involved in making organizations durable by seeing these entities to be – what has been theorized elsewhere – a 'recurrent accomplishment' (Nicolini 2013: 3).

When taken into the field of museum studies, the lines of enquiry prioritized by these anthropologically informed, ethnographic studies sit well with my ambitions to explore expanded understandings of change in museums as organizations. This is because ethnographic methodologies have particular affordances (or qualities) that make these especially suitable for incorporating such perspectives. For example, by taking a grounded (or 'bottom up') approach to observe, ask questions about, and participate in activity as it happens, ethnography tends not to presuppose too far in advance what might emerge relevant to the questions or domains being studied. One consequence of this approach is that ethnographic methodologies typically foreground what is not usually spoken about; sometimes because it is taken for granted or because it is considered unimportant (by other scholars and/or those we research with).

By crafting 'intense' research encounters with people and sites (Pink and Morgan 2013), ethnographic techniques enable researchers to explore those aspects of lives that people are willing to share, yet are not easily accessed through other methods like surveys or structured interviews.<sup>5</sup> Applied to a study of museum change, this encourages focusing on the inner life-worlds that comprise the museum as organization, and moving analysis beyond 'visions' for change (articulated by identified 'change makers' through mission statements, design plans, and/or project bids) to focus closely on the ways that a varied range of players and practices not only implement but sustain, and may even further reshape, the newly introduced. These methods sit well with an assemblage emphasis on 'following the action' (Latour 2005), and enabling tracing change as an ongoing accomplishment of the many and not only the few, or what has been called an 'anti-heroic' account (Briers and Chua 2001: 264). Inspired by these conceptual and methodological avenues, I turn now to examine the case of the Kelvingrove redevelopment.



### Case Study: The Kelvingrove New Century Project

Opened in 1901, Kelvingrove has been described as the 'last and greatest achievement of the Victorian municipal museum movement' (O'Neill 2007: 380). Part of the Glasgow Museums service,<sup>6</sup> by the end of the twentieth century, despite being hugely popular, it was perceived as needing an update and modernization. The Museum was closed from 2003 until 2006 for a major refurbishment of the building, displays, and facilities (known as the Kelvingrove New Century Project). Awarded a Heritage Lottery Fund grant, this was a large-scale project unprecedented in the Museum's history. The neo-Baroque stonework of the building was cleaned, exhibition space increased by approximately 35 per cent, new technologies introduced for environmental systems, education areas developed, and public facilities built including a new shop and restaurant (see O'Neill 2006a, 2006b, 2007). Most striking was the complete overhaul of the displays to integrate an 'object based, storytelling, flexible' approach (O'Neill 2007: 385). Pragmatically, this resulted in an almost doubling of objects in galleries, a narrative display approach, incorporation of new media (including audio-visual and 'hands on' interactives), and the intent to rotate displays more frequently through 'flexible displays' underpinned by modular fittings and a thematic ordering (see Morgan 2013). Accompanying this transformation to the building and displays was an organizational restructure including (but not limited to) the reconfiguration of curatorial departments and the creation of new posts dedicated to learning and access.

Broadly speaking, these transformations were guided by social values translated into ambitions to increase physical and intellectual access to the Museum and its contents, and to include more diverse audiences – especially those from non-visiting socio-economic demographics (O'Neill 2006a, 2006b, 2007). While pushed throughout the entire redevelopment, this is most evident in the use of displays to 'tell stories' based on objects assembled thematically rather than sequentially. The re-opened west wing galleries contain 'story-displays' dedicated to the theme of 'Life' ('how we live and what that does to the world') and the east wing galleries to those of 'Expression' ('how we express ourselves and why we need to'). Objects are mixed from across traditional subject disciplines to tell these stories, and categorical orderings like taxonomy or chronology are supplemented with social or affective themes (including, on re-opening, displays on unsettling or hidden histories like sectarianism or violence against women). The new displays are intended to facilitate a range of experiences including the social and emotional. Key proponent of the redevelopment and (then) Head of Glasgow Museums, Mark O'Neill (2007: 387), explains how the aim was to use 'objects to stimulate visitors to open themselves to beauty, to imagine the past, to think about issues, and to empathise with people who are different from them'. This was supported through an approach to interpretation where curators worked to 'find the language (graphic, verbal, audio, computer, and manual interactives) most appropriate to each story' (O'Neill 2007: 390), and to encourage visitors to play an active role in the process of creating museum meanings (e.g. labels that address visitors through questions such as 'what do you think?'). This approach captured widespread attention, and continues to be heralded as a 'cultural revolution' rather than 'a regular refurbishment' (Holt 2016). Such rhetoric suggests the refurbishment would have long-lasting effect by updating and mapping (*vis-à-vis* a major capital project) a socially engaged ethos into all aspects of the museum through its new displays, refurbished building, and reorganized institutional structures.

