

**Organising People, Constructing Meanings:
Social and Institutional Dynamics in the Production of
Art Museum Knowledges**

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Abstract

While some research has focused on what happens ‘behind the scenes’ in art museums and how this relates to ‘front stage’ museum representations, little has been written about how this relates to what happens ‘centre stage’: in other words, how the organisational structure and culture of an institution influence the art historical knowledges constructed and presented through display. While much work has been done on the relationship between collecting, collections and display, little has been done to examine interpretation practices in museums of art. This thesis attempts to address this gap in order to better understand the importance of the role of interpretation in the construction of art and art history.

This thesis presents the results of research into the production of knowledge, understood as modes of representation, at three museums of art: the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, Tate Britain in London, and the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts. The research focuses on the relationship between changing organisational structures and interpretive practices in these institutions, with a focus on how the traditional divide between ‘educators’ and ‘curators’ is being blurred - suggesting a reinvention of the purpose and function of museums of art. Each case study institution had recently undergone (or was in the process of undergoing) significant organisational change, providing a chance to map out or reflect upon changes to interpretation over time.

Combining qualitative, ethnographic methods and display analysis, the research attempts to trace the internal, social workings of each institution with the statements of position communicated to visitors. Proceeding from a social constructionist viewpoint that museum displays are a type of embodied theory, and that museums are not merely ‘reflective’ (Macdonald 1996), the research argues that the structural and cultural dynamics of organisations influence the knowledges communicated to visitors.

The research argues that staffing structures (and the power and politics that exist within these structures) not only influence the content of exhibitions and displays, but are capable of altering museum representations. In revealing these connections and examining production practices, this research opens up new thinking about the significance of organisational structures in the production of museum knowledges. This thinking challenges naturalised assumptions about the nature of art and its histories, presenting new possibilities for representation, understanding and the experience of visiting exhibitions.

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Chapter One

Introduction

A conventional (and perhaps conservative) process of curating an art exhibition in a public art museum goes something like this: A curator develops an idea for an exhibition, either of her own accord or based on the requirements of stakeholders. The exhibition is researched, objects chosen, and the layout formulated based on the messages the curator wishes to communicate. Textual interpretation, if included, is based on what the curator feels is important about the work or what forms the thesis of the exhibition. Educators then take their places as editors of the texts and producers of additional programming – talks, school programmes, or perhaps resources for children. They may have some say over the choice of objects included, but not often. The audience is for the most part imagined, and the representation of a curatorial thesis the central focus.

Picture for a moment an alternative model of curating an exhibition, where visitor motivations and modes of learning are accounted for in the initial stages of planning. Where consideration of how the exhibition might be experienced by visitors is taken into account alongside the intellectual content devised by curators. These visitors, rather than existing largely in the imaginations of curators, are understood from evaluation and research. Staff members with experience in education, interpretation and communication are involved in the exhibition's production from the very early phases and work alongside curators throughout the process. The main roles of these staff members are to research and think about the way in which visitors respond to exhibitions and apply these principles during the planning process.

The descriptions of exhibition production presented in the preceding paragraphs are not intended to encapsulate exactly what happens within institutions. Instead, they describe two examples of ways of thinking about the way in which exhibitions are realised: the first, a curator-centric model, and the second, a more holistic model in which curators work as part of a larger team that includes interpretation

specialists or educators. The second reflects a move towards collaboration of education and curatorial departments that can be observed in some museums of art, a model which breaks from the traditional divide between these departments that has long existed. As Benjamin Ives Gilman, Secretary of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts stated in 1923, “a museum of art is primarily an institution of culture and only secondarily a seat of learning” (Tapia and Barrett 2003:197) – and later, in 2008, as Andrew McClellan claimed, “Tensions between museums’ goals to collect and preserve and to educate are built into the structure and staffing of museums” (2008:155).

This thesis examines new models of exhibition production in art museum practice, similar to the more collaborative model described above, and how these models affect museum representations. I was inspired to pursue this research as a result of my involvement in a collaborative exhibition project that experimented with the configuration of staff; while working on this exhibition project, which I will discuss in more depth in section 1.4, I became intrigued by the changes to the construction of art historical narratives as a result of collaborative working processes. A question arose in my mind: What happens to museum representations when decision-making power is more broadly distributed among members of the organisation? This thesis examines the results of more collaborative approaches to exhibition production, uncovering the ways in which new organisational models have altered the knowledges of art presented through museum displays. It argues that knowledge produced in museums is influenced: 1.) by structural factors such as the configuration of staff, 2.) by the introduction of new and powerful agents to the organisational structure and 3.) by the processes through which exhibitions are brought to life. This understanding is important because it denaturalises the natural: it reveals the ways in which the representations of art and art history as presented by museums are socially constructed, capable of being altered when changes occur to modes of production.

Firstly, I argue that new organisational structures are changing the way knowledges of art are constructed by art museums, and subsequently how they are presented through display. In recent years, some museums of art have begun to use models of exhibition production in which consideration of the visitor experience takes priority,

and where education and curatorial teams work more closely together. These models have been called ‘interdisciplinary’ (O’Neill 2007), ‘project approaches’ (Morgan 2013), and ‘core team approaches’ (Filippini-Fantoni 2015), and the trend in implementing institution-wide interpretive planning has been the subject of a selection of books published since 2013 (i.e. Wells et al. 2013, Farnell (ed.) 2015). In these institutions, the production of exhibitions and displays often involves collaboration with interpretation specialists – members of staff who have expertise in communicating with visitors, understanding how they engage with displays, facilitating knowledge encounters in the gallery space and whose remit is to concentrate specifically on these areas of exhibition production. A role that combines aspects of curatorial and educational practices, I argue that interpretation specialists have a unique position in the organisational structure: they act as connectors, mediators, translators and bridges across organisational boundaries and facilitate communication between curators, educators, designers, exhibition teams and other members of staff. Additionally, they act as a bridge between the institution and its audiences.

Second, I argue that the introduction of new, more powerful agents to the organisational structure can affect and change the knowledges produced through display. Drawing on theories of power and status from organisational studies, such as the concepts of ‘expert power’ and ‘position power’ (French and Raven 1959, Handy 1993), I argue that a change in leadership and a disruption to existing power structures can impact upon the knowledges constructed through display; for example, the hiring of a new director can influence not only the subject matter of exhibitions, but the choice of display style, the approach taken towards interpretation, or the balance of decision-making power between curators and learning staff. All of these factors contribute to the ideas, theories and knowledges presented through museum representations. These factors can radically alter the choice of truths, positions and histories established by an institution.

And third, I argue that the processes by which exhibitions are brought to life affect the construction of knowledge. The thesis will examine interpretive practices in three institutions, demonstrating through the concepts of ‘convergence’, ‘divergence’ and ‘contention’ that the processes involved in producing exhibitions and

interpretation can unify, limit or even disrupt the production of museum representations – thus altering the way in which art and art history are constructed through display.

As already indicated, this thesis focuses on interpretation in museums of art: the conditions of its production, the dynamics and politics of cultures of interpretation and how organisational and structural factors influence the construction of knowledge. The specific aim of this research is threefold: first, to uncover some of the ‘behind-the-scenes’ or ‘backstage’ practices involved in the production of exhibitions and interpretation in art museums; second, to understand how these practices connect to the ‘front stage’ representations made in museum displays; and third, to decode and critically analyse the content of such representations in relation to the construction of art knowledges. The thesis takes the view that interpretation can be seen as the ‘voice’ of an institution – therefore, struggles over whose voices are heard are a common feature of the knowledge production process.

The focal point of study is the work of interpretation specialists and the unique position they occupy in the structure of the organisation. I argue that interpretation specialists contribute to the production of new knowledges of art by acting as ‘boundary brokers’ (Wenger 2000) – facilitating knowledge flows through the organisation and among groups and communities of practice, contributing to the shifting of disciplinary boundaries, and changing museum interpretive approaches from ‘product-based’ to ‘process-based’ (Whitehead 2012).

Product-based approaches, historically dominant in art museums, emphasise the art *object*, its importance, the importance of the artist, and how it relates to other artworks and art styles or movements. In order to fully understand these relations, prior knowledge and understanding of art history is often paramount. Process-based approaches, on the other hand, look more broadly to examine how, why and for whom artworks have been made and how they relate to the cultural and societal contexts from where they originated. The types of questions asked through a process-based approach seek to challenge the notion of art objects as ‘transcendental’, encouraging the viewer to think more critically about the significance of objects on display. Process-based approaches to interpretation do not

require the viewer to arrive with vast amounts of prior knowledge in order to make sense of what they see – instead, these approaches encourage critical thinking, questioning and reflection and often relate to everyday life. For this reason, process-based approaches are arguably more accessible to a wider audience. As interpretation specialists play a role in shifting an organisation's approach from product-based to process-based, I argue that they are key players both in helping institutions reaching out to more diverse audiences and in radically altering our understanding of art history.

The project was formulated as a response to changing trends in art museum practice over approximately the last decade. Traditionally, 'curators' and 'educators' occupied two distinct and separate departments within the organisational structure with each party being responsible for certain types of interpretation. Curators, for example, traditionally interpreted collections through layout, positioning and narration and produced certain types of textual interpretation like labels and exhibition catalogues. Museum educators, on the other hand, produced resources for schools, families and organised workshops and events and most often did not participate in the choice of or placement of objects in the galleries. The types of interpretation produced by educators have been historically considered 'teaching' or types of 'experiences' (Burnham and Kai-Kee 2011). These additional resources or activities are critically described by Cheryl Meszaros as a type of 'supplement' based on Derrida's concept of covering a 'lack' – in this case, the "lack and deficiency of the pedagogy of display" (Meszaros et al 2011:38). However, museum practice in recent years has seen a more unified, less 'supplemental' approach to interpretation as departmental boundaries between curators and educators have started to blur.

With the 'reinvention' (Anderson 2004) of modern museums and their 'renewal' (Janes 2009), art museums are responding to changes to their purpose and function by adapting their aims and objectives and the ways in which they work. Many art museums have made changes to organisational structures, models of exhibition production and interpretive strategies partly as a means of responding to their shifting identity and role in society. Others have responded to a changing trend in curating in which the 'white cube' model of exhibitions has shifted to make way for more immersive, experiential exhibitions; an appeal to audiences who crave the

interactivity and entertainment that has begun to make up the fabric of everyday 21st century life.

This thesis looks in depth at three case study institutions that have recently undergone redevelopment projects where a change to staffing structures and to interpretive strategies took place. In order to understand how structural and social relationships interact with the construction of knowledges, the research used a methodological approach that utilised display analysis to examine museum representations and attempted to trace them to their modes of production. Three case study institutions were chosen based on the scope of their collections and the timeframes of their redevelopment projects: The Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, Tate Britain in London and the Peabody Essex Museum in Massachusetts, USA. These will be introduced in more detail in section 1.5. First, section 1.1 will provide an overview of what is meant by 'interpretation', while sections 1.2 - 1.4 will situate and provide justifications for the research.

1.1 What is 'interpretation'?

As a precursor to discussing museum interpretive strategies, it is useful to provide an introductory dialogue of what is meant by 'interpretation' that will help contextualise the rest of this chapter and provide a starting point for the rest of the thesis. Unfortunately, pinning down what is meant by 'interpretation' is not an easy task, as there is no clear and specific definition. As explained in more depth in Chapter Two, where an overview of relevant literature is provided, the concept of art interpretation can be variable, shifting and personal. It can encompass a range of ideas and can be described as both a process and a product. The concept of art interpretation is a continually debated subject, and often as difficult to define as it is to define 'art'. For the purposes of this thesis, however, definitions of interpretation are based on three ideas: first, that it can be a *product* created to enhance or support the understanding of art objects within museum displays. Second, it can be referred to as a *department* in a museum, consisting of staff members whose role revolves around creating products of interpretation and in implementing interpretive strategies. Third, it can be described as an *action*, an activity, or something one does when trying to make meaning from an encounter with an art object. These three

categories of ideas are not exhaustive definitions, but rather are a type of “framing” (Goffman 1974) that helps focus the findings of the research.

Despite these three frames that help categorise understandings of interpretation in this study, in reality each of these three groupings encapsulate a wide range of debates. As a ‘product’, interpretation can include the static information situated throughout a display, including text labels, panels and so forth. It can include digital interpretive resources, such as multimedia guides, touchscreens, and collections information accessed online. But it can also encompass ‘experiences’ such as tours and talks or hands-on activities designed to promote participation either within an exhibition or alongside it. It can include the overall ‘ambiance’ (Raney 2007) of a gallery space. Interviews conducted by Lynch (2007) with directors, curators and educators in contemporary art galleries in the UK suggested that ‘interpretation’ is anything that contributes to opening up of intellectual access. Ultimately, among practitioners, the scope of what interpretation is continues to be debated and varies from institution to institution.

As a role in an organisation, ‘interpretation’ is also a fluid concept that is defined differently among museums. For the purposes of this research, I have used the term ‘interpretation specialist’ to group together the staff members whose role has something to do with interpretation or managing interpretive strategies; however, the scope of each specialist’s role varied. For some, their job included aspects of interpretive planning, curating of exhibitions, producing interactives and contributing to the design of an exhibition in addition to producing textual materials. For others, their main roles were to liaise with curators and serve in an editorial capacity, with a focus on text labels, text panels and other text-based resources. They may have been a part of meetings discussing the layout of exhibitions, but mainly contributed to the production of text rather than the choice of objects or the way in which they were displayed. So, despite the grouping together of these individuals in the thesis, in reality the job role of an ‘interpretation specialist’ can vary and their level of autonomy and authority differs among institutions.

Interpretation is also talked about as a process that a viewer goes through when interacting with an object, a process of ‘meaning-making’ connected with ideas of

the constructivist museum and constructivist learning (Hein 1995). Although the focus of this thesis is not on the way in which individuals interpret objects, but rather on interpretive strategies as produced by an organisation, in many interviews respondents moved back and forth between these concepts. Within the same interview, a staff member might refer to a visitor's interpretation, the interpretation department and the interpretation on the walls. Despite the use of one word to describe all three, in reality they are very different ideas, all connected to the process of interpreting an object. It has been difficult to untangle the multiple concepts from each other, leading to a kind of messiness in the research; the literature review in Chapter Two will add to the theoretical concepts and definitions of interpretation in more depth, helping to make sense of the complexity of this topic.

1.2 Situating the Research: Art Interpretation and the Construction of Knowledge

The premise of this thesis is based on the idea that museums do not reflect reality, but rather construct it through discursive acts of assembling objects and knowledges in relation with one another. In essence, museums theorise. As Sharon Macdonald states:

Any museum or exhibition is, in effect, a statement of position. It is a theory: a suggested way of seeing the world. And, like any theory, it may offer insight and illumination. At the same time, it contains certain assumptions, speaks to some matters and ignores others, and is intimately bound up with – and capable of affecting – broader social and cultural relations. (1996:14)

This theorising is done largely through physical display. 'Display' is defined as the "organisation in space of cultural objects (ranging from tangible objects to places, concepts, historical events or personages) for staged, and sometimes cumulative, encounters between visitors who are assumed to be engaged in co-ordinated acts of locomotion, sensing (primarily looking), reading and viewing" (Whitehead et al 2012:48). The size and scope of a 'display' can range from a single item in a glass case through to the arrangement of hundreds of cultural objects in multiple gallery spaces. The combination of objects, positioning, lighting, available interpretation, inclusion or exclusion of histories – to name a few – all become part of the theories

presented by the institution. Through these acts of display, propositions of knowledge are presented to the public. These arrangements of knowledges, statements and theories – most often called ‘exhibitions’ – have been described metaphorically as narratives, types of texts and as film (Bal 1996, 2008) but also as maps (Whitehead 2009, 2011).

This thesis is most closely aligned with the view that the museum is a type of map; Whitehead (2009) uses the terms ‘differentiation’, ‘narration’ and ‘evaluation’ to describe how the museum ‘maps’ objects, classifies them, places them in relation to one another and creates a particular narrative or posits a particular theory or argument. Through strategies such as classification of objects into disciplinary categories, arrangement of objects, highlighting particular objects and de-emphasising others, placing objects in juxtaposition with one another and suggesting relationships between objects, the museum represents what is considered important and what stories are worth telling. Through modes of display, the museum theorises, constructs art historical knowledges and acts as a classifying agent. These strategies taken together form the museum’s ‘statement of position’.

But, it is not simply the products of display that theorise. The process involved in producing a display is a form of theorising, one that can be altered by organisational politics (Karp and Lavine, 1991; Gray, 2015), the architecture of a building (MacLeod 2005; MacLeod et al 2012; Tzoritzi 2015), allocation of funding and commercial interests (McClellan 2008), and a host of other factors. In the case of art museums, artworld politics may shape the theorising that occurs; Bourdieu (1986) argues that many ‘agents’ are involved in determining the value of art, from artists to collectors to curators, and the ‘vast operation of social alchemy’ (p. 137) involves many different agents who act over time. These agents all contribute to the production of knowledges of art, or ways of knowing and understanding art. When these knowledges come together in particular formations within exhibitions, a type of theorising occurs – producing a statement of position that suggests how we should view the objects on display, their relation to one another and their relationship with the wider world.

The question then remains, *how* do mappings of objects and knowledges come about? Who are the authors of the narratives about art, and who are the key agents involved in Bourdieu's 'vast operation of social alchemy'? Who in the organisational structure has the authority to determine the arguments or theories presented through display? In the conventional model of exhibition production described in the opening paragraph of this chapter, it would seem as though curators were the only authors or creators of such knowledge propositions and that they consciously orchestrate the messages within. It would also seem that, with the inclusion of a wider range of participants in the production process, that the construction of knowledge is more complex but yet still easy to understand. This is not the case. Even in a conventional model of production, which seems simpler, elements such as the architecture of the gallery spaces, the range of objects available (either from a museum's collection or available on loan) and the interpretive agency of visitors can alter the intended messages (Mason 2005). With the inclusion of interpretation specialists and with the use of more collaborative methods of production, the process becomes even 'messier' and its dynamics more difficult to trace and comprehend. There are many agents acting together during the production of an exhibition, all of whom contribute to knowledge production. As Macdonald (1996) argues, "museums negotiate a nexus between cultural production and consumption, and between expert and lay knowledge" (p.4) - this 'nexus' is a complex point where power struggles may occur, dominant interests are brought to the fore, classifications challenged, and complex social relationships negotiated.

This study attempts to make sense of some of the dynamics of production that occur between production and consumption and between different levels of expertise and knowledge. While indeed the findings are 'messy', they reveal aspects of the production of knowledge in museums that were not known before, connecting the findings with theories of organisation to view museum practice through a new lens. In doing so, it offers a better understanding of how changes to organisational structures alter the messages that museums communicate. In providing a clearer picture of the factors that influence museum communication, museum professionals might gain a better understanding of how to better serve their visitors, persuade funders to support their work and to reach more diverse audiences. Understanding

the dynamics at play in knowledge production also opens up debates and increases awareness of the political nature of museum communication.

Some aspects of organisational theory drawn upon in the thesis examine how knowledge is shared and produced among organisational members and how organisational structures and interdisciplinary teams affect knowledge production. Bringing organisational theories of knowledge production together with museological and sociological approaches allows for the construction of new understanding of the significance of organisational structures in museum practice and opens up new lines of inquiry and debate.

1.3 Justification for the Research

As indicated earlier in this chapter, the thesis proceeds from the constructionist viewpoint that museum displays are a type of embodied theory – that museums are not merely ‘reflective’, presenting a single truth, but rather utilise displays as a means of representing a particular view or statement of position on how we should understand the objects on display. The nature of the relationship between cultural production and consumption, along with the relationship between expert and lay knowledge (the ‘nexus’ as described by Macdonald 1996) is an area that is under-researched. But it also an area that, if better understood, would lead to a fuller comprehension of the forces at play in producing exhibitions, and the ways in which political and cultural motivations intentionally and unintentionally penetrate the gallery space. This thesis attempts to better understand a small part of this ‘nexus’: the interaction between different types of expert knowledge along with the conditions of cultural production.

Museum professionals both consciously and unconsciously construct narratives that include some accounts and exclude others, which can lead to museum visitors leaving with skewed, partial or biased understandings. Of course, visitors can sometimes misread these messages as well – however, because museum publics trust their singular truth and authority, museum professionals need to be aware of their actions. This has been discussed at length by Whitehead (2012, 2016) who explains that it is paramount to be able to “decode, deconstruct and denaturalise museum communication” (2016:3). A great deal of museum studies research has

focused on museum representations – quite arguably, the majority of research on exhibitions and displays focuses on the messages communicated to audiences. Some research exists on organisational ‘behind-the-scenes’ aspects of museum practice, such as Sharon Macdonald’s (2002) *Behind the Scenes at the Science Museum*. But to date, very little has been written about what happens ‘centre stage’ – in other words, how the dynamics of structures and professional social interactions connect with what is presented to audiences. How do social interactions among producers affect museum representations? How do structural factors such as the organisation of staff, hierarchies and organisational cultures impact upon cultures of interpretation? Who is included in the collective ‘institutional interpretive voice’, and who is excluded?