#### *Entering the Field: Locating Change?*

As an anthropologist interested in exploring what so-called 'new' models of museological practice (especially those driven by the critical scholarship and identity politics) mean on the ground, my curiosity was also deeply piqued by the Kelvingrove refurbishment. From 2008 until 2009 I spent twelve months on site undertaking ethnographic fieldwork. I reviewed public accounts about the project, undertook archival research, interviewed staff, and conducted participant observation of everyday work. Rather than being based with one department, guided by the conceptual and methodological approaches introduced above, I remained open to tracing the legacy of change throughout the museum as organization.

When I arrived at Kelvingrove, my initial aim was to locate a starting point for the

refurbishment. However, it quickly became clear that, while the Museum was closed from 2003 to 2006, the genesis of the formation of a 'new' Kelvingrove had occurred over a much longer timeframe. Interviewing key players did not enable me to clearly pinpoint 'when or where it all began', as I asked people to describe. It opened more avenues of enquiry with my interlocutors encouraging me to speak to others, investigate earlier examples of the 'new' display approaches taken across Glasgow Museums' sites, and consider aspects of change I had not fully anticipated – including the above-mentioned organizational restructure. Fieldnotes written during my first weeks on site (after meeting a manager involved in the redevelopment) illustrate this:

After explaining that I have been concentrating on Kelvingrove, they tell me that they "have an issue or difficulty in understanding why you are looking at Kelvingrove, because it was a process that began before the redevelopment". Continuing in this vein, they explain how "it was part of a process of transformation of the whole service". A process they think began with a former director, but was "accelerated" by the current head of the museum service. They continue by talking to me about their involvement in an institutional restructure. The remainder of our conversation focuses on this. I struggle to make sense of details, timescales, and changes to the organization of staff and departments. Although lost in the specifics, what is evident is that the manager clearly thinks that, in order for me to understand the redevelopment of Kelvingrove, I must first begin to familiarize myself with other moments in the institution's history.<sup>7</sup>

These kinds of materials illustrate how trying to locate any clear-cut beginning to transformation at Kelvingrove made little sense to those working in this context. Meaningful moments could certainly be identified. For example, the submission of an initial bid (1996); organizational restructure associated with a council-wide performance review (1999-2001); or the museum closure for building work and display installation (2003-2006). Yet the redevelopment was situated within, arose from, and was experienced as a broad and ongoing process of institutional change ('a transformation of the whole service', 'an evolution of the vision', or 'an institution in flux', as it was variously put to me). I thus found myself following the emergence of the 'new' Kelvingrove through different directorships, past exhibitions, alternative museum builds, and funding bids (Morgan 2011). Moments that incrementally (rather than dramatically) reconfigured relations between objects, the building, staff, and the public, and did so guided by an emerging social ethos. On the one hand, this is not unusual for ethnographic research, given the affordances outlined earlier. Yet, it indicates that change occurred in a more piecemeal manner than 'epochal' narratives framing the refurbishment suggest (i.e. a 'cultural revolution' or transformation marked by clearly defined moments of 'before' and 'after'). It also encourages sensitivity to the ways that a 'new' museum may continue to emerge. Including through what might be characterized, to draw on Ingold and Hallam's (2007: 6) words (informed by a phenomenological anthropological approach), 'active regeneration' through 'the tasks of carrying on'.

#### *Foregrounding the Mundane: 'Carrying On' Through the Efforts of Many*

Certainly my interlocutors did not perceive the re-opening of the Museum to be an end point, but rather a beginning enacted through all sorts of 'carrying on' tasks. Staff were responding to the effects of general wear and tear from the vastly increased visitor numbers and dealing with unexpected outcomes. For example, reverting to physical barriers in one display of natural history specimens after it was found that 'psychological' (or case-free) methods had not entirely worked as anticipated due to some specimens being touched by visitors (Rutherford *et al.*, 2007; Holt 2016). However, less explicit than erecting barriers, 'carrying on' tasks were occurring across a wide range of routine practices – or everyday activities intimately bound up with implementing and sustaining professional values, beliefs, identities and practices associated with ambitions for change. Taking my cue from staff, my attention was drawn to areas where the legacy of the Kelvingrove New Century project was perceived by staff to be powerfully evident, yet are the kinds of details not usually foregrounded in the current literatures. This

included, as I have written about elsewhere (Morgan 2013), small-scale exhibition curating at display rather than gallery level but also (as I will focus on in the remainder of this paper) maintenance and front-of-house work.

Exemplifying ethnography of the mundane, cleaning work was passionately discussed by staff in anticipation of a 'mystery visit' from a national tourism organization to assess the quality of the visitor experience. Given that a key ambition for the redevelopment was to reassemble the Museum to become an internationally-recognized heritage institution – and such quality assurance systems have been said to have a 'scale-shifting' effect by coupling local sites to the global assemblage of cultural tourism (Macdonald 2009: 129) – it is perhaps not surprising that staff were concerned not to be demoted from the top grade they had been awarded soon after re-opening. In an attempt to maintain this newly assembled symbolic status, which was bound up (I have analysed elsewhere through a differently-nuanced discussion) with a desire to stretch 'newness' as a visual or aesthetic quality (Morgan 2012), a 'deep clean' programme was implemented. By undertaking participant observation of the 'deep clean', the potential for specific materialities (of dirt, dust, and grime) to destabilize specific redevelopment aims was revealed. While not typically featured within the museums literature, and likely considered by some to be a relatively minor detail to highlight in the face of seemingly more high-profile aspects of the redevelopment, this is precisely the point. Ethnographic fieldwork demonstrated how staff regarded this everyday work to be a crucial area of 'carrying on' by maintaining specific ambitions associated with assembling a 'new' museum.

#### *Adapting Towards Change: Mixing the 'Old' and the 'New'*

Following such behind-the-scenes work also revealed the ways that change emerges from an interaction between the newly introduced and what is already in place. One area this was apparent was the front-of-house work of volunteer tour-guides. During the redevelopment a new system of tour-guiding was introduced. This was commonly described as being a new 'scripted' tour designed to cover the highlights of the collections to showcase range, quality, and depth. Organized to a shared 'script' (or notes setting out eleven 'star objects', bullet-pointed information, and a suggested route and timings) it was a significant change from pre-refurbishment guiding. Previously, guides had developed their own tours that (due to experience and interest within the team) focused predominantly on the fine art collections. The new system shuffled in not only a different itinerary but a new guiding identity to provide tours, as one curator told me, that 'reflected the whole ethos, the whole rationale, the whole educational aspect' of the refurbished museum.

Despite this change in emphasis, by participating in training to become a guide while I was on site from 2008 until 2009, it was evident to me that pre-existing approaches to itineraries, notions of expertise, and ultimately a sense of volunteering self had not been entirely abandoned. This was illustrated through the minor adaptations I observed guides make to the route and content of the tour – or what in the training was encouraged through an emphasis on 'editing'. The trainers (themselves longstanding Kelvingrove guides) suggested incorporating several stops not included in the 'highlights' tour but perceived to be useful for describing the Museum's history (e.g. a painting of its opening in 1901) and refurbishment (e.g. a patch of un-cleaned original stonework). They also suggested making 'links' between different stops, again not included in scripted information.