If we assume (as stated above) that the truth claims and representations made by museums are usually viewed as factual, based on expertise, and capable of significantly influencing society, it is important to deconstruct their practices in order to better understand how meaning is made. This thesis does not seek to decode how visitors make sense of displays, as that is beyond the scope of the research. Instead, it seeks to uncover some of the hidden, behind-the-scenes practices of interpretation specialists and those they work closely with, revealing some of the institutional and social dynamics of the production of art knowledges. Researching and analysing the processes of production will help us develop a deeper understanding of the ways in which museums of art construct knowledge, help practitioners realise and reflect on the impact of what they produce, and inform future work in a sector faced with increasing demands to communicate more effectively with its audiences.

1.4 Personal Interest and Positioning

I became interested in the subject of interpretation while working as a learning officer at the Laing Art Gallery in Newcastle upon Tyne, UK. A small, regional art museum, the Laing had a handful of curators and a team of two educators whose main role was to develop programmes for schools and families. The process of developing temporary exhibitions rarely involved much input from the learning team, other than to review text labels. However, when the learning team was

included in larger scale redevelopment projects and given some responsibility for contributing to interpretive planning, I observed that the knowledges produced had a very different feel. They seemed less laden with art historical terminology, were more participatory in nature and seemed to appeal to a wider range of visitors. While the observation about visitors is primarily anecdotal and was gathered from conversations with staff, there was a marked difference in the visitor figures that summer. There were more children and families interacting within the gallery spaces, rather than only coming to take part in scheduled events.

I began to wonder about larger institutions and how their exhibition development processes differed from those I had been a part of. While I was part of a small team and therefore easily able to discuss the content of exhibitions with other staff, the roles of 'curator' and 'educator' (or in this case, 'learning officer') were distinctly divided. The responsibility for producing interpretation and for planning the content of temporary exhibitions fell firmly onto the shoulders of the curators. When I grew curious about the structures of larger museums, I noticed that in many there was a role dedicated to interpretation. In some institutions, these staff members simply edited text to ensure it was easy to comprehend by visitors. But, in other institutions, interpretation staff had a much wider remit: they co-constructed exhibitions alongside curators, leading on interpretive planning and connecting educational and curatorial aims. The resulting exhibitions, displays and interpretive resources appeared to have shifted, taking a less traditional art historical approach. Narratives, text and other interpretation appeared to be written for a wider audience.

Around this time, Christopher Whitehead published *Interpreting Art in Museums & Galleries* (2012) which examines and critiques interpretive practices in museums and galleries. Whitehead's research looks at these new models of exhibition production, but the focus of his work is mainly on the interpretive outcomes of such working arrangements. Whitehead presents theoretical frameworks for examining interpretation in art museums and galleries, encouraging a deeper engagement with some of the historical and political aspects of interpretation. His research analyses the way museums construct 'art' but does not examine in depth the organisational and structural factors that influence this process. My own research builds on this

knowledge, utilising some of the theoretical frameworks developed by Whitehead to inform the methodology and to more thoroughly investigate organisational factors that influence changes to interpretive practice.

As my project progressed, it became evident that the meanings and understandings of the concept of 'interpretation' are very different between individuals and institutions. What was originally a clear concept (to me) soon became a philosophical and theoretical debate. As mentioned, interpretation was defined as a product – text labels, multimedia guides, and so on, it was defined as a department and a job in the organisation, and it was defined as a personal act that one undertakes when viewing an artwork. One of the most challenging aspects of the research was navigating the myriad 'interpretations of interpretation' which I discovered as I spoke to participants. I have tried to distinguish 'interpretation' as a concept from 'interpretation' as a job role throughout the thesis, but inevitably these two concepts continually intersect throughout.

As mentioned above, this project arose out of experiences gained as a museum professional. This has undoubtedly affected my position as a researcher, as has my prior professional experience and education. My first degree was in art education, which was followed by seven years of art teaching in schools. I later transitioned to a museum career after completion of an MA in Art Gallery and Museum Studies at Newcastle University. Naturally, my background in education and my focus on communicating to wide audiences throughout my museum career has affected my perspective on both the significance of art museums and their role in society.

Throughout the research, I have tried as much as possible to put aside my professional experience and approach the project with fresh eyes. However, as hard as I try, this experience has come through at certain points in the thesis and my passion for making art museums as accessible as possible is evident. My professional experience in museum education positions me in such a way that many of the ideas I assume are factual are opinion. Two decades after training as an art teacher and later as a gallery educator, the idea that 'art is for all' is deeply ingrained within my psyche. I also bring to the research a philosophy of art that tightly interweaves product and process; that understanding and experiencing the processes of making

and the context in which an object was produced or originally intended for provides deep and meaningful engagement. These personal philosophies of art are by no means based on facts – instead, they are frames by which I view the art world, based on my own education and experience.

In many ways, my experience of working as an art educator and working directly with museum audiences in the past was an asset as I conducted the research. I noticed details that may have been overlooked by someone without this experience, such as the way in which family visitors engaged with interpretive materials, the intellectual accessibility of exhibitions and the degree to which ‘interactive’ and ‘family-friendly’ elements of exhibitions were either segregated from or interwoven into the main displays. Because I strongly believe that the arts are something all of us should feel confident engaging with, much of the thinking and analysis that happened during the course of the research was viewed through this ‘art for all’ framing.

1.5 Introduction to the Case Studies

This research looks at the working practices in three museums of art located in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States. The case study institutions vary in size and scope, but all present a mix of historical and contemporary exhibitions and displays and all have large, varied collections. The following sections will give a brief overview of each case study institution in order to provide context and orientation for the remainder of the thesis.

1.5.1 The Rijksmuseum

The Rijksmuseum was established in 1800 as the ‘Nationale Kunstgalerij’ or National Art Gallery, following France’s lead in setting up a national museum (Spaans 2015, Rijksmuseum 2017a). The Nationale Kunstgalerij began with a collection of over 200 paintings and objects, and its first director soon began a process of expanding the collection exponentially. First located in The Hague, the museum soon moved to the new capital city of Amsterdam. After years of relocations among pre-existing buildings and the dividing and uniting of various collections, work began on constructing a purpose-built museum to house everything. Architect Pierre Cuypers designed the Gothic and Renaissance inspired

building that is the Rijksmuseum of today, which was opened officially in 1885. The museum's location on the edge of the city, between the old town and a new district, meant the city of Amsterdam required Cuypers to include a city gate or passage that connected the two.

Cuypers designed a central gallery in the building called the 'Eregalerij' or 'Gallery of Honour', in which Rembrandt's *The Night Watch* (1642) was the central focus. Over the subsequent years, the collection was expanded further and various renovations and changes were made to the original building. Meanwhile, in 1927, the museum's structure was divided into two, forming the departments of Dutch History and Sculpture and Applied Art. These departments were housed in separate parts of the museum building, and the displays were divided accordingly. These departments remained separate until the building-wide renovation in 2012, therefore the complete reorganisation of both departments and displays at this time was a significant change.

Today, the grand and imposing building remains where it has for over a century, on a site south of the centre of Amsterdam. Situated on the 'Museumplein', the Rijksmuseum overlooks a green space bordered by both the Van Gogh Museum and the Stedelijk contemporary art museum, all of which attract large numbers of tourists each year. Nearly 2.5 million visitors were recorded in 2014 (Rijksmuseum 2014:26), the year preceding data collection for this study and the year after the museum reopened. The museum is a hub of activity, with a cycle path running through the passage beneath the archways in the centre of the building. During the process of redevelopment, this gateway was the cause of much debate, and ultimately pressure from the public forced the architects of the new Rijksmuseum to maintain the passage within the new design.

The €375m redevelopment was finally completed in 2013, after nearly a decade, and saw the museum's interior completely overhauled and its collections redisplayed. No longer separated in sections of the building by discipline, they were brought together in what was described by Annemies Broekgaarden, Head of Public & Education, as a 'mixed presentation' (2015) – organised to tell a chronological story via a series of thematic groupings. The combining of fine art, decorative art and

historical objects marked a radical departure for the museum and its interpretive strategy was completely redeveloped. Alongside an arduous physical redevelopment, the museum staff rewrote thousands of text labels and presented the collections in a way that had not been done before. It was a long, difficult process of organisational change for all involved and resulted in the unification of departments, disciplines and collections. The museum's revenue streams changed as well – a reduction in government funding from 70% in the 1990s to 50% at the time of the reopening (Higgins 2013) resulted in a greater focus on fundraising and creative programming.

The Rijksmuseum's collections are comprised of approximately one million objects with 8,000 of these on display (Rijksmuseum 2017a). The Eregerij and Rembrandt's *The Night Watch* are still the central focal point of both the collection and the building, and the painting is a national treasure reproduced on everything from advertising to items in the museum shop. The collection comprises paintings by other Dutch masters such as Johannes Vermeer, Frans Hals and Jan Steen; the Eregerij houses these masterpieces along with other highly valued works from the Dutch Golden Age. The museum also has a small collection of Asian art, acquired in the 1950s.

The vision and mission of the Rijksmuseum is published on the museum's website, and is described as follows:

- Vision
 - The Rijksmuseum links individuals with art and history.
- Mission
 - At the Rijksmuseum, art and history take on new meaning for a broad-based, contemporary national and international audience.
 - As a national institute, the Rijksmuseum offers a representative overview of Dutch art and history from the Middle Ages onwards, and of major aspects of European and Asian art.
 - The Rijksmuseum keeps, manages, conserves, restores, researches, prepares, collects, publishes and presents artistic and historical objects, both on its own premises and elsewhere.
 - Rijksmuseum (2017)

The museum also emphasises its function as a 'national' museum, one which brings visitors in touch with 'art and history'. While the collections have been redisplayed and unified, the language of the institution still reflects the historical division of

disciplines. 'Art' is still distinct from 'history', even though the aims of the museum are to showcase all of these objects in one chronological display. The museum's vision and mission makes it clear that they are speaking to both a national and contemporary audience, and this is reflected throughout the museum's interpretation, multimedia guides and publications which are all available in many different languages. The role of education is not clearly stated within the mission and vision; instead, the museum uses the phrase 'presents' in relation to artistic and historical objects. Although the vision and mission suggest otherwise, a large part of what the Rijksmuseum does is led by education and learning.

Renate Meijer, Senior 'Medewerker' (Education Officer) for Public & Education explained that, during the process of renovating and subsequently reopening the museum, the Department of Public & Education grew exponentially. It developed from a small team of a few staff, to a large department of staff, volunteers and workshop facilitators. The renovation and growth of the department allowed for a new emphasis on audience engagement; staff were assigned to focus on the needs of particular audience groups with schools, families and adults forming the main three audience segments. As part of the redevelopment, a building initially marked out to become a research library was subsequently 'given' to education, and the Teekenschool was established. Meijer explained its function as a school for 'hands-on experiences with art and history', ranging from drawing workshops for adults to drama workshops for schoolchildren.

Unlike the other case studies in this project, the Rijksmuseum did not have a defined department of interpretation. Instead, the role of producing interpretation was the responsibility of a small team of 'adult educators' within the larger Department of Public & Education. The staff members, called Education Officers (translated from the Dutch 'Medewerker') worked alongside curators and other staff to collaborate on the rewriting of text labels, developing a series of information cards, designing multimedia guides and developing and organising tours. But, as indicated earlier in this chapter, for the purposes of this research I have called these staff 'interpretation specialists'. Their position and role within the organisational structure will be more fully explained in Chapter Four.

1.5.2 Tate Britain

Located on the north bank of the Thames River in London, Tate Britain is the oldest of four Tate galleries: Tate Britain, Tate Modern, Tate Liverpool and Tate St. Ives. The story of Tate Britain began in 1889 when Henry Tate, an industrialist who had made his fortune as a sugar refiner, offered his collection of British art to the National Gallery. He insisted that the works be displayed in a room dedicated to what he called the 'Tate Collection'. Unfortunately, the National Gallery could not accept the bequest because of space constraints, so instead a new gallery housing British works from the collections of Tate and others was proposed. With an 'anonymous' donation of £80,000 towards its construction (a donation which turned out to be from Tate himself), the process of site selection and building began (Tate, 2017).

The gallery was founded in 1897 as the National Gallery of British Art, and is situated on the site of the former Millbank Penitentiary. Architect Sidney R.J. Smith was chosen for the project, and the building's design was influenced by the footprint of the demolished penitentiary. When it first opened, the gallery displayed 245 works from British artists dating back to 1790. Now known as Tate Britain, the gallery houses a collection of 70,000 objects, of which a large number are paintings and sculpture; the gallery's collection also includes a significant collection of works by J.M.W. Turner. Over the years, the building has had many extensions and renovations as the collections grew or were transferred from the National Gallery; in 1937 the Duveen sculpture galleries opened, which were the first in England designed specifically for the display of sculpture (ibid). Later, in 1955, Tate separated completely from the National Gallery, and in 1979 and 1987 further extensions were built, including the Clore Gallery which was funded by the Clore Foundation – a grant-making charity that supports learning within cultural organisations.

Tate Britain's grand entrance leads up a set of steps and through Corinthian columns, into a domed portico. Atop the entryway sit sculptures of Britannia, a lion and a unicorn, signifying the gallery's mission of displaying British art. Entrance to the gallery is free, although exhibitions incur a fee. Of the three case studies

examined in this research, Tate Britain was the only institution to provide access to its main displays free of charge. The Tate philosophy towards interpretation is, in principle, meant to be aligned among all four sites with information provided 'at the point of encounter' with a work of art. How this is implemented in displays and exhibitions varies from site to site, however, and the approach at Tate Britain will be examined further in Chapter Five.

In 2012, under the management of a new director, Penelope Curtis, the gallery undertook a re-installation of its permanent galleries. Whereas previously works from the collection were displayed thematically, the new display sought to arrange works in the order in which they were produced. The *BP Walk through British Art* (British Petroleum being a main sponsor) presented the collection in a circuit around the perimeter of the building, arranged by date. Prior to this, interpretive panels were placed next to each object, textual interpretation in the new display was kept to a minimum and aesthetic arrangement emphasised. Curtis's *New Juxtapositions* gallery guide (2015), available to view in the undercroft display space, explained how the redisplay was part of a larger project known as the 'Millbank Project', which commenced in 2007. The project focused on restoring the focus on the principal façade of the building, re-emphasising historical aspects of the building's architecture and opening up more public spaces. This included the opening of space in the undercroft of the building as well as opening a new café. The Millbank Project and subsequent redisplay of the collections all centred on reviving the history and original architecture of the building, providing an example of 'critical spatial practice' (Rendell 2006) that connects Tate's architectural past with its present.

Tate Britain's mission and vision are aligned with the broader Tate vision, as stated in Tate's 2015/16 annual report:

Tate is a champion of art and its value to society. It believes that an understanding of the visual can enrich all our lives and that artists make a special contribution to the community. Tate therefore has the ambition to make us all aware of the significance of the visual in contemporary life and how artists help us to see and interpret the world. (Tate, 2016:2)

This vision emphasises the importance of art and artists in society and how art influences our views of the world. As Tate Britain operates as part of the larger Tate venture, it does not sit in isolation, solely focused on historical art. The role of contemporary art and living artists is as much a part of the mission of Tate Britain as it is of the other Tate sites – art is recognised not simply as a record of the past, but as a living and vibrant part of our everyday lives.

Tate’s funding stream comes partially from government sources; it receives 30% of its funding from the UK Department of Culture, Media and Sport and 70% from ‘non-governmental sources’ such as temporary exhibition charges, fundraising and trading (ibid). Corporate sponsors include BMW, British Petroleum, Microsoft, Deutsche Bank and many others, while the list of sponsors, patrons and benefactors provided in the 2015/16 Tate Report numbers in the hundreds. Government sponsorship in the UK has, in recent years, declined significantly, making fundraising efforts and creative programming a priority for the institution.

The organisational structure of Tate is large and complex, spanning across four sites and involving nearly 1300 staff. At Tate Britain, a small interpretation department oversees the production of interpretive information for exhibitions and displays, with one staff member managing the team and producing interpretation (the ‘Convenor’), two staff dedicated only to producing interpretation (the ‘Interpretation Curators’) and one staff in an assistant role (the ‘Assistant Curator of Interpretation’). Some Tate Britain staff work across sites in London and are responsible for working on exhibitions and displays at Tate Modern as well as Tate Britain. We will return to a more in-depth discussion of the organisational structure and staff roles in Chapter Five.

1.5.3 The Peabody Essex Museum (PEM)

Located in Salem, Massachusetts, the Peabody Essex Museum (referred to as ‘PEM’ throughout the thesis) is described as the oldest continually operating museum in the United States (PEM 2017). The city of Salem is located 16 miles north of Boston, Massachusetts. A small but historically significant seaport city, Salem was first settled by Europeans in 1626 and as of 2013 had a population of approximately 42,500.

The original museum collections were established in 1799 by the East India Marine Society, an organisation of Salem captains and entrepreneurs who had travelled beyond the Cape of Good Hope or Cape Horn. PEM's vast collection of 1.8 million objects began as a collection of items brought back by these individuals from their travels at sea; objects originating from the northwest coast of America, Asia, Africa, Oceania, India and elsewhere. As part of the society's charter, it was agreed that a 'cabinet of curiosities' be established, uniting the diverse objects into what were the beginnings of a museum collection. According to the museum, these pioneering individuals wished not only to show off their collections but wanted to educate the local community about the wider world (ibid).

In 1848, The East India Marine Society joined with the Essex Historical Society (also based in Salem), merging into one new organisation called the Essex Institute. This merger brought together the diverse range of objects from cultures around the world with local historical objects, natural history specimens, books and archaeology. A later merger between the Essex Institute and the Peabody Museum of Salem in 1992 formed what is now known as the Peabody Essex Museum. Today, PEM's collection comprises Asian, Asian export, Native American, African, Oceanic and maritime art, as well as fashion and textiles, photography and architecture. In addition to a large central building housing displays of these collections, PEM's campus also includes 24 historic properties. – including Yin Yu Tang, a late 18th century Chinese house which was relocated from its original location in Anhui province to the museum grounds, rebuilt, and opened to the public in 2003. PEM's campus also includes numerous parks and period gardens, and a research library.

In 2003, the museum reopened after a \$200 million redevelopment that added more than 250,000 square feet of space and helped to unify the museum's 24 historic properties and gardens (PEM, 2013). 26,000 square feet of this comprised exhibition galleries and 55,000 square feet of space added now showcases the museum's permanent collections. A new wing was added, and a new education centre was built. Around this time, PEM also added to its grounds an authentic 18th century Chinese house, Yin Yu Tang, which was relocated from its original location in Anhui province and rebuilt. During this phase of the museum's redevelopment, a process of reinvention towards its approach to interpretation, display and engagement began.

This process is ongoing, with further redevelopment expected in the coming years made possible by immensely successful fundraising efforts. A 40,000-square-foot wing is planned for a 2019 opening, and further redevelopments and new collection installations are planned to be completed by 2022 (PEM 2017).

The museum's approach departs from traditional disciplinary groupings and display methods, seeking to combine art, architecture and history and, in the words of the museum, "present art in the world in which it was made" (PEM 2016b) and its overall mission focuses on "transforming people's lives by broadening perspectives, attitudes and knowledge of its audiences through its collections" (ibid). Through thematic groupings, interweaving of historical and contemporary objects in displays, and attention to the audience's overall experience in the museum, PEM's approach to interpretation is innovative among art museums. The museum's continued redevelopment also brought with it a re-think in the way staffing was structured, and in 2011 the post of Chief of Education and Interpretation was created. With this, a process of further organisational change was initiated, and more attention was focused on developing the museum's interpretive philosophy. Further structural changes followed, including the hiring of a staff member whose job was solely focused on overseeing interpretation in the organisation. The museum's vision and mission statement is as follows:

The mission of the Peabody Essex Museum is to celebrate outstanding artistic and cultural creativity by collecting, stewarding and interpreting objects of art and culture in ways that increase knowledge, enrich the spirit, engage the mind and stimulate the senses. Through its exhibitions, programs, publications, media and related activities, PEM strives to create experiences that transform people's lives by broadening their perspectives, attitudes, and knowledge of themselves and the wider world. (PEM 2017)

PEM's vision and mission emphasise the 'transformative' nature of art and how art can positively impact on visitors' lives. This is a departure from focusing on the importance and significance of artworks and historical objects, moving away from a product-based approach to a more holistic and process-based approach that centres on the visitor experience. This is expanded upon in the Mission and Vision 'Summary' section of the museum's website:

The Peabody Essex has emerged as a new and different kind of museum – one that creates a richer experience for visitors by bringing art, architecture and culture together in new ways, and by presenting art in the world in which it was made. (PEM 2017:np)

The museum's mission and vision also emphasise the ways in which it wishes to link past and present through exhibiting and interpretation:

The Peabody Essex is now able to interpret its singular collection in ways that invite visitors to discover the inextricable connections that link artistic and cultural traditions, connections that have always influenced art and culture and that now characterize our lives in a global community. By presenting contemporary and historical work, the museum can help link the past and the present. (ibid)

PEM's visitor base comprises both visitors from Greater Boston and those from Salem and surrounding areas, and annual attendance was approximately 267,000 in 2014. The museum charges an admission fee. However, a membership scheme allows residents of Salem to enter for free. In 2014, approximately 9000 memberships were recorded.

PEM's approach to the organisation of staff is one that emphasises teamwork and collaboration, with staff across departments working together to produce exhibitions and collections displays. At the time of data collection, PEM had a department of interpretation and education led by Dr. Juliette Fritsch. Fritsch, whose PhD focused on visitor studies and interpretation, was part of the Executive Leadership Team and worked closely with other members of the team to lead and direct interpretive strategies throughout the institution. Within this team, interpretive planners and liaisons focused on implementing interpretive strategies, collaborating with curators, designers, educators and others. Chapter Six will examine organisational structures and processes in more depth and will more closely investigate display strategies in the institution.

1.6 Research Questions

This research sets out to answer the questions: how have changing institutional processes affected the production of interpretation? And how has this affected the production of knowledge about art?

The research has four main aims.

Aim 1: To investigate current theories of interpretation in museums of art:

1.1 To define what literature suggests 'interpretation' is in relation to this study, by mapping out contemporary theories and debates.

1.2 To understand how art interpretation has come to be understood as it is today, by mapping out key events in the history of art interpretation and its development in Western Europe and North American since 1793.

1.3 To investigate definitions and theories of interpretation as indicated by practitioners in case study institutions.

Aim 2: To understand the current practices involved in the production of interpretation in case study institutions:

2.1 Examine practices at three case study institutions where organisational change has affected the way interpretation is produced: The Rijksmuseum, Tate Britain and the Peabody Essex Museum.

2.2 Analyse the culture and ethos of each institution: including organisational language, organisational goals and mission, political and economic influences and who their audiences are.

2.3 Analyse who is responsible for production of interpretation, their position within the staffing structure, and what processes they undergo to produce interpretation for displays and exhibitions.

Aim 3: To understand what changes in working practices have occurred in case study institutions and why:

3.1 Identify what structural changes have taken place in each case study institution, what changes to institutional goals and missions have been made and how working processes have changed.

3.2 Analyse internal and external factors which have contributed to the implementation of organisational change.

Aim 4: To determine what new knowledges of art have been produced as a result of organisational change and changing working practices:

4.1 Define 'knowledges of art' and the way in which these are produced and constructed by museums.

4.2 Analyse what knowledges of art are present in displays and exhibitions at case study institutions.

4.3 Identify and analyse how interpretation and knowledges of art have changed or are in the process of shifting in case study institutions, from the perspective of museum staff.

4.4 Analyse the relationship between changing organisational structures and the production of knowledge about art, and how an understanding of these changes might influence universal working practices in museums of art.

1.7 Thesis Synopsis

The thesis is divided into three sections, comprising nine chapters: the first section consists of an introduction, literature review and methods, corresponding to Chapter One, Chapter Two and Chapter Three. The second section, the findings, is comprised of Chapters Four, Five and Six and is where the case studies are introduced and discussed in depth. The final section consists of a discussion chapter (Chapter Seven) followed by conclusions and implications in Chapter Eight.

This chapter (Chapter One) introduces the research and provides an overview of the case study institutions. Following this introductory chapter, Chapter Two examines in detail the concept of 'interpretation', provides a detailed overview of relevant literature and examines the relationship between interpretation and the construction of knowledge. Issues relating to the interpretation of contemporary and historical art will be discussed. The chapter will also examine relevant theories of organisations in relation to this study, providing a foundation for understanding the structural and cultural aspects of organisations that influence the production of interpretation.

Chapter Three will discuss the methodological approaches and research methods used in the study. An in-depth discussion will be provided about institutional approaches to research, challenges faced in the study, the use of case studies and the use of methods implemented in analysing displays. Data collection methods will be explained in detail as will the methods of analysis. This section will foreground the attempts to forge a new method in which analysis of displays is connected and traced to their modes of production.

Chapter Four presents analysis of data collected at the Rijksmuseum, using display analysis and organisational analysis to inform a discussion on the role of boundaries

in the production of knowledge. The chapter focuses on the knowledges presented through the permanent collections displays and examines how disciplinary boundaries are crossed and knowledges combined. The chapter connects organisational processes of interpretation production with the knowledges manifested through display.

Chapter Five presents findings from data collected at Tate Britain. Focused on the *Walk through British Art* chronological circuit, the chapter examines how organisational dynamics have impacted both interpretive strategies and resulting representations of art history. The chapter analyses how a powerful new agent, such as a new director, can impact upon the production of knowledge in museums of art.

Chapter Six presents findings from PEM, focusing on how collaborative working processes have impacted upon interpretive strategies and how this has affected the production of knowledge. The chapter aims to understand how the process of 'interpretive planning' and an institutional focus on 'visitor experience' impacts upon the knowledges presented through display.

Chapter Seven brings together the themes presented in Chapters Four, Five and Six to examine the dynamics behind the construction of knowledge in museums of art. It investigates the connections and disconnects among the findings, drawing together the three case studies in order to expand upon, critique and add to existing research in both museum and organisational studies.

The thesis concludes with Chapter Eight, which provides a summary of the research and a discussion on implications and areas for further research.

Chapter Two

Literature Review: Defining and Theorising Interpretation and Institutions

2.1 Introduction

The two main foci for this research project are art museum interpretation and theories of organisations. This chapter will critically examine literature from these two areas of study, providing a foundation for understanding the case study analysis that follows in later chapters. The literature presented in this chapter will be discussed in more depth further on in the thesis, alongside findings and analysis from each case study institution.

The first half of this chapter will unpack theories of art interpretation for the reader, providing a broad overview of what it means to interpret a work of art, and how 'interpretation' is viewed by art museum professionals. The concept of interpretation is complex and difficult to formalise through definition; therefore this chapter will take the reader on a journey through the literature and examine this concept through various disciplinary and theoretical lenses.

The second half of the chapter will shift towards looking at theories of organisations. As this research project examines the way art museums function as organisations, it is important to provide an overview of relevant areas of organisational theory in order to orientate the reader. What follows is an initial mapping, looking broadly at themes of structure, culture and knowledge construction within organisations. Specific aspects of organisational theory will be examined in more depth in later chapters, in relation to individual case studies.

2.2 Defining and Theorising 'Interpretation'

What is meant by 'interpretation' as used in relation to museum, gallery and heritage practice? What are the origins of this term, and how does its use by museum and gallery professionals differ from its use by theorists, philosophers and

historians? How does the study of hermeneutics inform definitions of interpretation, and how do communication theories function to provide an understanding of the process of interpretation in the museum? What are the difficulties and debates surrounding the interpretation of art in museums? And finally, how is art interpretation viewed through the lenses of gallery education, art history, art theory, museology and from the perspective of museum professionals?

This section (2.2) aims to answer these questions through a review of literature in museum and gallery studies, communication studies, art history, sociology and philosophy. It seeks to clarify the various meanings of the word 'interpretation', particularly in reference to its use in museums and galleries, by drawing upon definitions and debates present within the study of hermeneutics, communication theory, constructivism and semiotics. The section will begin by providing a general overview of the word 'interpretation' as commonly used by museum and gallery professionals and will follow with a review of the theories that have influenced its formation as a concept.

The chapter will then consider debates specific to the interpretation of art, examining the difficulties and complexities encountered when attempting to define and analyse both historical and contemporary art. While interpretation of museum objects is complex in and of itself, interpreting objects as 'art' and in relation to epistemologies of art brings forth another layer of considerations and complexities because of the instability of both the concept and definition of 'art'. Through a review of literature from art gallery education, art history and theory, and museology, the chapter will examine some of the debates surrounding the concept of art interpretation and explore what this means in practice.

2.2.1 Definitions of museum, gallery and heritage 'interpretation'

Definitions of 'interpretation' vary greatly and pinning down a precise definition is a daunting task. Interpretation is one of the least studied areas of art museum practice (Meszaros 2006; Hooper-Greenhill 2000) and also one of the most debated. Even the definition of 'interpretation' is debated. A simple dictionary definition of 'interpretation' states that it is "an explanation or opinion of what something means" (Cambridge Online 2016). Meszaros (2006:10) maintains that "interpretation is a

concept - not unlike 'experience' - that is highly ambiguous, itself open to wildly different interpretations". The task of defining interpretation becomes more difficult when focusing on art: "Any talk of art interpretation is necessarily complex, for art itself is complex and practically impossible to define in itself" (Whitehead 2012:3). The complexities of art-specific interpretation will be examined in more detail later in this chapter.

In the context of museum studies, interpretation can be approached as a product, a process, or a combination of both. As a *product*, interpretation can be defined as the meanings communicated by museum professionals about museum objects and artworks. The word 'interpretation' is also used to describe the resources that are produced in order to communicate these messages. These resources are most commonly thought to be physical objects – such as the wall texts, labels and other textual information about the objects on display. However, 'interpretation' can also include gallery tours, educational activities or even artist interventions. Messages can also be communicated through factors such as the building's architecture, the layout of a gallery, placement of furniture, and the choice of colour on the walls. These forms of communication can be divided into two categories of interpretation: 'verbal' and 'environmental' registers; the verbal register of interpretation includes tangible 'products' that provide textual information, from text panels to audio guides, while the environmental register includes aspects of the physical environment such as the way artworks are lit or the choice of wall colour (Whitehead 2012).

As a *process*, interpretation can be viewed as the act of making sense of, attempting to understand or contemplating the meaning of an artwork or museum object. This is done in a variety of ways, through affective dimensions as well as cognitive dimensions. Viewers may observe an object, experience it emotionally, and relate to it on a personal level. They may attempt to analyse its formal qualities or categorise it historically or compare it with other objects. They may develop more than one interpretation, or their interpretation of a work can change over time. The process of making sense of art or developing an understanding of it is influenced by many factors, such as available interpretive resources, the background of the visitor and their reasons for visiting the museum, environmental considerations, and others.

Whitehead describes the influence of these factors as a third register of interpretation, called the 'experiential' register, encompassing the emotional and personal contexts of the visit and the influence of environmental factors on how an artwork or object is received (Whitehead 2012). The experiential register works alongside the verbal and physical registers to affect the process of interpretation.

In museums, use of the word 'interpretation' can refer to a particular reading or understanding that the viewer has come to about the work or object at a given point in time. However, particular interpretations of a work of art are not necessarily permanent or static. Over time, a viewer's interpretation may change. Abigail Housen's (1983) 'Stage Theory' of aesthetic development details the possible processes viewers may engage in when examining an object or artwork, arguing that viewers move through five stages of aesthetic development, and more experienced viewers may revisit and redefine their interpretations of a given work indefinitely. The multiple uses of the word 'interpretation' within the walls of the museum or gallery mean that it is often misunderstood or used differently by different institutions.

Written definitions of 'interpretation' as used in museums, galleries and heritage can be found throughout both professional and academic literature, and the differences in these definitions illustrate the point that 'interpretation' is not a fixed, well-understood concept. Use varies between fields of study and practice; for example, heritage practitioners may understand its meaning quite differently from those working in art galleries. Freeman Tilden was one of the first people to write extensively about heritage interpretation, describing interpretation as "an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by first-hand experience and by illustrative media rather than simply to communicate factual information" (1957: 8). He suggested that "interpretation is revelation based upon information" and that the "chief aim of interpretation is not instruction, but provocation" (ibid). The production-end of interpretation is the product (i.e. text labels) and the consumption-end is the message the audience receives; Tilden's 'Principles of Interpretation' laid the foundations for an understanding that between production and consumption lies a 'co-construction' of meaning that is made without active collaboration between the

various parties. Tilden's work was mainly within the US National Parks system, and his idea of interpretation has been widely adopted in heritage studies, but the basic premise of his definition appears to have influenced how interpretation is defined in museums and galleries as well. For example, the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) defines interpretation as:

...the media/activities through which a museum carries out its mission and educational role... Interpretation is a dynamic process of communication between the museum and the audience (and) the means by which the museum delivers its content. Interpretation media/activities include, but are not limited to: exhibits, tours, websites, classes, school programs, publications, and outreach. (AAM 2005:np)

Like Tilden, the AAM acknowledges that interpretation is both a product and a process, however, their definition (as written) discounts ideas that interpretation is actually a dialogic activity. Despite indicating that it is a 'dynamic' process, this definition places emphasis on the distribution of the museum's knowledge (or 'content') to the visitor and seems stuck in the idea that the museum is the authority. The focus here is on what the museum provides to the visitor, and not the other way around.

In *The Engaging Museum*, Graham Black (2005) provides further definitions of interpretation sourced from professional organisations. These organisations view interpretation as a communicative process:

The USA National Association for Interpretation defines interpretation as 'a communication process that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and the inherent meanings in the resource'. Interpretation Canada defines it as: 'A communication process designed to reveal meanings and relationships of our cultural and natural heritage to the public, through first hand involvement with objects, artefacts, landscapes or sites'. The Australian Association for Interpretation uses: 'Heritage Interpretation is a means of communicating ideas and feelings which help people understand more about themselves and their environment'. Simplest of all, the Association for Heritage Interpretation in the UK uses: 'The art of helping people explore and appreciate our world'. (Black 2005: 183)

These definitions of interpretation also oversimplify what is inherently a complex concept, as well as place an emphasis on communicating information from the

institution to the viewer. There is a clear bias towards heritage interpretation, and there is little acknowledgement of the role of the viewer in the process. There is an assumption that the 'true' meaning of aspects of cultural and natural heritage is hidden away, and it is the job of the interpreter to 'reveal' them – in the above passage, we can see a clear example of this in the definition provided by Interpretation Canada. There is also an obvious lack of reference to art interpretation in the definitions above, perhaps because of complex political and social factors which will be discussed later.

In academic literature, definitions of 'interpretation' have developed along slightly different lines and have been viewed through various theoretical lenses, including those of hermeneutics, communication theory, learning theory and others. These theories focus primarily on the process of interpretation, or the process of making sense of a text, an artwork or an object. In order to situate the concept of museum, gallery and heritage interpretation within history and understand how it is defined today, this chapter now turns to an overview of theories that have shaped the formation of the broader concept of interpretation.

2.2.2 Theoretical foundations of interpretation: hermeneutics

One of the areas of study that has influenced early thinking about museum interpretation is hermeneutics, or the study of interpretation, which originated in classical antiquity as a means to decipher sacred messages and signs. Hermes (from whose name the term derives) was believed to interpret the elusive wishes of the Gods; later hermeneutics transformed into a way of studying mysterious or difficult aspects of the Bible and communicating the word of God using systematic techniques to decipher the more incomprehensible or elusive aspects of the text. These techniques, which vary among branches of Christianity, examine in detail the language, context, literary genres and other aspects of biblical scripture, contributing to a deeper understanding of its 'correct' meaning (Virkler and Ayayo 2007). German philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768 – 1834) argued that interpretation was not just for sacred texts but could be applied to all human texts and modes of communication, and that misunderstanding of a text could occur no matter its level of accessibility (Lawn 2006). Thus, in the eighteenth century, the

study of hermeneutics moved from a way of examining sacred texts and determining their correct meaning to an area of philosophy that examined the nature of human understanding more generally.

Schleiermacher was influential in the development of Romantic hermeneutics, bringing together trends from older schools of thought with the new 'philosophical hermeneutics' of the twentieth century (Mueller-Vollmer 1985:8). Whereas traditional hermeneutics saw the role of the interpreter as a neutral party who revealed the truth behind a text, Schleiermacher emphasised the role of the interpreter's prejudices in the process of interpretation, as did German hermeneutic philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey (1833 – 1911). During the time of Romantic hermeneutics, Martin Heidegger (1927) advanced the concept of the 'hermeneutic circle', which illustrates the circular process one goes through in order to understand a text, focusing alternately on detail and on the whole in order to comprehend its meaning; it also emphasises the role of previous knowledge or interpretations on understanding. The hermeneutic circle can not only be applied to the reading of a text but plays an essential role in the examination of an artwork. Heidegger discusses the circular nature of art, arguing that understanding a work of art is not possible without an understanding of the artist and of 'art'; the understanding of 'art', artists and the artwork are intertwined and one cannot be understood without the other – just as we move between examining the meaning of a word or section to the meaning of the entire text when interpreting a book, we move between examining the artist, the artwork and the larger concept of 'art' in order to understand a particular work of art.

Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900 – 2002), whose work was influenced by that of Heidegger, came to dominate the study of hermeneutics in the twentieth century with his key work *Truth and Method* (1960). Gadamer developed the idea of 'philosophical hermeneutics', arguing that all understanding is shaded by prejudice, and that all interpretations are dialogical and circular. To Gadamer, everything is an interpretation. There is no single truth, and all interpretations of the world are dependent on pre-understanding. All understanding and interpretation is guided by what Gadamer calls a 'fusion of horizons': "A text, or any thing or event within the world we interpret, has its own *horizon* of meaning. Interpretation is sited within

the mutual horizon of the interpreter and the thing to be interpreted” (Lawn 2006: 2).

Hermeneutic theory has been adapted and related to interpretive practice in museums and galleries by several key authors, primarily Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (1999, 2000), Cheryl Meszaros (2004, 2006, 2007) and Rika Burnham & Elliot Kai-Kee (2011). Hooper-Greenhill (2000) uses the concept of the hermeneutic circle to describe how a viewer makes sense of museum objects:

The process of understanding... is a process of looking from the whole to the detail and back again. The detail contributes to the understanding of the whole. At the same time, almost without being aware of it, the object is treated as part of the whole society, both now (today) and in the past. The object is placed within existing knowledge about the present and the past... The whole is a circular question and answer process. (Hooper-Greenhill 2000:117)

Just as Heidegger argued that an artwork cannot be understood without relating it to the artist and the broader concept of ‘art’, Hooper-Greenhill states that a museum object must be related to its place in history, to pre-existing knowledge and to its place in today’s world. Interpretation and meaning of an object comes from the dialogic encounter between text (the museum object or artwork), interpreter (the viewer) and mediating force (the museum). Meszaros’ work (2007) argues for an understanding of hermeneutical principles in art museum practice, arguing for a “critically engaged interpretation practice’ which calls for ‘an awareness of the kinds of interpretive authorities or traditions of meaning-making that are called upon in an act of interpretation” (p.17). Burnham and Kai-Kee (2011) draw upon Gadamer’s hermeneutics, which have provided the philosophical basis for their work in museum education. While hermeneutical approaches have not had a tremendous impact on museum and gallery practice to date, the work of these authors illustrates that it has provided a basis for some areas of study and analysis.

2.2.3 Theoretical foundations of interpretation: structuralism, semiotics and constructivism

In contrast to hermeneutic approaches to interpretation, Structuralists viewed meaning as being generated through a system of signs. Ferdinand Saussure, a Swiss

linguist, developed a study of the use of signs at the beginning of the 20th century, which came to be known as semiotics. Saussure argued that signs consist of 'signifiers' (for example, text and images) and 'signifieds' (the meaning attached to each signifier). Mason (2005) discusses Saussure's theory:

(Saussure) argued that signification relies on comparison and differentiation between signifiers and that we learn to differentiate as we acquire language. In this respect, meaning depends on a shared understanding of a given signifying system which is socially constructed. (Mason 2005: 18)

Saussure's theories influenced the formation of constructivism, which views interpretation as an active process shaped by a person's previous experience and knowledge. "Constructivist learning theory insists that people make their own active interpretations of experience. Individuals search for meaning, look for patterns, try to invest their experiences with significance.... There is no knowledge outside the knower..." (Hooper-Greenhill 2000a:118). Texts, objects and artwork do not simply have a finite meaning, nor are their meanings determined by the creator, but instead their meanings are constructed in conjunction with the viewer, based on his or her past experiences and cultural influences. These ideas relate to social constructionism, and the idea that knowledge is constructed through social interaction.

Hall (1997) defines constructivism as one of three theories of representation of meaning through language: the reflective, the intentional and the constructionist or constructivist approaches. The reflective approach sees language as a mirror, reflecting the true meaning as it already exists in the world, whereas the intentional approach argues the opposite, suggesting that the author imposes his or her meanings on the world through language. The constructionist or constructivist approach argues that "neither things in themselves nor the individual users of language can fix meaning in language. Things don't *mean*: we *construct* meaning, using representational systems – concepts and signs" (Hall 1997: 25). In the study of museums, and how viewers make meaning from museum experiences, constructivism and semiotics are key players: both have influenced the cross-disciplinary rethinking of the process of meaning-making in which attention "has

turned towards recognising the active role of the reader or the viewer, and rethinking the role of the ‘producer or author’” (Mason 2005: 202).

2.2.4 Communication theory

While hermeneutics, constructivism and semiotics have been important in the formation of the general concept of interpretation, communication theory has been highly influential in how interpretation is viewed and defined specifically in museums and galleries.