It is possible to interpret adaptations (or 'editing') to be a creep away from the newly introduced system. Encouraging narrative 'links' between galleries was, even if unintentionally, somewhat at odds with the non-linear (themed, storytelling) approach outlined above. More generally, 'editing' resonates with more longstanding forms of guiding agency where volunteers autonomously developed tour content rather than working from a standardized system. However, I would suggest that editing can and *should* be understood as being intended to adapt towards maintaining the newly introduced. For example, the ability to 'edit' was explicitly connected by guides to being responsive. One guide explained:

The guide is just facilitating a way for the audience to see, to appreciate, and to take something from that painting. You get them to look at the painting, to use



their eyes, and they'll remember that painting and appreciate it. You don't need background knowledge, you don't need a crowning in art history, you don't need anything. Anyone can look at a painting and take something from it. It's the guide's job to enable that person to see as much as they can, and to take as much as they can, and just to enjoy looking at it, and if that's what the guide manages then that guide is 100 per cent successful.<sup>8</sup>

Such opinions indicate that guides understood their refurbished role to be one of 'facilitating' by making sure that visitors left not with 'a lecture' or 'a lesson' but rather 'the KG experience' (as was often explained to me). Such ambitions clearly resonate, even if not in entirely straightforward ways, with new models of learning underpinning the refurbished displays. Particularly those intended to activate the meaning-making capacity of visitors, provide social experiences, and democratize the museum experience by valuing individual and personal responses. While necessarily brief, these observations illustrate how the guiding role that I was trained in was not that of the 'old' Kelvingrove, yet through an emphasis on 'editing' neither did it seem to be entirely that intended with the introduction of a scripted system. Reassembled guiding practice emerged from a complex interplay between the newly introduced and pre-existing. This brief analysis indicates the ways that desired outcomes for the refurbishment were not only implemented through the everyday work practices of staff, but came to be shaped by a complex interplay between newly introduced professional values, beliefs, identities, and practices, and what was already in place.

### **Conclusion: Reflections on Change**

Tracing the legacy of the Kelvingrove New Century Project took me into varied institutional nooks and crannies. By developing a critical framework bringing together assemblage theory, organizational anthropology, and ethnographic methods, I came to focus on the kinds of everyday activities typically unaccounted for in dominant discussions around museum change. Far from being a one-off moment of reorganization, located solely in the capital redevelopment, a wide range of players were found to be involved in the 'new' Kelvingrove's coming into being and continuation through implementing and sustaining the newly introduced.

Drawing on assemblage perspectives, that foreground the 'mediatory' capacity of a range of players (Latour 2005; Bennett and Healy 2009; Macdonald 2009), my analysis supports a growing trend in museum studies to examine previously ignored professional realms (e.g. Brusius and Singh 2018). The cleaning of display cases is not usually connected to the dynamics of change, nor do such (supposedly) 'minor' or 'mundane' activities feature in formal change programmes and/or evaluations of their impact, as identified in my earlier literature review (Janes 2013, Lynch 2011, Bienowski 2016). Yet the Kelvingrove case has illustrated how practices like these hold potential to modify objectives for change, and reconfigure symbolic, material, and aesthetic ambitions.