An overview of how communication theory influenced museum practice until the mid-2000s can be found in Mason (2005), while Hooper-Greenhill (1999) provides a more detailed look at the development of communication theory and how these theories were applied to museum studies at the end of the twentieth century. Hooper-Greenhill outlines several communication theories, based on the transmission model of communication in which a communicator transmits a message to a receiver through a message or medium. Hooper-Greenhill applies these theories to museum practice, beginning with a simple ‘communicator – message/medium – receiver’ model then explaining how Shannon and Weaver’s model can be applied to various forms of communication (McQuail 1975). Hooper-Greenhill goes on to examine Cameron’s (1968) model, which suggested that there are multiple transmitters, media and receivers; Knez and Wright’s (1970) model, that suggests museums put forth ideas, and Morley’s (1980) ‘hypodermic’ or injection model which argued that museums inject ideas into the receiver. Miles (1985) argued that the linear model of communication is echoed in the exhibition development process, with curators representing the transmitter, designers representing the medium and educators representing the receiver. Miles argued that this model ‘disabled’ the museum, kept departments from working collaboratively and giving all power to curators (Hooper-Greenhill 1999).

Mason (2005:23) also points out that, at the time of writing, museums had come to acknowledge that these linear models of communication assumed that the receivers of information (museum audiences) were “empty vessels waiting to be filled with information or knowledge”. A move towards recognising this was also identified by Karp and Lavine (1991) and Falk and Dierking (1992, 2000). These models applied

mainly to exhibition development. Hooper-Greenhill argued that museums must take a more holistic approach to communication, and that museum-wide elements need to be considered in order to apply theories to the whole of the museum – not just its exhibitions. Other writers in the 1990s and 2000s examined the role of communication in the museum, taking the argument forward that it should be considered in all areas of museum practice. Mason summarises Karp and Lavine's (1991) view that museums are now understood to be not so much places of instruction and dissemination, but spaces which facilitate communication, discussion, exchange and interaction, Bennett's (1995) view of the shift from the museum as 'monologic' to 'dialogic', and Clifford's (1997) argument that museums are 'contact zones', or places where people of different backgrounds come into contact with one another, interacting and establishing relationships.

Jumping ahead in time and from one conceptual area to another, Nina Simon (2010) argues for a 'participatory museum'; a place of active participation by visitors, not just passive consumption. She writes of the way the internet and technology have propelled society forward, embracing interactive learning and entertainment; in order to remain relevant, the museum must also become more interactive. Not only does a participatory ethos involve more interaction, however – it also involves shifts in power, in ownership, and in relationships between institutions and communities. This idea follows on from Bennett's idea of the dialogic museum, Clifford's contact zones argument, and connects with contemporary theories of communication.

Hermeneutics, semiotics and communication theories have served as a foundation for many contemporary views on interpretation in the art museum. Burnham and Kai-Kee have adopted Gadamer's hermeneutics as the basis for their ideas on art museum education, proclaiming that "what art museum teaching shares with the hermeneutics of Gadamer is the core premise that conversation and dialogue are the foundation of understanding and interpretation." (2011:60). Hermeneutics has also been adopted by Meszaros (2007) who writes of the 'hermeneutic turn' in philosophy and how it has begun to manifest itself in the museum. While these authors claim to have been highly influenced by hermeneutic theory, it could be argued that they have adopted only selected principles that can be easily applied to museum practice. However, these selected principles, such as the idea of the

hermeneutic circle, have helped to move forward ideas that communication in museums is not just a one-way process. The same could be argued for constructivism; often cited in museum education literature (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994; Hein, 1995; Jeffery-Clay, 1998; Burnham and Kai-Kee, 2011) authors often use carefully selected principles of the theory. However, the use of these selected aspects of theory has formed the foundations of how interpretation is viewed in museums today and the shift towards seeing interpretation as a dialogic process.

The above sources examine the interpretation of texts and objects in museum and heritage settings as well as in everyday life. While I have touched upon the interpretation of art here, there are many further layers of consideration that stem from the political, social and economic complexities of the art world. It is because of this that art interpretation is one of the least studied areas of art museum practice, and texts that specifically examine art interpretation are relatively small in number. What follows is a more thorough review of the issues and debates surrounding the interpretation of art, and an examination of relevant literature.

2.2.5 The interpretation of art: challenges, debates

In art museums, the concept and practice of interpretation is highly complex because of the difficulties in defining and interpreting art. This section will examine various theories relating to the interpretation of art, viewing it through the lenses of art history and theory, museology and gallery education. It will examine some of the approaches taken when interpreting historical and contemporary art and other art objects in museums and will finally consider the various 'agents' that shape and define art and contribute to how it is interpreted.

In his introduction to *The Art Circle: A Theory of Art*, George Dickie (1997:3) states that "Philosophizing about the nature of art begins, as so much in philosophy does, with Plato... What Plato said about art is that it is imitation". However, Dickie goes on to state that Plato did not specify a set of conditions that can distinguish between which imitations are art and those which are not. The nature of what art is and is not has been debated since Plato's time, and continues to be debated among philosophers, theorists, academics, artists, museum professionals and the public to this day. These debates have produced endless theories of art, theories that have

both influenced and challenged art museum professionals, as well as contributing to determining art's value. The earliest theory of art, imitation theory (proposed by Plato and Aristotle), argues that an object is only an artwork if it is an imitation of reality; whereas neorepresentational theory, developed in the twentieth century, counters this by stating that an object is an artwork if it is *about* something, or if it has a subject about which it makes some comment (Carroll, 2011).

Neorepresentational theory, unlike imitation theory, accommodates contemporary art and helps to justify its value.

While there is not time or space to examine theories of art in great detail here, it is important to touch upon those which have most influenced the practice of art interpretation in the museum. For example, institutional theories of art, as formulated by Danto (1964) and further developed by Dickie (1971, 1974) state that objects can only be seen as art when declared as such by the institution of the 'artworld'- of which museums can be seen to play a major role as 'conferrers of status':

A work of art in the classificatory sense is 1. An artefact, 2. A set of the aspects of which has had conferred upon it the status of candidate for appreciation by some person or persons acting on behalf of a certain social institution (the artworld). (Dickie, 1974:34)

Pierre Bourdieu (1993) suggests that art is given meaning and value through its interaction with agents in the 'field', the artworld. These agents, ranging from artists to curators and all who are connected with art, participate in the 'consecration' of art. The role of the museum, therefore, is to contribute to the production of definitions of what is considered 'art' and what is not through a variety of actions – including art interpretation. Whitehead (2012) emphasises the significance of art interpretation as a political act, one that serves to identify art and produce and reproduce discourses of art. The act of interpreting art by a museum or gallery contributes to the construction of art itself, defining particular works as 'good' and defining whether or not they are worthy of inclusion and recognition in art discourse. The museum is, through these actions, an agent which contributes to the "vast operation of social alchemy jointly conducted" (Bourdieu in Whitehead

ibid:13), a gradual process which brings together various agents who decide whether or not something is art.

Once something has been declared 'art' by the artworld, it can be viewed and interpreted from a multitude of perspectives. In identifying literature relating to the interpretation of art, authors have debated from an art historical and theoretical perspective, from the point of view of museology and museum practice, and through the lens of art museum education (or 'gallery education'). While these categories are somewhat arbitrary, for the purposes of this section they have provided a structure for thinking about a very complex subject area.

2.2.6 Art historical and theoretical debates: to interpret or not?

One of the central debates present within the study of art interpretation is whether or not the experience of viewing art should primarily be an aesthetic encounter or whether the viewer should be in receipt of information to supplement their experience. Using Whitehead's (2012) terms, one could ask which of the 'registers' of interpretation should be the dominant focus of production by an institution - the verbal, the environmental or the experiential? Literature from all disciplines debates this question.

Art theorist Umberto Eco (1989) argues for valuing the openness of a work, freeing it from authoritative interpretations and allowing the viewer to explore meaning for herself, and that every artwork can have multiple interpretations. Museum director and art theorist Nicholas Serota (1996) later argued that minimal interference from textual information is best, with the arrangement of artworks as the primary source of interpretation. Using an example of an exhibition of work by two different artists, Serota draws our attention to the messages found in the display: "As a visitor, one is conscious that grouping in this way (placing works together by different artists) places a curatorial *interpretation* on the works, establishing relationships that could not have existed in the minds of the makers of these objects..." (1996:8). James Cuno (2004) argues that the unmediated experience of viewing art is of primary importance, and that the object of the art museum is to present its collections to the public in order for their aesthetic qualities to be appreciated. For Cuno, viewing art should be an experience filled with wonder and awe, rather than laden with textual

information. It can be argued that Eco, Serota and Cuno all assume that the viewer is both comfortable with and competent in viewing art, able to decode its messages and has the ability to come to an interpretation without assistance. These views discount the viewer who does not come equipped with such prior knowledge or experience, or who is intimidated within the confines of the gallery space.

Viewing the role of the art museum as a producer of art historical narratives, art historian David Carrier (2009) suggests that verbal forms of interpretation do not matter nearly as much as the choices curators make in displaying art – and therefore assumes that the viewer will be literate in ‘reading’ the display or the sometimes opaque intentions of the curator:

The curator doesn’t spell out her interpretation (except perhaps in the catalogue essay or in telegraphic form on panels of wall text), rather she displays the art so as to get you to see it. (In a sense, the texts are irrelevant, for if we see what she wants to show, then the words are redundant, and if we cannot see it, then the words add little) (Carrier 2009:227).

Philosopher Robert Stecker (1994) examines art interpretation in relation to both literary and art criticism, discussing the ideas of ‘critical pluralism’ (the idea that a work can have multiple interpretations) and ‘critical monism’ (the idea that there is one correct interpretation of a work). While no specific reference is made to museum practices, Stecker’s examination of these two seemingly opposing viewpoints illustrates different ideas of what interpretation of art should communicate.

2.2.7 Museology, museum practice and interpretation

Within museology, the focus is less on the aesthetic experience of viewing art and more on the provision of supplementary information. Cheryl Meszaros (2006, 2007, 2008) disputes the notion that art would be viewed without interference of predetermined interpretations, a practice that she terms the “whatever” interpretation. She argues that, “by placing interpretive authority in the hands of the individual... the museum not only justifies its failure to communicate, but also it absolves itself of any interpretive responsibility for the meanings it produces and circulates in culture” (2006:13). Meszaros’s stance is that interpretation in its many forms is integral to the understanding of art. She emphasises that the art museum

must make the art object accessible to the public, along with the interpretive repertoires that have created and sustained it as art (2011:35). Whitehead (2012) also argues the importance of art museum interpretation, declaring it an important political act which serves as a “means of identifying art and producing and reproducing discourses of art: what counts as art and what does not?” (p. xvi).

This is not to say that aesthetic experience should be ignored: Whitehead suggests that, while curators have control over environmental and textual interpretation, and cannot necessarily control the experience of the visitor - “all three of these registers (environmental, verbal and experiential) must be borne in mind when managing and using interpretive technologies” (Whitehead 2012: xiv). While the idea of ‘experience or interpretation’ (Serota 1996) seems to polarise debates about interpretation into two factions, those who believe that interpretation should predominantly be environmental and those who believe it should include an important verbal component, Whitehead emphasises that there are actually *three* registers and all three should be taken into account in planning exhibitions and displays.

2.2.8 Art museum and gallery education and interpretation

In line with acknowledging multiple registers of interpretation, a move towards understanding how people learn in museums coupled with a strong desire to increase participation by a broader audience has promoted an acknowledgement of the educational nature of interpretation. In recent years, art museums have begun to work collaboratively in interpretive planning, with educators taking on greater responsibility for the production of interpretation (Czajkowski and Hudson Hill 2008; Wells et al 2013; Farnell (ed.) 2015). Within museum education literature, there appear to be two strands of analysis of art interpretation – one is the analysis of interpretation as process, while the other focuses on the products of interpretation. In her book *The Educational Role of the Museum*, Hooper-Greenhill illustrates the differences between the use of the word ‘interpretation’ in philosophy (hermeneutics in particular) versus its use in museum education practice:

There is a major difference in emphasis between the way the words are used hermeneutics and in the museum. In the museum, interpretation is done for

you, or to you. In hermeneutics, however, *you* are the interpreter for yourself. Interpretation is the process of *constructing* meaning. (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000:12)

She differentiates between the use of the word 'interpretation' to describe the way in which individuals make sense of things and the way it is used by many museum professionals – for example describing elements of exhibition design as 'exhibition interpretation' or staff attempts to interpret objects as 'object interpretation'. Some sources focus on the practical aspects of producing exhibition and object interpretation (e.g. Serrell 1996; Ravelli 2006), focusing mainly on practical aspects such as writing style for text labels. Other authors, such as art museum educators Burnham and Kai-Kee (2011), write of interpretation as an experience, one that is enhanced by participation in activities led by gallery educators.

The concept of what interpretation is also varies according to the type of art being examined. In researching interpretation practices specific to contemporary art, Lynch (2007) indicates that debates as to what exactly interpretation is still reverberate through museums and galleries as its definition has shifted away from the physical resources produced to supplement exhibitions, towards any activity that engages viewers with contemporary art.

Hooper-Greenhill (1994: 44 - 51) focuses on theories of engagement within historical art museums, writing of the process of interpretation based on both her observations of gallery teaching and her study of hermeneutics. She observes that visitors to the gallery participate in hermeneutical principles when viewing paintings, coming to an understanding of the work by developing a dialogue. This dialogue involves looking at the whole and the part, the past and the present and using available information to inform the process. Hooper-Greenhill's view is that (during the 1990s) there was little understanding of this process among curatorial circles. This changed in the early 2000s with museums developing a greater awareness of, and desire to meet, the needs of visitors (Czajkowski and Hudson Hill 2008; Falk 2009). Roberts (1994, 1997, 2004) examines the changing practices of interpretation in the art museum, tracking the history of approaches to interpretation by museums since the late nineteenth century until the 1990s. She writes about the way in which the role of the educator in art museums shifted

dramatically in the 1990s: “Over the course of a few years, educators’ interpretive role has thus shifted dramatically from representing the curatorial view to experimenting with new languages and methods for representing that view and finally to authorising alternative views altogether” (Roberts 2004:221).

As the above authors have pointed out, education has become more central to art museum practice since the early 1990s, and, in many museums, interpretation has moved from being only a curatorial prerogative to being the mission of the entire institution, with educators taking on greater decision-making power. An early example of this has been written about by Gail Durbin (2004), lead educator at the V&A in 2001, who formed part of the team who led on the redevelopment of the British Galleries. The redevelopment was led by a small three-person ‘concept team’, including Durbin. Durbin’s educational expertise was used to identify target audiences, their characteristics and their learning styles and needs. The resulting interpretation incorporated a range of interpretive devices, from text to video and audio. A similar redevelopment project at Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum in Glasgow also handed over lead management responsibilities to an educator, resulting in interpretation that took into account different learning styles, multiple perspectives and a range of participatory elements. Mark O’Neill, head of Glasgow’s Arts and Museums from 1998 - 2005, explained the rationale behind this decision:

...the expertise of the education and access curators and the learning we derive from visitor studies need to be brought into the equation. The staff who know most about the objects may not be able to see — amidst the closely packed trees of their knowledge — the particular path that might engage the public’s interest most. To tell a story effectively, we have to be as rigorous in knowing our audience as we do in knowing about the objects. Above all, these forms of knowledge have to be in constant dialogue. This enables us to provide what visitors are looking for from objects. (O’Neill, 2007: 389)

While the previous examples illustrate the influence of education expertise on the production of exhibitions and physical resources, interpretation in the art gallery can also be seen to include ‘live’ events that have been the remit of educators since the advent of museum education, such as workshops and tours. Burnham and Kai-kee (2011) argue that the experience of art provided through these events is a form of interpretation, discussing gallery teaching as a ‘project of shared interpretation’.

Other authors, particularly those who engage with contemporary art (Lynch 2007; Robins 2007; McCall 2007), share the sentiment that interpretation is any form of mediated encounter with art, including educational events, artist interventions, or textual information. The relationship between education and art interpretation can also be examined through the work museums and galleries do with artist educators, particularly in relation to contemporary art. Pringle (2009) examines the relationship between art practice and pedagogy, examining the approach artists take when engaging with learners. She states:

The artist deconstructs a work and builds up an interpretation by interrogating the processes of production. The art historian, by contrast, brings his or her accumulated knowledge to bear on the work in order to contextualise and explain it. (Pringle 2009: 3)

These differing approaches illustrate how art can be analysed through various theoretical lenses, regardless of whether the interpreter is an art theorist, museologist or educator. I will now turn to the idea of ‘interpretive frames’, a concept adapted by Whitehead (2012) in order to decode some of the ways art is discussed and to exemplify art museum practice today.

2.2.9 Art interpretation in practice

The interpretation of historical art is often approached quite differently from the interpretation of contemporary or decorative art in museums and galleries. In each case, certain ‘interpretive frames’ explain or provide information. Whitehead (2012) has adapted the concept of framing, as defined by Goffman (1974), Snow et al (1986), Gitlin (1980) and Entman (1993), for use in understanding art interpretation: “there are myriad interpretive ‘frames’ which can provide different but always partial understandings about art, and... their use in art museums is part of the production of knowledge about art and art history”. Frames are, as defined by Gitlin, “principles of selection, emphasis and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters” (Gitlin in Whitehead 2012:54).

A single frame is sometimes used in interpretation, while in other cases a combination of frames can be seen. Whitehead’s interpretive frames (2012: 54 –

109) provide a way of deciphering what the museum has chosen to focus on in the interpretation, but also serve to remind us what may have been left out. For example, one of the most frequently used interpretive frames for discussing historical art is the 'evolutionary frame'. This frame places a focus on the style adopted by the artist, the relation of this style to those adopted by the artist over the course of his career, and the relation of this style to that of other artists. Other interpretive frames often used for historical works include: the 'narrative frame', focusing on the story of or within the work; the 'pictorial' or 'formal' frame, where the viewer is directed to look at formal elements or examine the composition; and the 'biographical frame', which focuses on the life of the artist. Further frames discussed by Whitehead include the 'technical-stylistic frame' which focuses on techniques used; the 'socio-economic frame', emphasising the socio-economic context of the work; and the 'historical-documentary' and 'critical-historical' frames that document an historical event or take a critical look at history through the work. So, when interpreting an 18th century oil painting one can examine the artist's biographical details, how he made the work, who it was made for, where it was originally displayed, the techniques used, the composition of the work, its iconography and so on. When interpreting contemporary art (and non-figurative art), some of these areas of analysis become more difficult.

Whitehead explains further interpretive frames that can be utilised when discussing contemporary (or non-figurative) art, although these frames tend to be less concretely defined as those used for looking at historical and representational art due to the more experimental nature of such interpretation. First is the 'conceptual-affinitive frame', which seeks to identify points of contact between works of different ages and from different places. Whitehead describes the use of this frame, alongside another frame he terms the 'chronological-connective frame', in describing displays at Tate Modern. These two approaches to interpretation do not rely heavily on text but rather on curatorial placement of artwork; however, when text is used liberally in display, often an 'intentional-explanatory' frame is used where the focus is on the artist's intent.

The approach taken in interpreting decorative arts is again slightly different from the approaches taken in interpreting historical and contemporary art. Whitehead

has defined several interpretive frames used for decorative arts: first is the 'material-technical' frame, which focuses on the processes used in producing an object and the materials used. An interpretive frame similar to the evolutionary frame has also been identified, which places the object's technical and aesthetic characteristics within history. Finally, Whitehead describes a 'functional frame', which emphasises the functional role of the object. Again, these frames are not exhaustive and other approaches to interpreting decorative art objects are sometimes used, such as the use of the biographical or socio-historical frames.

2.2.10 Towards engagement: interpretive planning in art museums

While Whitehead writes of three registers of interpretation (environmental, verbal and experiential), the focus of his analysis is on written texts in museums of art. Many art museums and galleries, artists and art critics focus on text as the primary means of conveying information about an artwork and often appear to define 'interpretation' as primarily verbal; Dany Louise's *The Interpretation Matters Handbook*, published in 2013, illustrates this. Louise, an art writer, aims the book at museum professionals and those more generally interested in art gallery practices, and focuses primarily on the writing found in text panels. The use of the word 'interpretation' in this context suggests that art interpretation is merely a written explanation of a work. However, a significant change in approach to what encompasses 'interpretation' in art museums and galleries can be found in literature written by those who are at the frontier of interpretive planning practices.

One such example is *Interpreting the Art Museum* (Farnell (ed.) 2015) which comprises a collection of essays and case studies written primarily by museum professionals. In the foreword, Judith Koke, Chief of Public Programming and Learning at the Art Gallery of Ontario explains the volume's focus on exploring "different approaches to the facilitation of personal connections to art" (Koke in Farnell (ed.) 2015:11); she states that a significant number of art museums have created interpretive planning departments or posts, arguing that "these staff bring expertise in visitor learning, behaviour and motivations into the mix of art and art history knowledge, to shape the development of art experiences" (ibid). Included within the volume are essays examining the role of visitor studies and inclusion of

audiences in the interpretive planning process, and accounts of interpretive planning processes in art museums. Also included are a number of writings that interrogate the definition of interpretation and seek to broaden its meaning to include all three registers of interpretation: environmental, verbal and experiential. Interpretation specialist Emily Fry's account of experimenting with mapping emotions in the gallery space at PEM (2015:210) suggests that interpretation is far broader than simply words on a wall, while education specialist Andrew Westover's piece looks at the role of body language and movement in gallery spaces (ibid:227). The overall argument of the collection seeks to prove that interpretation is more than just text, and interpretive planning should aim to not only convey information but help visitors engage and connect personally with works of art.

The chapter now moves away from discussing interpretation and towards the exploration of theories and concepts from within organisation studies. This will provide a foundation for understanding some of the ways of thinking about the organisational structure and culture of art museums and how they function - and will offer a basis for understanding concepts which will be discussed in depth in later chapters.

2.3 Defining and Theorising Organisations and Institutions

Throughout the history of museums, museum leaders have been grappling with the evolving transformation of the museum and its role in society... Survival for museums today requires understanding the external forces that impact museums coupled with institutional reflection to define a strategic direction. Institutional reflection must include the examination of values and assumptions, the refinement of the mission and the vision to assure relevancy, and an assessment of institutional capacity in order to refine institutional effectiveness and public impact. (Anderson 2012:1)

Gail Anderson's introduction to *Reinventing the Museum*, above, summarises the challenge for museums in the 21st century, suggesting that they need to understand and reflect on what is happening both inside and outside the museum in order to survive. However, in order to understand the process of change and to remain relevant in a fast-changing world, museums also need to recognise the basic structures of organisations and institutions and how they operate.

Organisational theory is the study of how organisations function and how they work within their environments. This section (2.3) sets out to examine how aspects of organisation studies can provide a clearer understanding of how art museums function, with a focus on the influence of structure and environment on working practices. Organisational theory is a vast field, with many schools of thought, and therefore this section will look at specific aspects that are most relevant to analysing the production of interpretation in art museums – in particular, the influence of structure, culture and environment, and the relevance of theories of organisational knowledge production.

The terms ‘organisation’ and ‘institution’ are often used interchangeably to describe art museums, therefore subsection 2.3.1 will first examine definitions of institutions and organisations in order to clarify the difference between the two. The section then goes on to briefly review some of the literature within museum studies that discusses elements of organisations. Organisational change, in particular, is an area of increasing interest in an era when museums are struggling to stay relevant amidst rapid social change, and this is the focus of much of the available museum-focused literature. Many sources also chronicle specific museum case studies, providing insight into what museum professionals feel are prevalent issues within their organisations. Subsection 2.3.2 then goes on to provide an overview of organisational theory, organisational structure and institutional theory, situating museums within debates in sociology and organisational studies. Institutional theory came to life in the 1970s, raising questions about the world of organisations such as why organisations of the same type located in different parts of the world so closely resemble one another (Scott 2014). This section explores institutional theory with the aim of understanding why art museums are changing their approach to the production of interpretation, despite being located in scattered geographic locations and operating in vastly different contexts.

Theories of knowledge production in organisations will then be discussed, in relation to the wider field of organisational learning. These theories inform understandings of how new knowledge is produced through changing configurations of staff members, and how these affect what knowledges of art are communicated through display. This section will also examine organisational

culture, communities of practice, and boundaries - all aspects of organisational functioning that affect the way information and knowledge moves through the organisation and how new knowledge is produced.

By examining areas of organisational studies and mapping out organisation-focused literature within museum studies, this chapter aims to connect two fields of thought and analyse debates in each that shed light on changing practices in museums of art; it also sets out to provide a basis for further dialogue and the development of new frameworks that will enable museums to embrace future change.

2.3.1 Defining organisations and institutions

The concept of *institution* encompasses multiple meanings. One of the oldest and most often-employed ideas in social thought, it “has continued to take on new and diverse meanings over time, much like barnacles on a ship’s hull, without shedding the old” (Scott 2008: x). Like ‘interpretation’, definitions of ‘institutions’ and ‘organisations’ are difficult to pin down. What exactly is an organisation, and how does it differ from an institution? Jones (2001:2) defines an organisation as “a tool used by people to coordinate their actions in order to obtain something they desire or value – that is, to achieve their goals”. Organisations can be large (i.e. a bank or a police force) or small (i.e. a church). Organisations form when new needs are discovered, and they die or transform when the needs they met are no longer important or have been replaced by others.

Institutions, on the other hand, are more difficult to define. A broad-brush definition of *institutions* concludes that they are “systems of established and prevalent social rules that structure social interactions. Language, money, law, systems of weights and measures, table manners and firms (and other organisations) are thus all institutions” (Hodgson 2006:2). Hodgson, an institutional theorist, views organisations as a ‘special institution’ that involves the establishment of criteria to separate members from non-members, principles of sovereignty concerning who is in charge, and chains of command which delineate responsibilities within the organisation (ibid:18). In this light, we can view organisations as a type of institution.

North (1990:3), an institutional economist, approaches institutions as “the rules of the game in a society or, more formally... the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction”. North also wrote: “If institutions are the rules of the game, organisations and their entrepreneurs are the players” (1994:361). North’s focus is on how institutions affect the performance of an economy. The emphasis of his 1990 study is on the interaction between institutions and organisations, and the role of the ‘players’ as agents of institutional change. North states: “Institutions, together with the standard constraints of economic theory, determine the opportunities in a society. Organisations are created to take advantage of those opportunities, and, as the organisations evolve, they alter the institutions” (1990:7). In viewing art museums through this lens, it can be argued that by changing the way they work in response to evolving social needs, art museums (and those who work in them) are slowly changing the rules of the game – the norms and embedded social rules that govern how art museums interpret art, display art and produce knowledge.

W. Richard Scott (2014), an organisational sociologist, provides a definition that he calls an “omnibus conception of institutions”:

Institutions comprise regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive elements that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life. (Scott 2014:57)

He goes on to connect these ideas to the work of other organisational theorists, stating that institutions are “multifaceted, durable social structures” that are “resistant to change” (Jepperson 1991). They give ‘solidity’ to social systems (Giddens 1984:24), and they can be “transmitted across generations, maintained and reproduced” (Zucker 1977).

Scott (2014) argues that rules, norms and cultural-cognitive beliefs (symbolic systems) are the ‘central building blocks of institutional structures’ that help guide behaviours and resist change. These symbolic systems are defined as making up the ‘three pillars of institutions’: the regulative pillar, the normative pillar and the cultural-cognitive pillar. Each pillar makes up or supports an institution. The regulative pillar emphasises rules and sanctions that constrain and regulate behaviour; the normative pillar emphasises social norms and obligations that

impose constraints; and the cultural-cognitive pillar stresses “the shared conceptions that constitute the nature of social reality and the frames through which meaning is made” (Scott 2014:67).

These concepts of institution and organisation relate to Bourdieu’s concept of the ‘field’, defined as “networks of positions objectively held” (Grenfell and Hardy 2007:29). Agents and their social positions are located within fields, systems of social structures in which struggles for power and resources define the relationship between members. Similar to North’s (1990) idea of institutions being the “humanly devised constraints that shape interaction”, Bourdieu’s field theory suggests that the structures of institutions formed through dynamic processes. The rules of the game are constantly changing, just as the ‘field position’ of art museums is shifting between the contradictory roles of “highly consecrated cultural palace” and “pleasurable tourist spot” (Grenfell and Hardy 2007:105). As art museums change field positions, and as the ‘rules of the game’ change, the structures within them change.

The ideas outlined here represent a fraction of definitions and concepts of ‘institution’ and ‘organisation’ and provide a starting point for thinking about the relationship between theory and practice. Section 2.3.3 will go into more depth about organisational theory and structure. In summary, while there are many variations among scholars as to the precise definition of both ‘organisation’ and ‘institution’, it can be concluded that an organisation is a type of institution. Using North’s game analogy, we can view the *concept* of art museums and what they stand for as the rules of the game – the institution – while the actual museums themselves and those who work in them are the players – the organisation.

2.3.1 Theorising organisations in museum studies literature

Dramatic shifts in society since the start of the 21st century have had a significant impact on museum practice. Technology is changing the way ideas are generated and communicated, and how people and communities connect with each other across continents. Events or trends happening in other countries affect those thousands of miles away, while globalisation, economic volatility, the ‘explosion of social media’ and shifts in demographics are impacting institutions. Meanwhile, local

politics and shifting perceptions of the museum's role in communities have influenced the way museums work.

Museums are “inescapably political” (Gray 2015:150), capable of affecting and being affected by local, national and international politics. Gray (ibid) examines the political dimensions of museums on these levels, pointing out that the museum is not a single entity but rather a complex and fragmented system composed of multiple sites of action. Gray uses key concepts from political analysis to explain their effect on museum practices. These concepts of power, ideology, rationality and legitimacy are used to explain how museums make decisions, why certain groups of actors are more powerful than others, and why some organisations hold more influence over the museum sector as a whole. Significantly, however, Gray argues that museums have different intrinsic functions, each with different concerns and having different political dimensions. Therefore, the political dimensions affecting ‘communication’ (the function to which exhibitions, education and interpretation all belong) will be different to those affecting ‘preservation’.

In response to a wide range of political factors, museums have begun to shift the way they operate in order to become more central to their communities or simply to increase capacity and stay open (Anderson, 2012). In some instances, such as at the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA), organisational change is a matter of survival. Jeffrey Abt (2001) chronicled the DIA's battle to survive over the course of more than a century despite a variety of difficult financial, social and political factors that created problems in its organisational infrastructure. Penney (2009) describes DIA's massive reinstallation project, which opened in November 2007, and the way in which director Graham Beal took steps to change the museum's focus through changes to staff and to the organisation. At a time when Detroit, once a prosperous city, was suffering a huge economic decline, it became necessary for DIA to adapt to external pressures and resolve historical problems to continue to operate.

Organisational change in museums has been a topic of debate among the museum community for some time. Robert Janes' (2013) detailed account of organisational change at Glenbow Museum in Canada describes how the museum underwent a long process of ‘repositioning’ that would allow it to survive and prosper despite huge

cuts in government funding. An unusual account in that it tackles issues around organisational structure, it describes the difficulties of the process of change and provides a comprehensive and detailed look at management practices in the organisation; Janes stands out in that he examines change in the museum far more candidly and in greater detail than other museum studies authors. Short case studies, such as those found in Gurian (1995) describe some aspects of change within museums and discuss the effect these changes have had on staff, however they do not provide a comprehensive understanding of the contexts each case study institution were operating in; these descriptions of institutions undergoing organisational change are illustrative but are often only able to provide a glimpse into events rather than give a thorough analysis.

Organisational change in museums has also been examined through historical accounts. Some of these are primarily uncritical or personal narrative histories, often written by members of an institution; others approach museum history from a more critical and scholarly perspective. Stearn's (1981) account of the Natural History Museum, for example, provides a largely uncritical (albeit comprehensive) museum history as researched and constructed by a retired former member of staff, while MacGregor (2001), a curator at the Ashmolean Museum, provides a detailed narrative of the museum's history and collections. Charles Saumarez Smith's (2009) *The National Gallery: A Short History* is another example of a personal account written from an 'insider' perspective; he writes of how the institution has been managed over time, providing an account of the museum during each director's period of office. As a former director of the gallery himself, Saumarez Smith provides a history centred on the challenges he and other directors have faced, telling the story of organisational change through the eyes of top-level management. Saumarez Smith argues that "the culture of the institution and its *modus operandi*, the character of the collection and the relationship to its audiences, are all to a considerable extent shaped and determined by its history" (p. 11), a revelation that occurred after the writing of the book and upon vacating his post as director. Saumarez Smith sees the institution as a "construction of history" (ibid); its character, collections and organisational culture all influenced by the contributions of his predecessors.

Further examples of museum histories form another body of literature that looks at change in museums from an 'outsider' perspective. Although some authors such as Sam Alberti (2009) work within museums, this body of literature provides more in-depth critical analysis of the history of institutions. Alberti examines the construction of the disciplines of nature and culture within museums, using the Manchester Museum as the focus for his analysis. Through his history of the Manchester Museum, Alberti examines the nature of knowledge construction and provides an understanding of the political, social and museological contexts in which the museum has operated over time. Alberti examines the ways in which staff expertise over the course of the museum's history has influenced the development of its collections and how disciplinary divisions are a result of staff practices. Alberti's overarching focus is on the way in which museum practices impact upon the understanding of objects and the social construction of disciplines.

Utilising historic collections of photographs taken of exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, Staniszewski (1998) examines an 'overlooked' aspect of the institution's history to piece together a critical analysis of how display practices have changed since the museum's founding in 1929. By examining these 'forgotten' records of exhibitions, she argues that the lack of attention to the history of exhibition installation affects the construction of art history. In contrast to Alberti, whose focus is specifically on the relationship between museum practices and the understanding of individual objects, Staniszewski argues that art objects acquire meaning through the contexts in which they are displayed: that installation design contributes significantly to the understanding of art objects, to the experience of visiting and to the construction of art historical knowledge.

MacLeod (2013) takes yet another approach, exploring the role of museum architecture and its relationship to social experience by examining the history of the Walker Art Gallery. Changes to the gallery over time provide the basis for a critical analysis of museum design. MacLeod draws on a body of architectural theory that sees architecture as "implicated in such diverse aspects of our social experience as politics, power, shared social meaning, individual identity formation and a sense of self" (p. 6). While Alberti (2009) focuses on the role of staff in bringing meaning to museum objects and Staniszewski (1998) on the role of installation design on the

understanding of art, MacLeod's focus is specifically on the buildings themselves. In critically examining museum architecture, MacLeod contributes to an understanding of the broader issues of power and politics that are also associated with knowledge construction.

Another body of literature within the field of museum studies examines the way in which specific exhibitions or displays were developed, with discussion on the roles of various staff members in the process. Many of these accounts are from the point of view of museum professionals involved in the projects - for example, Durbin's (2004) account of the redevelopment of the V&A British Galleries and O'Neill's (2007) account of the redevelopment of Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum which were discussed in section 2.2.8. Durbin's account gives some information about the structure of the project team (or 'concept team') formed during the redevelopment and how it differed from earlier team formations. This raises questions around how project teams affect interpretation. O'Neill's (2007) account of Kelvingrove's redevelopment details some of the reasoning behind it, and provides a glimpse into the political, economic and organisational context in which the museum functioned at the time; it also discusses some of the issues the museum faced in light of organisational change. Other accounts exist describing various aspects of Kelvingrove's redevelopment (Economou 2004; Latimer 2011) but mainly focus on the process and final product rather than management structures and other aspects of organisation. O'Neill's account, while limited in scope, does offer the reader a chance to understand the underlying structures that influenced the resulting display. The impact of organisational structure and issues around organisational change will be discussed in the next section as well as in later discussion chapters.

Within the discipline of museum studies there are many descriptive accounts of how museums have changed their ways of working or have attempted to do so. There are some examples of genuinely critical histories, but these often present an analysis of a specific aspect of museum practice (i.e., Staniszewski 1998, MacLeod 2013). The focus of much of museum studies literature is on why museums need to reinvent themselves, but there is little analysis of *how* they can do this. We now turn to a more detailed look at aspects of organisations through the lens of organisational theory, in order to better understand how organisations function and to provide a

basis for critically examining practices within each case study institution in this project.

2.3.2 Organisational theory and organisational structure

Organisational theory is the study of how organisations function, and how they affect and are affected by the environment in which they operate (Jones 2007). Distinct from its related field of organisational behaviour, which focuses on the way members act and on their perceptions, organisational theory focuses on the bigger picture – on the organisations themselves. For the purpose of understanding how art museums function, and later for analysing how their structures influence the production of interpretation, this section will examine organisational theory and provide an overview of aspects of theory that most directly relate to museum practice.

Organisational theory has developed over time into a complex field of study approached from a variety of perspectives. Classical and scientific management perspectives emerged the 18th and 19th centuries and into the early 20th century; Smith (1776), Marx (1867), Taylor (1911) and Weber et al (1978) focused on the role of organisations on society, efficient structures and management, hierarchies and formalisation. These approaches argued that there was ‘one best way’ to conduct business. Later, from the 1950s, systems and contingency theories emerged (Parsons 1951; Gouldner 1954; Trist and Bamforth 1951; Lawrence and Lorsch 1967); these approaches argued that organisations were complex systems and there was no ‘best way’ to manage an organisation.

From the late 1950’s onwards, social constructionism influenced organisation theory: Goffman (1956), Berger and Luckmann (1966), Boje (1991) and Law (1994) brought forward the idea that reality is constructed and organisations are, in fact, communities where social interactions are significant. Social constructionism views organisations, knowledge and identities as constructed through the interactions of organisational members whose assumptions, beliefs, attitudes all shape their perceived reality. The influence of social constructionism is significant because it draws attention to how knowledge produced by institutions and organisations becomes naturalised through discursive practice. The reality of an organisation is

based on the perceived realities of its members – therefore, alternative social and discursive arrangements can result in changes to organisational realities (Boje 1991). Postmodernism also had an effect (Foucault 1973; Lyotard 1984; Hassard and Parker 1993), influencing organisational theory through questioning existing conceptions of organisations and their purpose and the role of power relations in their structures.

For the purpose of providing a general overview of organisational theory, the remainder of this section (2.3.2) will focus on mainstream concepts through a multiple perspectives approach, starting with organisational structure and design. An organisation's structure and design influences how it divides up work, makes decisions and ultimately achieves organisational goals. The structure of an organisation is most often represented in an organisational chart, which shows the basic framework and shape of the organisation. The design, on the other hand, looks at the elements that make up the structure and how they work together (Cunliffe 2008).

There are various types of structure within organisations. Three of the most common are the 'functional', 'divisional', and 'matrix' structures. A functional structure groups workers together based on their common skills and expertise or because they use the same resources (Jones 2001). This type of structure seems most common in museums, with staff divided into areas of expertise such as curatorial, education and so on. A 'divisional' structure exists where the organisation is divided into self-contained divisions or profit centres, and each division or centre reports to a central team or headquarters. Often each centre is supported by central functions such as finance or human resources; divisions can be based on products, on geographical locations or based on markets (Cunliffe 2008). Multi-site museum services such as Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums in Newcastle upon Tyne (TWAM) or Tate contain elements of a divisional structure. A matrix structure exists where workers and activities are grouped into multifunctional teams and are often short-term arrangements based on projects or contracts. The British Galleries redevelopment at the V&A, mentioned previously, took on elements of a matrix structure during the course of the project.

The way in which an organisation divides up work and how it controls its human, financial and physical resources constitutes its design. There are several key aspects of organisational design which will be defined further here: differentiation and integration; centralisation and decentralisation; standardisation and mutual adjustment; and formalisation.

'Differentiation' is defined by Jones (2001: 34) as "the process by which an organisation allocates people and resources to organisational tasks and establishes the task and authority relationships that allow the organisation to achieve its goals". There are two types of differentiation: horizontal and vertical. Horizontal differentiation accounts for how work is divided between functions, departments and units, whereas vertical differentiation refers to the number of levels of management, or hierarchy, and how authority is assigned to these levels (Cunliffe 2008).

Jones defines 'integration' as "the process of coordinating various tasks, functions and divisions so that they work together and not at cross-purposes" (2001:42). In the case of a museum, for example, the work done by curation, education, conservation and marketing need to be coordinated in some way so that all parties are working towards a common goal. Integration occurs in several ways. Firstly, integration occurs when relationships and responsibilities are clarified in an organisation. This is reinforced through job descriptions, rules and goals. Integration can occur through the establishment of 'liaison roles', or posts that work across departments and functions (Jones 2001; Cunliffe 2008). An example of this in an art museum could be the interpretation curator, whose responsibilities cross over between education and curation departments. Integration also occurs through cross-departmental communication or construction of cross-departmental teams who work on projects together. This can be seen in exhibition meetings attended by multiple departments, or in redevelopment projects where staff from different teams come together for the duration of the project such as that described by Durbin (ibid). This relates to concepts of boundaries and boundary brokering which will be examined in more detail in subsection 2.3.5 and will form the basis for discussion around the roles of staff at the Rijksmuseum in Chapter 7.

‘Centralisation’ and ‘decentralisation’ relate to the distribution of authority and allocation of resources within an organisation. In a highly centralised organisation, decisions are made at the top by a direct, CEO or senior management team and employees have little or no authority to initiate new actions or use resources for purposes that they deem important (Jones 2001:47). Resources are also located in one place. Traditionally, many art museums were centralised organisations, with most decisions made by directors and established curators.

A decentralised organisation, on the other hand, distributes decision-making power to managers at all levels in the hierarchy. In many of the art museums examined for this project, the power of decision making has been distributed more evenly throughout the organisation, creating more decentralisation. Organisations do not necessarily have to be centralised or decentralised, but instead operate on a spectrum. The challenge for organisations is to find the right balance between centralisation and decentralisation; centralisation provides greater control but becomes a problem, for example, when managers become so overloaded with day-to-day resource issues that they have no time for long-term strategic planning. On the other hand, while decentralisation provides greater flexibility and responsiveness, it can mean that planning and coordination among managers becomes difficult (ibid).

‘Standardisation’ is the way in which rules and norms in an organisation help employees to carry out work in the same way. In contrast to this is ‘mutual adjustment’, when employees use their judgement to address problems rather than conforming to standardised practices. Like centralisation and decentralisation, organisations must balance these two in order to operate effectively. Related to this is the level of ‘formalisation’ in an organisation, which is the “degree to which the organisation has written, formal and well-defined organisation charts, job descriptions, operating procedures, rules, policies, and requires formal written communication vs. Informal and less defined ways of working and interacting” (Cunliffe 2008:33). Aspects of organisational structure will be discussed in the discussion chapters later in this thesis, providing a foundation for understanding each of the case study institutions and how they operate.