By focusing on such activities, I have argued that the refurbished museum may be understood to be an emergent, uncertain, and ultimately incomplete endeavour. Change took surprising directions, including those involving continuity of the pre-existing, yet in ways not entirely replicating what went before. My account of volunteer tour-guiding demonstrated how a system emphasizing 'facilitation' co-exists with earlier guiding practice (including more autonomous forms of agency). Change can thus be considered to emerge from a mix of the newly introduced and elements intended to be discarded, but which persist albeit modified. The 'old' and the 'new' entangle in relational rather than simply antagonistic ways. My analysis of the Kelvingrove case disrupts what might otherwise be considered moments of 'clear punctuations' (Macdonald 2009: 118) – including 'epochal' (du Gay 2003) claims of sweeping 'cultural revolution' from an 'old' to a 'new' museum (Holt 2016). Summarizing what this tells us about change, I found transformation to be continuous and open-ended; involving a broad range of players (including what was already in place); occurring beyond any single identifiable moment in time; and sometimes resulting in unanticipated outcomes. By enabling me to 'follow the action' (Latour 2005) through the inner-life world of the museum, ethnographic methods have ultimately revealed what assemblage perspectives call the 'mess' (Law 2004), or emergent and

fluctuating properties, of everyday social and organizational worlds. Pushing these reflections further, these findings respond to calls within the literature for new perspectives on change, including Peacock's (2013: 242) argument for the need to rethink 'the source of change and innovation' in museum organizations.

Finally, while I have identified what the critical-methodological framework developed in this paper adds to our understanding of change, there is a risk that it may be considered to foreground isolated pockets of activity within the museum. Of course, an ethnography of the 'mundane' is not the *only* way to understand change, and it should be reiterated that my aim is to expand rather than counter existing approaches. Since the Kelvingrove refurbishment, Glasgow Museums has undertaken different programmes of organizational change through involvement in the Paul Hamlyn Foundation *Our Museum* initiative between 2012 and 2015 (see [www.ourmuseum.org.uk](http://www.ourmuseum.org.uk)). This programme involved a 'staff ambassador' scheme (inviting a cross-section of staff to better understand community engagement) and artist interventions (to challenge staff understandings of their role). It could be said that these initiatives indicate the institution to have recognized value in addressing change from a variety of perspectives, including the more creative and experimental.

Similarly, the ultimate value of the analysis offered in this paper may be the ways that the less typical approaches it develops can complement (while extending) other accounts of the change process. This includes those which seek to evaluate the impacts of formal change management programmes from other starting points including scientific management theory (Lynch 2011, Bienkowski 2016). By doing so, the perspectives developed hold potential – as they continue to be brought into dialogue with other ways of knowing – to address in new and productive ways the unabating nature of change, and the diversity of actors involved in sustaining and mediating such change.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> For an example of a discussion focused on UK contexts for change and museum development, see Knell (2004).
- <sup>2</sup> A recent iteration of the current push for museums to become socially-purposeful organizations is reflected in the UK Museums Association *Museums Change Lives* campaign [www.museumsassociation.org/museums-change-lives](http://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-change-lives) accessed 21 March 2018.
- <sup>3</sup> Taken from *Transformers: Radical Change in Museums*. <https://www.museumsassociation.org/professional-development/transformers/15042014-transformers-radical-change-in-museums> accessed 21 March 2018.
- <sup>4</sup> For accounts of the development of organizational anthropology, see Schwartzman (1993), Wright (1994), Van Maanen (2001), and Corsín Jiménez (2007).
- <sup>5</sup> I have written about ethnographic methodologies elsewhere, see Pink and Morgan (2013). For an excellent summary of the affordances of ethnographic methodologies (that resonates with my interpretation of ethnography), see an interview with Sarah Pink available at: <http://itu.23video.com/video/21489832?source=share> accessed 21 March 2018.
- <sup>6</sup> Glasgow Museums is a sub-brand of Glasgow Life ([www.glasgowlife.org.uk](http://www.glasgowlife.org.uk)), which is the operating name for the charitable-status company Culture and Sport Glasgow (CSG). Glasgow Museums has been described as 'the largest municipal museum service in Britain,

with some 350 staff, 1.4 million objects, and seven major sites' (O'Neill 2007: 380). These sites include museums, a purpose-built collections store and the Open Museum outreach service.

<sup>7</sup> Fieldnote by author, 3 October 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Kelvingrove Museum Volunteer Tour Guide, interview by author, digital audio recording, 10 February 2009, Glasgow.

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