2.3.2 Institutional theory and organisational change

In section 2.3.1, literature pertaining to organisational change from the field of museum studies was examined. This section looks in more depth at theories and concepts relating to organisational change on a broader scale, including institutional theory.

The field of organisational change research is overwhelmingly complex and fragmented. It offers a wide range of perspectives that are not always complimentary, while the literature calls upon many academic disciplines including social psychology, sociology and economics. Jacobs et al (2013) assist by breaking down perspectives in the literature into categories of 'micro', 'meso' and 'macro'. Micro perspectives focus on the effects of organisational change on individuals, including attitudes and perceptions towards change and how individuals cope with change. Meso perspectives address issues relating to organisational contexts, group processes and social identities, and macro perspectives focus on issues related to an organisation's environment.

The fragmented nature of organisational change literature is further complicated by a division in the type of writing style and intended audience. While much has been written from an academic standpoint, some literature is intended to guide practitioners in implementing change in their organisations or to provide students and managers with a route through the complicated array of material on the subject. Rather than attempt to provide an overview of this vast and confusing field, the remainder of this section will look at selected literature that has been chosen in relation to the project's aims and objectives. These range from theoretical to practical.

Considering types of organisational change is a starting point for understanding the nature of the field. Several models have been identified that set out different types of change: Nadler and Tushman's (1989) 'frame bending change', Grundy's (1993) three major types of change; Balogun et al's (2004) change paths; and Plowman et al's (2007) approach which looks at pace and scope of change. These various typologies are brought together into six categories: convergent, radical, planned, evolutionary, revolutionary and emergent (Senior and Swailes 2012).

The idea, however, that organisations have a 'life cycle' (Greiner 1972, 1998; Kimberley and Miles 1980) suggests that it is not possible to categorise change in this way, and that organisations go through stages of development. Greiner suggested that organisations go through five phases as they develop and grow, and these stages relate to the age and size of the organisation.

But why do organisations change? Essentially, many factors in an organisation's environment can prompt or trigger organisational change. An organisation's operating environment consists of three levels: the internal environment, the external environment and the temporal environment (Sadler 1989). Within the internal environment are both informal and formal factors: culture, politics and leadership, and management, strategy and structure, for example. External factors can be political, economic, socio-economic and technological (PEST). The temporal environment is a category based on the history of the organisation – historical developments either in the organisation itself or in its sector that bring change over time. Organisational change occurs as a response to these different changes and pressures in the organisation's environment.

The particular circumstances of an organisation will vary, and change may manifest itself in different ways. However, it is often the case that organisations of a similar type and in a similar institutional environment will go through change in similar ways despite geographical distance. Institutional theory examines how organisations adapt and change according to the demands of their institutional environment:

Institutional theory attends to the deeper and more resilient aspects of social structure. It considers the processes by which structures, including schemas, rules, norms, and routines, become established as authoritative guidelines for social behavior. It inquires into how these elements are created, diffused, adopted, and adapted over space and time; and how they fall into decline and disuse. (Scott 2004:408)

Institutional theory provides an interesting lens for analysing how museums adopt similar practices both nationally and internationally – for example, why there are universal similarities and trends in museum education or similar changes in curatorial practices, even across continents. Institutional theorists argue that

organisations within the same environment develop similar practices and structures, a characteristic that is called 'isomorphism'. Isomorphism occurs in three ways: 'coercive isomorphism' occurs when there are laws or political sanctions that demand certain practices; 'mimetic isomorphism' occurs when organisations imitate other successful organisations; and 'normative isomorphism' occurs when organisations adopt the norms and values of other organisations due to professional associations or from the employment of staff from other similar organisations (Cunliffe 2008).

Aspects of organisational change will be looked at in more detail in later discussion chapters, in which the organisational environments of each case study museum will be examined and factors influencing change explored. The next subsection will provide an overview of organisational culture and discuss the significance of communities of practice, boundaries and boundary roles within organisations.

2.3.3 Organisational culture, communities of practice and boundaries in organisations

The culture of an organisation has a distinct role in how it operates. Organisational culture is defined by Jones (2001:130) as "the set of shared values and norms that controls organisational members' interactions with each other and with people outside the organisation". It includes values underlying actions and decisions, norms that guide behaviour, the language used by members, rites and ceremonies and common ways of acting and the artefacts and symbols of an organisation (Cunliffe 2008). Organisational culture can be used to increase organisational effectiveness by controlling what members do and how they behave.

There are numerous influences on organisational culture, for example, professional cultures and national cultures. Cunliffe (ibid) describes work by Geert Hofstede (2001) who examined the influence of national cultures on organisational culture in a study of IBM. Hofstede looked at IBM's culture in four countries where IBM has divisions and identified four factors (later increased to five) that he termed 'national value dimensions'. These were: power distance, or whether members of a society accept inequalities in power; uncertainty avoidance, or whether members of a society are most comfortable in a risk-avoiding setting; individualism/collectivism,

or the extent to which societies value being an individual versus being part of a community; masculinity/femininity, or which sex the dominant values of a society can be categorised as; and finally, long-term/short-term orientation, or whether members pursue long term goals or short term goals. All of these factors can alter organisational culture from country to country, even within the same organisation.

Edgar Schein (2010), an influential organisational theorist, identified three levels in organisational cultures: Artefacts, values and assumptions. Each level refers to the degree to which each phenomenon is visible to the observer. *Artefacts* include any tangible or identifiable elements, such as architecture, furniture or dress code. *Values* are the 'official' stated values and rules of behaviour, evident in mission statements or mottos. *Assumptions* are the taken-for-granted behaviours within an organisation which are usually unconscious and invisible. He argued that assumptions form the core of an organisation's culture and are what organisational members believe is reality.

Another approach to studying organisational culture is the *symbolic-interpretive* approach, which describes how organisational realities are socially constructed. Members make, use and interpret symbols, and the use and interpretation of these symbols permits members to create and maintain a culture. Symbols fall into one of three broad categories: physical objects, behavioural events and verbal expressions (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2013). Members interpret symbols, and these interpretations are influenced by other members of the culture.

Different types of cultures have been identified by theorists such as Ouchi (1981), Peters and Waterman (1982), Deal and Kennedy (1982) and Dennison (1990) (as cited in Cunliffe, 2008). Ouchi's *Theory Z* is based on a more humanistic approach to management, encouraging a culture of individual responsibility and collective decision making. Peters and Waterman's (1982) *In Search of Excellence* looked at a number of highly rated organisations and picked out eight characteristics that they thought were the reason for their success, such as having few administrative layers and providing rewards for best effort. Deal and Kennedy stated that cultures where employees are committed to and believe in organisational goals are more productive and effective. Denison defined four types of culture: bureaucratic cultures (focus on

rules, procedures and control), clan cultures (focus on teamwork, employee satisfaction and initiative), mission cultures (where employees aim to achieve the organisation's goals and are rewarded for doing so), and adaptability cultures (where there is a focus on flexibility and innovation) (Cunliffe, 2008).

Earlier theorists believed culture could be managed. However, more contemporary theorists disagree. Postmodernist approaches to organisational theory question the idea that there is one reality. The 'fragmentation perspective' (Cunliffe 2008, Hatch & Cunliffe 2013) argues that organisational culture is shifting, inconsistent and in a constant state of change. David Boje (2001) suggests that researchers need to study both narratives and antenarratives in organisations – narratives provide coherent accounts of events in retrospect whereas antenarratives are fragments of stories that are currently unfolding. He suggests that there is no collective organisational culture, only fragmentation (Cunliffe, 2008).

An organisation's environment is another key influence in how it operates. Jones (2001:164) defines the organisational environment as "the set of forces surrounding an organisation that has the potential to affect the way it operates and its access to scarce resources". Strategy is "the plan, decisions and actions identified as being necessary to achieving organisational goals" (Cunliffe 2008:75). The relationship between the organisation and its environment is important, as the more complex and unstable the environment, the more the organisation will need a structure, strategy and internal processes to adapt to and manage change (ibid:77).

Within the study of organisational culture lies a body of literature around the way individuals and organisations form groups and how these groups function alongside each other. Organisations are social systems that distinguish between members and non-members, defined as "goal-directed, boundary-maintaining, activity systems" (Aldrich 2008:4). Organisations maintain a boundary between themselves and the external environment; within an individual organisation one can find further divisions through job roles, departments and other groupings of people. These distinctions and groupings can be formal and structured, as in the existence of separate departments fulfilling different functions; i.e. a finance department or a

marketing department. These divisions can also be less formal and may result in the formation of 'communities of practice'.

The concept of 'organisational learning' was first articulated by Cyert and March (1963), suggesting that organisations can learn and store knowledge over time – adapting to their environments and learning from experience. In organisational learning literature, 'communities of practice' are defined as social learning systems, or as "groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (Wenger 2006:1). A community of practice in an art museum could be a department of educators, or a group of curators; these communities of practitioners may work together with other specialists outside of their organisation as well as with those inside it. These practitioners may share a common language, work practices, and forms of tacit knowledge. These groups of specialists work together and develop a 'shared history of learning', as Wenger describes; "over time, such histories create discontinuities between those who have been participating and those who have not" (Wenger 1998:103). Thus, boundaries form. The idea of boundaries has been examined in relation to exhibition development by Hansen and Moussouri (2004), who refer to interactions and learning across the boundaries between communities of practice.

Individuals or groups of individuals who do not belong to a community of practice in an organisation, but who move between them, are defined by Wenger as 'brokers'. These roles introduce the practices of one community into another, through the act of 'brokering'. In organisation studies literature, the concept of boundary brokering has also been called 'boundary spanning', and can refer to a role in which links are made between the organisation and an external agent. The concept has also been called 'knowledge brokering' (Pawlowski and Robey 2004; Meyer 2010), referring to a broker's role in circulating knowledge through the organisation. Because the exchange of knowledge throughout an organisation is important for its success (Ancona and Caldwell 1992; Brown and Duguid 1998), boundaries between groups become an obstacle to growth.

The act of boundary brokering may be supported by 'boundary objects' which can take many forms. Wenger (2000) groups these objects into categories of artefacts,

discourses and processes. In an art museum, artefacts could be documents, policies, prototypes or interpretive plans; discourses could be common language that is used in the organisation; and processes could be the steps taken to produce a text panel or the processes of putting together a new exhibition. Because boundary objects can be misinterpreted (or even ignored), they do not necessarily bridge boundaries. In fact, they can both contribute to or hinder the function of the organisational learning system (ibid). Choo (2006: 191) states that boundary objects "embody and represent essential knowledge and can be shared across domains and levels of expertise"; he gives the example of a prototype as used in product development. Prototypes have tacit knowledge embedded within them and are used to help facilitate communication and discussion between different groups.

Boundaries, boundary objects and boundary brokers will be discussed further in Chapter Seven, in relation to the working practices at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. The next subsection focuses on the way groups of workers combine individual knowledge to form new knowledge, looking specifically at a model developed by the organisational theorist Ikujiro Nonaka.

2.3.4 Organisational knowledge and knowledge production in organisations

The fields of organisational learning and knowledge management provide a range of models that offer useful frameworks for understanding how knowledge is produced through organisational processes. Nonaka (1994), Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), Leonard-Barton (1995), Fong (2003), and Choo (2006) have all examined processes of knowledge production in organisations, resulting in theories and models that shed light on how new knowledge is created. Nonaka and Takeuchi's 1995 book *The Knowledge Creating Company* has been defined as one of the key popularising texts in the field, acting as a watershed in the development of the subject of organisational knowledge (Easterby-Smith & Lyles 2011); Nonaka's 'SECI' model of organisational knowledge creation (Nonaka 1994; Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995) offers a valuable framework for analysis of how art museums and galleries work to produce interpretation and the way in which new knowledges of art are produced through collaborative working processes.

According to Nonaka (1994), and later Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), knowledge is produced in organisations through the continuous interaction of ‘tacit’ and ‘explicit’ knowledge. Tacit knowledge is defined as knowledge that is personal, experience-based and difficult to articulate or explain through verbal or written communication, while explicit knowledge is codified or written, such as the information contained in documents (Polyani 1958). Knowledge is not a possession, but a process which Nonaka and Takeuchi have broken into four stages.

The first stage, ‘Socialization’, involves the sharing of individual tacit knowledge through day-to-day social interaction. Individuals share experiences, socialise and learn from each other. The second stage, ‘Externalization’, is a process of transforming tacit knowledge by turning it into explicit forms of knowledge (i.e. through language, images, models, etc.) and then sharing with the group. The third stage, ‘Combination’, is when forms of explicit knowledge are collected then combined, edited or processed to form more complex sets of explicit knowledge. The final stage, ‘Internalization’, occurs when explicit knowledge created and shared in earlier stages is converted into tacit knowledge; through practice, reflection and its application to new processes and routines (Nonaka et al, 2008). While this model and the principles laid out by Nonaka were criticised by Gourlay (2006), further research was conducted by Nonaka and associates and his theories strengthened (Nonaka et al, 2006, Nonaka and von Krogh, 2009).

The SECI model of knowledge creation provides a useful framework for considering how different configurations of staff affect the production of interpretation in museums of art. This model will be examined in more detail in Chapter Six, where it will be used to assist in mapping out the way knowledge of art transforms through implementation of new organisational structures.

2.4 Summary: Defining and Theorising Interpretation and Institutions

In this chapter, a broad range of literature has been explored that contributes to an understanding of factors affecting the production of interpretation in art museums. Beginning with an overview of the concept of interpretation and issues around interpreting art in museums and galleries, the chapter gave an overview of theoretical and practical considerations related to this complex area of study. The

chapter argued that interpretation is a relatively under-researched area of museum practice, particularly in regard to the conditions of its production. Its definition and purpose are contested, and the interpretation of art remains a complex area of debate.

The chapter also gave a broad overview of theoretical debates relating to organisations, how they operate, and how they change. Reviewing a range of literature from the disciplines of cultural studies and organisation studies, the chapter presented some key arguments relating to organisational politics, structure and culture that demonstrated the incredible complexity of institutions and organisations. An understanding of these aspects of organisation are useful for making sense of the institutional dynamics presented in the Chapters Four, Five and Six. However, despite the breadth of literature presented here, what has been presented within this chapter sits broadly within three categories: that which debates the nature of art and interpretation, that which examines museum practices and that which that examines the nature of organisations. Very little has been written that connects these areas of enquiry. Even less has been written in relation to the connection between interpretive practice in art museums and the organisational structures of particular institutions. While Gray (2015) has moved this forward with his examination of museum politics, and Gurian (1995), Abt (2001), Penney (2009) and Janes (2013) have provided some insight into organisational change and its effect on staff, overall there are significant limitations to research around the connection between organisational structures and the production of knowledge.

The following chapters will explore some of the unanswered questions that existing literature has not addressed. For example, how does the organisation of people within an art museum affect the way exhibitions are produced? How does the existence of an interpretation specialist or an interpretation team impact the narratives within a particular display? While we understand the multitude of ways in which politics can affect museum practices, what does it mean for knowledge construction and the understanding of art? In Chapter Four, the negotiation of organisational and disciplinary boundaries will be discussed in relation to data collected at the Rijksmuseum. Chapter Five will examine the ways in which

leadership and power can affect the presentation of history, using Tate Britain as a case study. Chapter Six investigates working practices at the Peabody Essex Museum, arguing that changes to the organisational structure has a significant impact on the knowledges presented through display. Significant themes from each of these chapters will be brought together in the discussion in Chapter Seven. However, we now turn to Chapter Four, where the methodology for this research project will be explained in more detail.

Chapter Three

Research Methodology: Connecting People, Production and Meanings

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an outline of the methodological approach used in carrying out this study, which took place at three museums of art: The Peabody Essex Museum, Tate Britain and the Rijksmuseum. The overarching aim of the study is to analyse the way in which these three museums of art produce interpretation, to identify shifting organisational practices, and examine the way in which these processes and practices affect the production of knowledge about art. To achieve this, the study utilises a comparative case study approach and a combination of qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews, exhibition and display analysis and textual analysis of organisational documents. The research design draws upon ideas within organisation studies, museum studies and sociology, with the aim of gaining a better understanding of working practices within the chosen institutions.

This chapter describes the research design, setting out the rationale for the use of qualitative methods in researching organisational processes and providing an account of data collection and analysis methods used. The chapter begins with an explanation for choosing the institutions in this study and is followed by an examination of considerations and key debates surrounding research in organisations. It then discusses each method in turn, highlighting the rationale for use of case studies, semi-structured interviews, display analysis and textual analysis. The chapter then looks at the difficulties of capturing a clear picture of reality through the lens of Law's (2004) theory of 'mess' in social science research. Law argues that current social science research methods cannot clearly explain the 'messy', complex realities of the world, and in attempting to do so may actually make these realities less clear. The implications of this argument in relation to this study are discussed, and finally, the chapter examines my position in relation to the

research and the influence of my professional and educational background on the findings.

3.2 The Pilot Study

Prior to commencing data collection at the three main case study institutions, a pilot study was conducted at the Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle, UK. This was initiated as a testing ground for developing the interview questions and display analysis strategy. Two interviews were conducted: the first with Dr. Jane Whittaker, Head of Collections and the second with Amy Bainbridge, Education and Learning Coordinator. Alongside the interviews, a short period of display analysis was conducted in the English Interiors gallery.

The pilot study enabled the refinement of interview questions prior to undertaking the main data collection. It brought to light the difficulties of the term 'interpretation' and the challenge interviewees had in defining it and highlighted the difficulty of tracing knowledge produced in the past (and currently on display) with what interviewees could remember about the process. The pilot study also highlighted the difficulty of display analysis and of recording data in an efficient manner. In conducting display analysis at the Bowes, a number of issues arose around how to efficiently record the contents of a gallery, how to capture essential information and how to ensure that no gaps were left in collecting information. The research methods were refined significantly after conducting the pilot study – a checklist for conducting display analysis was developed, and a system of recording the contents of a gallery was also developed.

3.3 Rationale for Case Study Institutions

The three institutions chosen for this study were The Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts (USA), Tate Britain in London and the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. Each case study institution was chosen based on the aim of understanding how staffing structures impact upon processes of knowledge production. In order to do this effectively, it was important that each selected institution had both a wide-ranging collection and had recently undergone a significant change to exhibitions and displays. A collection consisting of a wide breadth of styles, subject matter and time periods and having recognised

importance was felt to allow for a greater range of discourses to be produced through exhibitions and displays. A collection of this type also meant there was more potential for staffing structures to be influential in the production of knowledge, as more personnel with more specific roles are required for its care. In addition, having gone through a period of recent change makes it possible for personnel to discuss new and different approaches to organisation of material in the galleries, new models of working practices, and where applicable, alterations in staffing structures and job roles.

As the study draws on ideas of institutional and organisational theories, it was important to base the research on large museums that have influence and status in the museum world, which have a high profile and are generally viewed as successful. As introduced in Chapter One, at the time of data collection the Peabody Essex Museum (PEM) was in the midst of a 175,000-square foot museum expansion project, while Tate Britain, after a two-year renovation, had recently (in 2013) unveiled a rehang of their permanent collection, entitled the *BP Walk through British Art*. The Rijksmuseum also re-opened in 2013 after a ten-year renovation. Further information on each institution's collection and redevelopment will be provided in Chapters Four, Five and Six. This chapter now turns to considerations, issues and debates surrounding the use of qualitative research methods within these large institutions.

3.4 Researching in Organisations

For the most part, the qualitative methods used in this study are straightforward and have been written about extensively in the social sciences; with the exception of display analysis, a wealth of literature is available explaining why and how to use such methods. However, conducting qualitative research in a large organisation or institution brings with it certain challenges and difficulties. The practical realities of conducting research in a work environment are very different from textbook descriptions of methods and the process requires careful negotiation and a willingness to be flexible and considerate of the needs of the organisation.

One of the major challenges in conducting research in an organisation is negotiating access. It has been suggested to allow for this to take some time and to use friends

and relatives where possible (Buchanan 2013) therefore the first step in securing access to the museums in this study was to contact professional colleagues. Buchanan also advises that, in discussing the research, the researcher should use non-threatening language and respect respondents' concerns with respect to time and confidentiality. In the case of PEM, access was secured through a professional contact at the museum who became the main gatekeeper for the case study. At Tate, another professional contact helped initiate a dialogue with relevant staff members, who then approved access to the museum. The process of securing access to the Rijksmuseum was more difficult, as I did not have a professional contact or friend who could help - however, through professional networking with staff at PEM, introductions to Rijksmuseum curatorial staff were made and eventually access was gained.

After access to each institution was negotiated, care had to be taken to establish rapport with and gain trust from museum staff. Having a professional background in museum work was useful in establishing a common ground. Buchanan et al discuss the interview atmosphere and various ways they have made respondents more comfortable; they point to Blum's (1952) argument for self-disclosure in interviews that are called "interview-conversations" (2013:60). By having a sort of conversation and disclosing personal information during interviews, the interviewee is made to feel more comfortable and the atmosphere is relaxed. During the course of interviews an approach was adopted that encouraged 'interview-conversations'. While not a great deal of time was spent discussing personal matters, allowing this to be a natural part of the interview created a more relaxed experience for both myself and the interviewee and a more comfortable atmosphere led to the revelation of more detailed interview answers.

The biggest challenge in conducting this research was coordinating with the schedules of interviewees and other personnel. Particularly as each case study involved long-distance travel, schedules had to be agreed ahead of time so that a concentrated amount of research could be done within a specified time period. When on-site, I made sure to respect work patterns and be as unobtrusive as possible. Working in concentrated periods of time meant that the methods used were limited to those that could yield the richest possible data in the shortest

amount of time. In-depth interviews provided the primary source of information, and this was complemented by data gathered through display analysis and analysis of organisational documentation. Because of the limited amount of time staff could spare for participation in the research, and due to the cost of travel, more time-consuming methods such as ethnography were deemed unsuitable for this study. Ethnographic methods also posed difficulty in terms of access. The following sections will briefly discuss the use of qualitative methods used in this study and why they were chosen, starting with the use of a case study approach.

3.5 Qualitative methods used in this study

This study used a qualitative mixed-methods approach, combining data from qualitative interviews, display analysis of exhibitions, document analysis and observation. The data collected is summarised below:

Case Study Institution	Data Collected	Month/Year
Peabody Essex Museum	Six interviews Document analysis of interpretive plans, organisational structures, and interpretive resources Observation of two exhibition planning meetings Detailed display analysis of galleries of American and Maritime Art and Nathaniel Gould exhibition	January 2015
Tate Britain	Six interviews Document analysis of exhibition planning documents, style guide, organisational structures, and interpretive resources Detailed display analysis of the <i>Walk through British Art</i> and BP Spotlight galleries	March - April 2015
Rijksmuseum	Twelve interviews Document analysis of text production timeline, print versions of staff presentations, interpretive resources and organisational structures Observation of one planning meeting Detailed display analysis of the Gallery of Honour and room 2.1	June - July 2015

3.5.1 Case studies

As this study looks at the nature of organisational change in museums, and asks how change occurs and why, the use of a case study approach was felt to be most appropriate. In order to gain a more comprehensive picture of how each museum works, it was felt that spending time in each setting interviewing staff and analysing the products of interpretation would provide a clearer overall picture and enable triangulation of data. A case study approach allows the researcher to examine real-life events from a holistic perspective; and because it looks at phenomena in-depth, it is highly suitable for asking 'how' and 'why' questions such as those presented in this study (Yin 2009; Thomas 2011). A comparative case-study approach, where a number of cases are used, allows the researcher to examine the similarities and differences between them.

Because of the relatively limited range of literature available about shifts in art museum working practices, the three cases chosen for this study are examples of 'revelatory' cases. A revelatory case is one in which the researcher has access to a situation that has been hidden, and there is potential to shed light on the research topic. (Matthews and Ross 2010). Where little has been studied or written about a topic, revelatory cases can be found. While there is a great deal of literature on both the Tate and the Rijksmuseum, there is little written about the way in which they produce interpretation, therefore making this 'hidden' process a fascinating area to study.

In case study research, it is important to gather multiple sources of evidence, such as what people say, what they do, what they produce and what documents and records show (Gillham 2000). Multiple sources of evidence are essential for triangulation of data and for validation of research (Yin 2009), therefore during the course of each case study I collected the following:

- *Semi-structured interviews* with staff members and others involved in the process of producing interpretation; these included members of interpretation departments, education departments and curatorial departments at each institution
- *Documents* such as interpretation policies, education policies, exhibition planning documents, museum maps, information leaflets and other interpretative materials

- *Photographs and sketches* of galleries and installed interpretation, generated by either myself on site or produced by each institution; some of these formed the basis for display analysis which will be discussed later in this chapter

While both quantitative and qualitative methods can be used in case study research, for the purposes of this study a qualitative approach was taken as it allows for more detail to be captured. In analysing change in organisations, qualitative research allows the researcher to undergo a detailed analysis of change, including the process of how change occurs and why (Cassell and Symon 1994). The smaller sample sizes used in qualitative research also allow for more in-depth interviews and a better understanding of the complexities of change.

3.5.2 Semi-structured interviews

During each case study, in-depth, semi structured interviews were used to gather information from museum staff. The interviews conducted are summarised below:

Institution	Interviewee and Job Title	Date of Interview(s)
Peabody Essex Museum	Emily Fry, Lead Interpretive Planner	23/01/2015
	Juliette Fritsch, Chief of Education and Interpretation	21/01/2015 26/01/2015
	Trevor Smith, Curator of the Present Tense	29/01/2015
	Lisa Incatasciato, Art and Nature Centre Projects Coordinator	29/01/2015
	Anonymous, Project Coordinator	30/01/2015
Tate Britain	Kirsteen McSwein, Curator, Interpretation	17/03/2015 20/03/2015
	Sam McGuire, Assistant Curator, Interpretation	17/03/2015 18/03/2015
	Penelope Curtis, Director	17/03/2015
	Martin Myrone, Lead Curator, British Art to 1800	22/04/2015
Rijksmuseum	Annemies Broekgaarden, Head of Public & Education	22/06/2015
	Inge Willemsen, Education Officer	22/06/2015
	Pauline Kintz, Education Officer	23/06/2015
	Tim Zeedijk, Head of Exhibitions	23/06/2015
	Renate Meijer, Education Officer	24/06/2015 29/06/2015 02/07/2015

	Wim Pjibes, Director	25/06/2015
	Femke Diercks, Junior Curator for European Ceramics	26/06/2015
	Jane Turner, Head of the Print Room (and label editor)	30/06/2015
	Martine Gosselink, Head of History	02/07/2015

The qualitative research interview is described as “an interview, whose purpose is to gather descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena” (Kvale 1983:174). Kvale also defines characteristics of a qualitative research interview, stating that it is: centred on the interviewee’s life-world; seeks to understand meaning of phenomena in his life-world; is qualitative, descriptive and specific; open to change and ambiguity; takes place in an interpersonal interaction and depends on the sensitivity of the interviewer (ibid:174). Miller and Glassner state that “narrative accounts produced through in-depth interviews provide us with access to realities” (Silverman 2016:51). It is these ‘realities’ that the study sets out to uncover, using interviews to identify the ways in which interviewees see phenomena in their working lives.

The interview schedule used in this study contains open-ended questions that did not need to be rigidly adhered to. This flexibility, characteristic of qualitative interviews, can cause initial research ideas to change as data is gathered (Bryman 2012). While a similarly worded list of questions was sent to each interviewee ahead of time, during the course of interview the conversation often shifted to what interested the interviewee or to what was most relevant to their professional practice. Each interview was between 30 – 60 minutes long. In some cases, multiple interviews with the same participant took place in order to follow up on information that could not be provided in the initial interview. Participants were given questions in advance and had the option of viewing the transcript if desired. All interviews were transcribed as recorded.

3.5.3 Exhibition and display analysis

While interviews provided a rich source of data in this study, exhibition and display analysis was undertaken in order to more fully understand the interpretation

strategies at each institution and to trace production processes to the knowledges presented. The approach to analysing displays taken in this study is informed by bodies of literature by several authors who have attempted to develop theoretical frameworks for exhibition and display analysis. A key concept in this approach is the notion that museum displays are not simply reflective - they are a technology for constructing knowledge and theorising about the world; and that the act of curating or producing a display is in itself a process of theorising (Moser, 2010; Whitehead 2009, 2016; Whitehead et al 2012). This section will provide a brief overview of various approaches to, frameworks for and theories of display analysis, along with their limitations. This is followed by a detailed explanation of the model of analysis used for this study.

Literature concerning the analysis of displays, particularly those in art museums, is diffuse. What has been written appears to fall into distinct categories: that which theorises, often through metaphor (Cameron 1968; Bal 2008); that which categorises exhibitions and displays into types (Burcaw 1975; Miles and Alt 1982; Hall 1987; Shanks & Tilley 1987; Greenblatt 1991; Arpin 1992; van Mensch 2003); that which is intended as a framework or guide for museum professionals for developing, evaluating or critiquing exhibitions (Serrell 2001, 2006; Diamond 2009); and that which proposes new methods for critically analysing displays and elements of display (Lindauer 2008; Moser 2010; Whitehead, 2012; Whitehead et al 2012).

Exhibitions and displays have been described as a form of language, as in Duncan Cameron's (1968) systematic approach to exhibitions as a communication system; this early approach uses language as a metaphor for an exhibition, comparing museum objects with nouns, the relationships between objects as verbs and secondary museum material and the design of the environment as adjectives and adverbs (van Mensch 2003). Exhibitions and displays can also be described as an art form with narrative, theatrical and cinematic characteristics (Bal 2008). In this way, exhibitions can be analysed through the various lenses one might use to critique a novel, a play or a film. This manner of thinking about exhibitions is useful for examining the connections and multi-layered meanings within a display. However, as novels, plays and films have a specific beginning, middle and end, using this

approach in analysing a display places limitations on the ways in which it can be understood. In experiencing a display, the visitor may go from one object to another, then back again; they may weave together stories from different areas of the display, or they may pass over some sections entirely. This experience is somewhat different from reading a book from start to finish or watching a play from beginning to end.

Art exhibitions can also be approached typologically, dividing them into categories based on a variety of criteria. These categories can be quite loose or abstract, or very specific and structured. Greenblatt (1991) identifies two elements present in exhibitions: 'resonance' is defined as the power of a displayed object to provoke thought about its place in the world, whereas 'wonder' is the power of an object to provoke an emotional response; all exhibitions have elements of both. Other approaches to exhibitions are more structured. Van Mensch (2003) attempts to develop a new theoretical framework for display analysis that categorises exhibitions into groups based on their structure, style, and technique. He bases his framework on typologies by Burcaw (1975), Miles and Alt (1982), Hall (1987), Shanks & Tilley (1987) and Arpin (1992). Grouping displays and exhibitions into types is useful in some ways, providing a structured way of thinking about the general approaches used. However, they are also limiting. While a particular exhibition may have 'resonance' for one visitor, it may provoke 'wonder' in another. Some displays or exhibitions may not easily fit into a specific category or may contain elements not covered in any typology.

Unlike theoretical approaches to the categorisation of exhibitions and displays, which do not deal much with the effect on the visitor, evaluation techniques developed in the museums sector often gauge their effectiveness for the purpose of improving the visitor experience. These approaches are functional, focusing on elements such as layout, accessibility of text, and other practical elements; they offer guidelines for museum professionals to refer to when producing exhibitions. One such approach, the 'Excellent Judges Framework' (Serrell 2006), is used by groups of museum professionals in evaluating exhibitions; it looks at aspects of comfort, engagement and intellectual content from the visitor's point of view. Teller (2007) points out other methods, including independent critique and summative evaluation, which evaluate an exhibition's 'success'. While these methods are

excellent tools for developing 'best practice', or what is deemed as correct or effective, they do not critically analyse the content of displays to a great degree. However, unlike the more theoretical approaches mentioned previously, they do take into account aspects of the physicality of display, which is equally as important as intellectual content. They may take into account issues of comfort, both physical and psychological; how engaging the displays are; the accessibility of interpretation, and other elements that can significantly impact how an exhibition or display is experienced and understood.

For this study, examples of approaches to display analysis were sought that view the museum as a whole but also focus on specific aspects in greater depth. One example of an approach which utilises a combination of critical, theoretical and practical methods has been presented by Lindauer (2008), who asks the reader to embrace critical museum theory, to view exhibitions and displays through investigative eyes, and to question everything in the museum from the physical layout to the intellectual content of displays. Lindauer views the museum as a 'text or script to be decoded' (ibid: 203). This became a starting point for thinking about analysis of displays in this study and for critically examining the interpretation strategies employed by each case study institution. Moser (2010) argues that it is necessary to combine analysis of the displays themselves with additional data to determine the rationale intended by the creators. She lists archival sources, collections of personal correspondence and research into the background of exhibition creators as possible sources of additional information. She argues: "while many elements appear to have little significance when examined in isolation, they can assume great importance in making statements about a subject when considered in relation to other details" (p. 24). This argument influenced the decision to combine display analysis with interviews and textual analysis in this study.

A second approach that influenced the methods used in this study sees museums as a type of map. Whitehead et al (2013) lay out a methodology for display analysis based on the concept that the museum is a form of map for the organisation of 'cultural objects'. Cultural objects are described as physical and material items; intangible items such as music or language; abstract concepts such as a theme; or a cultural signifier, such as an historical event. Their qualitative analysis of displays

charts museum representations, asks questions about what is emphasised and de-emphasised, how objects are grouped and scaled, and how specific ideas or themes appear throughout the museum. Through this lens, the museum display is seen not as linear (like a text or film script) but instead consists of many possible narratives, stories and relationships. Certain objects within the display may be emphasised or de-emphasised, but the viewer chooses which path to take and constructs her own version of the story as she travels through (unless the gallery layout prohibits it).

Further research into the analysis of displays by Whitehead (2016) informed the approach taken to the analysis of data in this project. Whitehead argues that museum displays are a form of representation as well as a cultural production of knowledge. Because museum displays are political, public propositions of knowledge and have the ability to influence audiences and create lasting social effects, special attention needs to be paid to understanding the meanings behind them. Later analysis of data in this study proceeded from this viewpoint.

The method of display analysis developed for this study stemmed from a desire to investigate what knowledges, stories and narratives are emphasised in displays while at the same time acknowledging affective elements that might normally go unrecorded. Through a series of in-depth field notes, the research attempted to articulate the general atmosphere, emotion and feeling of the displays in addition to critically examining content. This method draws on the 'semi-grounded' and 'impressionistic' methods set out by Whitehead et al, whose study relied on detailed field notes that recorded both cognitive and affective dimensions and meant that the researchers were "actively 'reading for' certain themes, accounts and stories... while being attentive to competing aspects of lesser interest to (their) research" (2012:58).

Regardless of approach, one of the main limitations to any form of display analysis is that displays and exhibitions can be read in a multitude of ways. Mason highlights the possibility of "multiple readings and the existence of alternative meanings present in museum displays" (2006:21); in the case of Whitehead et al (2012), the focus of analysis was on the representation of place and identity, whereas Lindauer's readings reflect her education, professional experience and readings on new

museum theory (2008:205). My readings of the displays in this study reflect my own experience and interests and the aims and objectives of this study.

In order to standardise the analysis of displays across each case study, a framework was developed to provide a general structure for each visit. The framework consists of a single overarching question which provides a reminder of the focus of the visit, which asks what stories, narratives, perspectives and/or knowledges are being represented and how. A series of more detailed questions to answer about the exhibitions and displays follows, which help focus the visit on specific elements of display. Questions ask first about the general 'impression' gained from being present in the museum and in particular galleries, then look more closely at forms of interpretation in the displays. The questions draw on cartographical approaches, such as how cultural objects are grouped, segregated and scaled; they also look at how interpretation is 'layered' in order to present differing amounts of information and multiple narratives. To balance information gained from display analysis and interviews, organisational documents were also consulted, as will be discussed in the next section.

3.5.4 Textual analysis

Analysis of organisational documentation provided a further layer of information in this study. The term 'organisational documentation' covers a wide range of texts produced by an organisation, such as annual reports, public relations materials, mission statements, departmental policies, formal correspondence and informal correspondence. For the purposes of this study, analysis was focused foremost on interpretation and education policies, mission statements, and annual reports. Where applicable, additional materials were included in analysis.

The analysis of organisational documentation as part of each case study was chosen primarily for practical reasons. The data collected from documentary records form a rich source of insight into how museums operate, what their aims and objectives are, and provide detailed information that would be difficult to obtain without being part of the fabric of the organisation. Forster (1994) sums up why using organisational documentation in organisational research is valuable:

“These varied documentary records constitute a rich source of insights into different employee and group interpretations of organisational life, because they are one of the principal by-products of the interactions and communication of individuals and groups, at all levels, in organisations. In coverage, these data are often more comprehensive than the kind of material which a research who is new to an organisation could obtain from either interviews or questionnaires. They are often contemporaneous records of events in organisations. This can help researchers to look more closely at historical processes and developments in organisations and can help in interpreting informants’ ‘rewriting’ of history in later verbal accounts (Forster 1994:148).

Practically speaking, within the limited time frame spent at each institution, it was important to collect as much data as possible without interrupting day-to-day museum operations. Referring to interpretation and education policies, annual reports, mission statements, and other readily available information provided data relating to organisational structure, the goals of the institution, aims of particular exhibitions and displays, and provided an historical overview of operations.

Analysis of organisational documentation, however, was intended merely to supplement information gleaned from interviews and display analysis and provide triangulation of data. This is because it is difficult to generalise about an organisation from its policies, reports and other corporate documentation. Forster (ibid: 149) points out that “company documentation may be fragmentary and subjective. It may not be an authentic or accurate record... (documentation is) invariably political and subjective” and suggests it is used with caution.

Methods of analysis of text and documentation can be complex. The use of a hermeneutic method is discussed by Forster (1994) in analysis of organisational documentation, suggesting the use of this seven-stage process to understand meaning, identify themes, triangulate data, and then check and recontextualise data. He points out that this method is not an exact methodology. Perakyla (2008) describes further methods of analysing talk and text, first discussing discourse analysis (developed by Brown & Yule in 1983) and then examining Fairclough’s (1989, 1995) method of ‘critical discourse analysis’ which looks at how texts of

different kinds reproduce power and inequalities in society. Silverman (2011) provides an overview of further methods of text analysis: content analysis, thematic analysis, narrative analysis, ethnography and comparative keyword analysis. While all methods discussed are useful, for the purposes of this study a more informal approach was taken.

Because the main source of data for this study comes from semi-structured interviews, analysis of organisational documentation provided an additional, complementary source of data used for triangulation. A less formal method of analysis was therefore preferred in which documentation was read and re-read and key themes identified. Perakyla (2008) references Seale's (1998) approach, stating that "an informal approach may, in many cases, be the best choice as a method... Especially in research designs where the qualitative text analysis is not at the core of the research but instead is in a subsidiary or complementary role, no more sophisticated text analytical models may be needed" (p.353). Reiterating Moser's (2010) position on understanding the "theoretical, political, and intellectual values at the heart of an exhibition" (p. 24), by combining textual analysis with display analysis and semi-structured interviews it is possible to uncover meanings that might perhaps not be evident when examining these elements in isolation.

Having discussed the three main methods of data collection used for this study – semi-structured interviews, display analysis and textual analysis – this chapter will now look at John Law's theory of 'mess' and how this relates to the complex nature of qualitative research in organisations.

3.6 Law's Theory of 'Mess' in Social Science Research

While every effort was made during the course of this research to build a clear picture of the processes occurring in case study institutions, it is not possible to grasp completely the complexities of everyday realities in these settings. The information gathered during the course of interviews, display analysis and textual analysis presents a snapshot of what is happening in each case study institution, but this is only one reality of many. John Law (2004: 2) argues that "social science tends to make a mess of describing things that are complex, diffuse and messy" and that "simple, clear descriptions won't work if what they are describing it not itself very

coherent". Attempting to describe a process undertaken by many people within a large organisation, within a limited time frame, was a messy endeavour.

Understanding an organisational process, especially when that process results in something so difficult to describe in words as a display, is difficult using established methods. Law argues that "some things in the world can be made clear and definite, but alongside this, the world is also textured in many different ways that academic methods of inquiry miss out on" (ibid: 2). By 'textures', Law means elements that are difficult to capture using established social science methods – much of the world is "vague, diffuse or unspecific, slippery, emotional, ephemeral, elusive or indistinct, changes like a kaleidoscope, or doesn't really have much of a pattern at all..." (ibid). The qualitative methods used in this study capture some of these 'textures', but not all.

Describing an exhibition or display is also difficult using established methods. The experience of visiting an exhibition or display is multi-dimensional. While words can describe the layout of the display, or the colour of the walls, or where objects are placed, it is difficult to capture the emotions it brings about or the thought processes we go through as we examine the works on display. Some realities are difficult to translate into text or imagery. As Law states:

... certain kinds of realities are condensed at best with difficulty into textual or pictorial forms. For instance, mystical spiritual experience cannot be captured in words... Narrative that represents a reality goes only so far. But the argument is not simply important in the context of the spiritual. Many other realities are like this too. Is it possible to *describe* emotional ecstasy, or love, or pain, or grief, or fear?... Many realities craft themselves into materials other than, or as well as, the linguistic." (Law 2004:147).

Law's argument is that dominant 'truth-related' methods are too restrictive: "I have argued that our methods should sometimes, perhaps often, manifest realities that are indefinite, and that as a part of this, it is important to appreciate that allegory, non-coherence, and the indefinite are not necessarily signs of methodological failure" (ibid:54). The results presented in this thesis are not intended to be a definite, single explanation of the reality of organisational processes, but instead represent one reality of many within a particular context and in a particular timeframe.

3.7 Reflexivity

As identified in the introduction to this thesis, my professional and educational background in art and museum education has had an impact on the research process. My first degree is in art education and art history, and I subsequently earned an MA in studio art and an MA in art gallery and museum studies. My professional experience includes 8 years of teaching in schools, and another 7 years of working in a variety of education and learning roles within the museum sector. Alongside my doctoral studies I continued to take an active interest in museum and gallery education, occasionally doing casual work for the local museum service, attending conferences and keeping abreast of happenings in the world of museum education.

I was concerned with my identity as a 'museum educator' as I approached each institution and began to conduct interviews, mainly because I did not want to significantly alter participant responses by identifying myself as such. This was particularly of concern when interviewing curators, as I would be seen as an 'outsider' and I was aware that this might affect the depth of their responses. I did not feel this pressure when interviewing educators and interpretation staff, as coming from a similar professional background made me an 'insider'. In both situations, I wished to emphasise my experience and understanding of general issues pertinent to all art museum professionals so as to establish rapport. I therefore identified myself as a 'museum professional and researcher' with a background in education. It is important to be aware that my professional identity may have subtly affected both the questions asked and participants' responses, as well as my interpretations of their responses.

3.8 Summary: Methodological Approaches

This chapter set out to explain the methodological approach used for this study, which was centred on three case study institutions. The combination of qualitative methods used within each case study provided complementary data which allowed for a more comprehensive picture of the way interpretation is produced, how organisational practices have shifted and how these processes have influenced the end products of interpretation. In-depth semi-structured interviews provided rich

data which was complemented by the study of organisational documentation; these were, in turn, informed by a comprehensive display analysis method that sought to reveal the overarching narratives, knowledges and discourse present in displays. Organisational research is complex and messy; understanding fully the operations of a museum is difficult to achieve as an outsider. However, the methods chosen for this study provide rich information that has helped paint a detailed picture of organisational life and provides a revelatory picture of otherwise invisible organisational processes.

Chapter Four

Negotiating Boundaries: Telling the Story of the Netherlands through Art and History at the Rijksmuseum

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents analysis of the data collected at the Rijksmuseum, aiming to show that interpretation specialists function as 'boundary brokers' in museums. These staff members serve as a 'link' between departments, they 'translate' curatorial knowledge for the general public, and act as 'intermediaries' between the institution and audiences – all actions that are defined as 'boundary brokering' (Wenger 1998). Through analysis of interviews, documents and displays, this chapter will demonstrate that through the act of brokering, interpretation specialists in art museums connect disciplines and departments, provide a route for circulation of knowledge in the organisation, and have an active role in shaping the stories of art told through display.

The position of boundary broker is an essential and important role that makes a vital contribution to the formation of new knowledge; within the organisation, interpretation specialists form a bridge between departments that have traditionally remained separate. They also act as brokers in the development of exhibitions, connecting curatorial aims with educational aims, and negotiate the way information is presented to museum audiences; their role helps to combine knowledge of museum collections with knowledge of how audiences learn and experience exhibitions. Boundary roles have been examined extensively in social science and organisational theory literature; Wenger (1998) describes a boundary broker as an individual who introduces one element of practice into another, whereas Hass (2015) maps out several types of boundary roles in organisations, ranging from broker to 'boundary spanner'. While different in title and focus, all boundary roles play an important part in circulating information among different groups. At the Rijksmuseum, interpretation specialists took on this role, contributing to the presentation of new narratives in the redeveloped displays.

While this chapter will focus on the findings from research at the Rijksmuseum, its central theme also emerged in each of the other institutions in this study. Interviews with staff at each case study institution revealed that interpretation specialists, regardless of the differences in the scope of their role, all had one thing in common: that their activity in the organisation created a bridge among various teams or departments that would not usually work closely together. In some cases, interpretation specialists primarily bridged the boundaries between curators and educators, while in others they also connected audience researchers, designers and marketing teams. And, of perhaps greater significance, interpretation specialists in all institutions in this study served as boundary brokers between curators and museum audiences, acting to translate specialist knowledge for a broad public.

Interviewees in all case studies, both interpretation specialists themselves and others in the organisation, often used metaphor to describe the role of interpretation staff; examples included 'conduit', 'medium' and 'translator'; one interviewee viewed these staff as 'police officers' because of the way they regulated communication. These metaphors for the role of interpretation specialists help to theorise the position of these staff members within the organisation. This is significant because it outlines the paths that various types of knowledge take through an organisation and how knowledge changes and transforms as it travels towards its destination – whether that is the theming of a gallery space, a text panel, a multimedia device, an information card or another form of interpretation.

The chapter will begin with analysis of the redeveloped permanent displays, with an in-depth reading of displays and interpretation in sections of the 17th century galleries. The chapter will then go on to trace the history of production of interpretation within the redeveloped displays, drawing from both interviews with staff and institutional documentation provided by the museum. In bringing these two groups of data together, the chapter aims to connect the processes of production with what is visible in the galleries, and to illustrate the boundary brokering role of interpretation specialists in the institution.

4.2 Display Analysis

4.2.1 Context: 8000 objects, 800 years of Dutch art and history, 80 rooms

The Rijksmuseum opened in 1885 in an area of Amsterdam that was, at the time, the edge of the city. Over time, the city grew, and today the museum is situated in the Museumplein square, also home of the Van Gogh Museum and the Stedelijk Museum. At the time of data collection (June 2015), the square was a hub of activity, with people of all ages queuing up to visit all three museums, cycling through the iconic arches that run beneath the Rijksmuseum and climbing atop the huge 'I love Amsterdam' sign installed in the square. Beautifully landscaped gardens are positioned in front of the Rijksmuseum, and visitors freely walked through and relaxed on the lawn chairs dotted throughout the space. A contemporary sculpture exhibition was on display in the gardens; in his interview Wim Pjibes, Director of the museum, described the idea behind opening of the gardens as a move towards connecting the museum with the city.

Inside the redesigned museum, visitors are welcomed into a glass-covered atrium filled with light. After purchasing tickets, visitors must navigate towards a set of small doors that lead into the gallery spaces; this leads to a grand staircase that takes visitors to the second floor *Eragalerij*, or, as translated by staff, 'Gallery of Honour' – the central hall that is the heart of the museum. The Gallery of Honour features what the museum has chosen as its most important objects from the Dutch Golden Age, a period of time spanning the 17th century. Rembrandt's *The Night Watch* features prominently in this gallery; the museum was originally designed with this painting as its centrepiece.

The vision of the museum, as published on their website, is to "link individuals with art and history"; its mission states:

As a national institute, the Rijksmuseum offers a representative overview of Dutch art and history from the Middle Ages onwards, and of major aspects of European and Asian art. (Rijksmuseum 2016)

To achieve this aim, the museum has used a broadly chronological approach to display, combining objects from both its history collections and its fine and

decorative arts collections to tell a story that begins in the Middle Ages and ends in the present day.

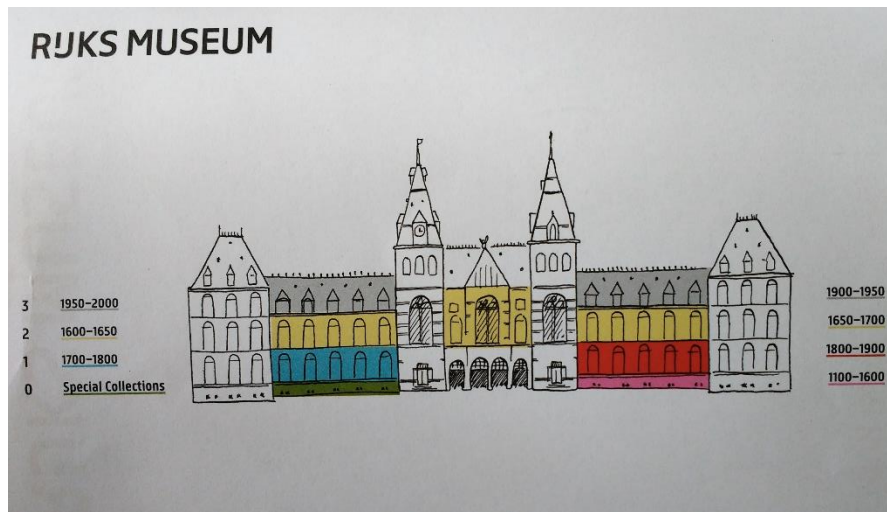


Figure 1 Illustration of layout. (Source: Rijksmuseum leaflet)

Figure 1 illustrates the museum’s chronological approach to display, as taken from the first page of the Rijksmuseum ‘Floor Plan’. As illustrated, the museum is divided into four floors with one time period represented by each colour. The exception to this is the ‘special collections’ area, which will not be focused on in depth in this chapter. The basement (Floor 0) holds both the special collections galleries and the 1100 – 1600 galleries. So, while the layout is broadly chronological, the focus of the museum is on its 17th century collections, housed in the centre of the building.

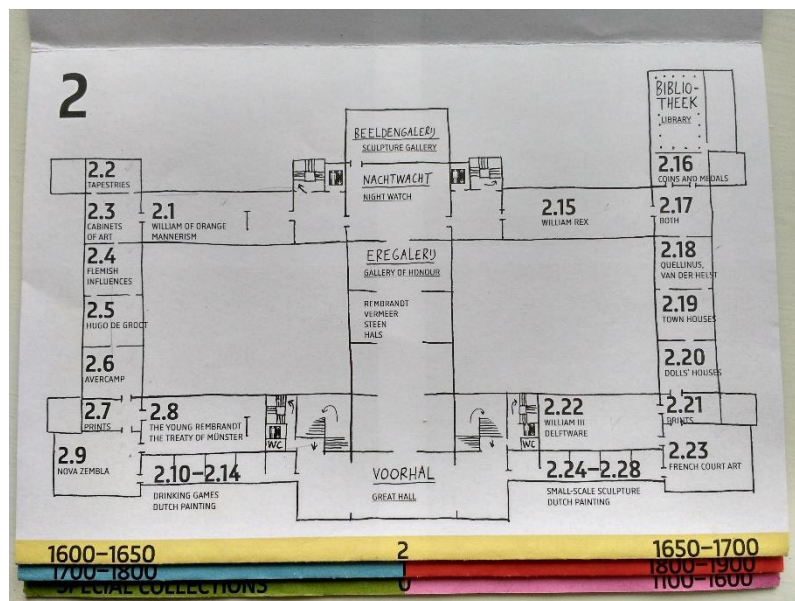


Figure 2 Layout of floor 2. (Source: Rijksmuseum leaflet, June 2015)

This analysis will focus specifically on room 2.1, located just off the Gallery of Honour. Rooms throughout the museum are numbered and each room has a central theme or focus (See Fig 2). If traveling along the Gallery of Honour and to the right, visitors would enter into room 2.1 and encounter works from the first half of the 17th century. The introductory panel in room 2.1 indicates that the room's narrative focus is on the "birth of the Dutch republic", a story that begins with William of Orange, leader of the rebellion against Spanish rule. The arrangement of themes and galleries are tied together by time period, but each room's thematic focus allows visitors to wander in and out without the need to follow a fixed route.

4.2.2 Display style and design elements – colour, light, object and text placement

The room, along with most other galleries in the museum, is hung in an 'art style' (Lindauer 2008) in which objects are arranged in order to accentuate their aesthetic qualities. While objects are grouped in clusters in some cases, they are spaced evenly around the room in order to allow visitors to examine each object or small grouping of works. Walls are a dark grey colour which provides a neutral background that does not detract from the objects on display, yet retains a period feel. The sophisticated LED lighting system evenly distributes daylight-emulating light around the room, allowing for all works to be seen clearly; objects are not obviously emphasised (or de-emphasised) using lighting techniques.

The placement of text and interpretive resources speaks to a traditional approach. Each section of the room has a longer introductory text which describes the theme of the room, while each object has a 60-word label placed next to (or near) it. Text is white on grey and uses a sans serif font designed specifically for the museum. Each 60-word label highlights the name of the object in a larger font size, with the artist and material listed below in a smaller font size; historical objects, whose makers are unknown, list their origin. Placement of text throughout the room is done in a semi-traditional manner, with longer text at the start of a room; labels are placed to the left of wall-based works or below other works. The placement of labels to the left of objects suggests that the interpretation is as important as the objects themselves – leading viewers to 'read' the display from left to right as they would read a Dutch or English text. The background colour of labels is carefully matched to the colour of

the walls, which helps them to blend in and draw attention to the objects on display rather than the interpretation.

The only other interpretive resource apart from text panels and labels in this room are several copies of an 'Inzoomer' information card that focuses on the painting *Allegory on the Abdication of Emperor Charles V in Brussels*. At first glance, one might think that Inzoomer cards have been designed for the most important pieces in each room; however, this is not necessarily the case and will be discussed in more detail in section 4.2.5.

4.2.3 Grouping, layout and emphasis

What is striking upon entering Room 2.1 from the Gallery of Honour is the placement of *Cannon of the Amsterdam Admiralty*, a 400-kilo ship's cannon, in the centre of the room; the cannon faces room 2.15 on the opposite side and is cleverly arranged to point to the Dutch warship the *William Rex*. This speaks to the telling of a military history and the success of achieving independence; many of the works on display in this room tell of the leadership of William of Orange during this violent time. The 'birth' of the Dutch republic, when the present-day Netherlands separated from Belgium, is represented as a time of pride in Dutch history.

The museum has chosen to represent this highlight in Dutch history using portraits of William of Orange, historical military objects and a gold ewer and basin carved with scenes of battle victories over Spain. Other objects in this half of the room represent other battles, conflicts and significant events, including the Abdication of Emperor Charles V. The room is separated, however, into two sections; while the first half examines historic events, the second focuses on the achievements of artists during this time period.

The introductory text in this half of the room is titled 'Mannerism and Caravaggism'. At first glance, it is difficult to see the link between the paintings and objects in this area and the war-focused objects in the other half; however, the interpretation ties these together. Rather than focusing purely on formal art historical elements or discussing art movements, the interpretation tells the story of what artists were doing, where they were going and how their styles were developing at the same time war was raging in the country (fig. 3).



Figure 3 Room 2.1 Introductory Text Panel – Mannerism and Caravaggism. (Source: Author)

The next section will look more closely at wall texts in both sections of Room 2.1.

4.2.4 Wall texts and object labels

Drawing on Whitehead's (2012) interpretive frames, as discussed in section 2.2.9, this section now turns to examining selected wall texts in room 2.1 in more detail. The texts and labels in this room utilise a mixture of interpretive framings: primarily narrative, evolutionary, pictorial, historical-documentary and technical-stylistic. The introductory texts on either side of the room utilise a solidly narrative framing to tell the story that ties together the objects in each section of the room; for example, the text in figure 4 gives the visitor an overview of events that are represented in the displays in this section of room 2.1:

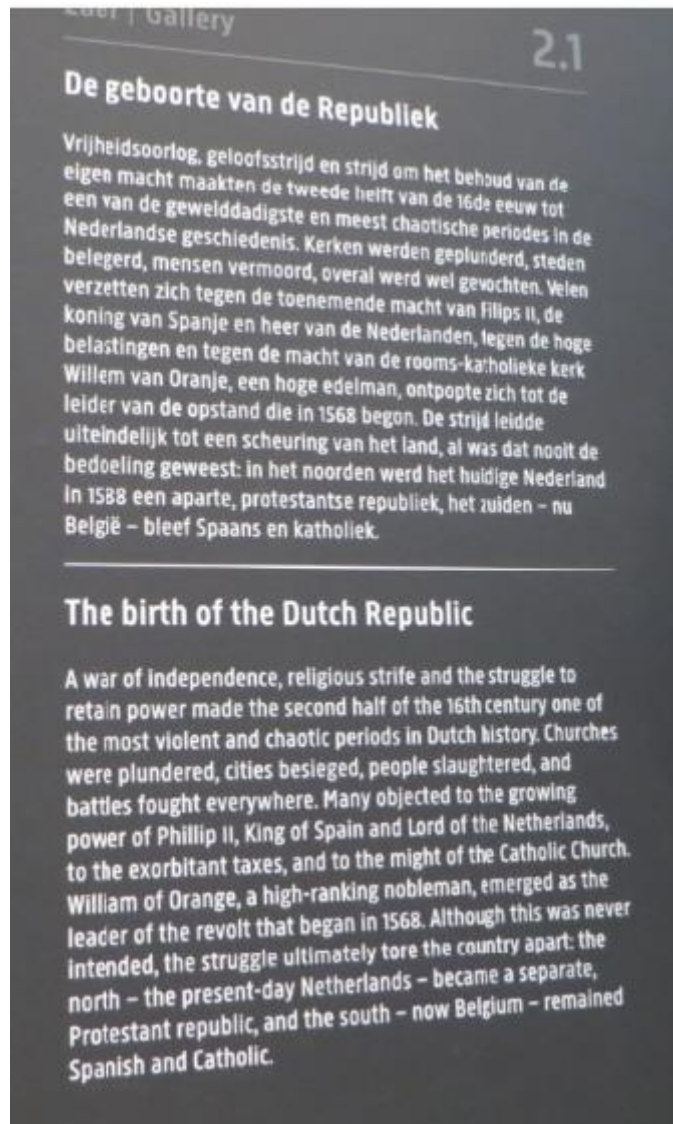


Figure 4 Introductory text, room 2.1 section A. (Source: Author)

A closer look at the introductory text on the other side of room 2.1 reveals a similar approach, but also utilises a type of evolutionary framing by describing how Mannerism fell out of favour among artists and began to be replaced by a Caravaggist style (fig. 5):

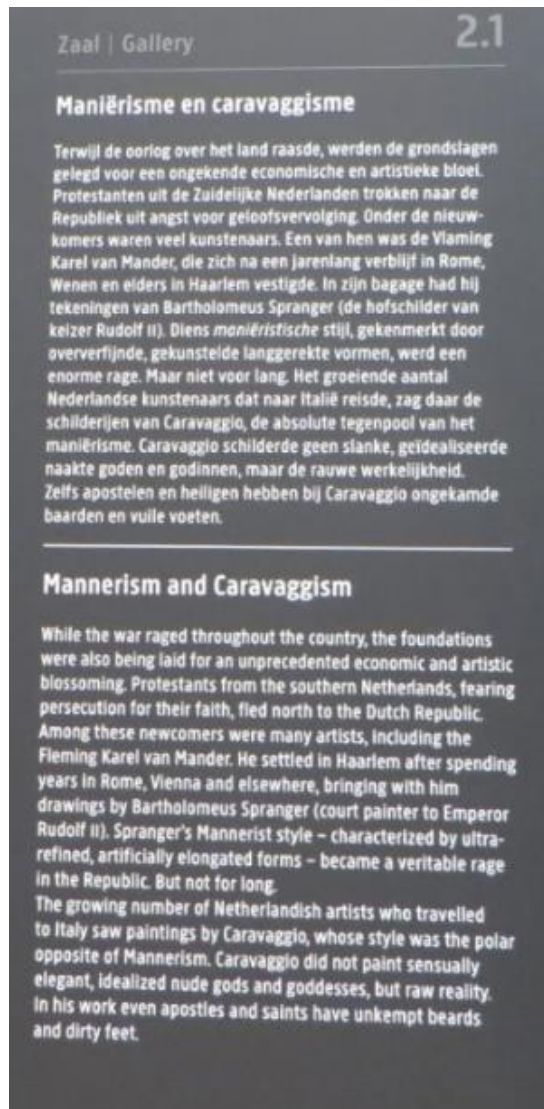


Figure 5 Introductory text panel, Room 2.1, Section B. (Source: Author)

Turning now to individual object labels, a wider variety of framings can be seen. Many of the objects selected from the history collections (discernible by the accession codes on the bottom of labels; the prefix 'SK' is from the painting collection, 'BK', decorative art, and 'NG', history) use a functional, technical-stylistic framing or an historical-documentary framing. This can be seen here in this label for the cannon in the centre of the room, which uses a functional framing (fig. 6):



Figure 6 Label for Cannon of the Amsterdam Admiralty, room 2.1. (Source: Author)

For paintings, particularly in the second section of the room (Mannerism and Caravaggism), narrative frames are most often utilised. In some cases, this is combined with a type of pictorial framing that identifies the location of a person or object in the work, or with an evolutionary framing that positions the artist's work in relation to the influence of Caravaggio. An example of the combination of these can be seen in the text label for *Prometheus Being Chained by Vulcan*, pictured here:



Figure 7 Prometheus Being Chained by Vulcan, Van Baburen, 1623. (Source: Author)

The text label (fig. 8) describes the story of the painting, points out to the viewer what can be seen in the painting, and concludes with a brief paragraph about Caravaggio's influence on Van Baburen.



Figure 8 Narrative, pictorial and evolutionary framing. (Source: Author)

The use of the evolutionary frame here is simplified, limited to the second short paragraph. The evolutionary frame is one which is entrenched within art museum practice and stems from a practice developed in the mid- to- late nineteenth century when ideas from evolutionary theory were applied to display (Whitehead 2012:75). Missing from the text labels in this room are formal framings that use art historical terminology.

In summary, room 2.1 contains a mixture of objects which have traditionally been the responsibility of different departments. The introductory wall texts join these objects together by providing a connecting narrative, while the individual object labels use interpretive frames rooted in the traditions of historical and art historical

display. A more integrated approach can be seen in the Inzoomer information cards and the multimedia guide, the focus of the next two sections.

4.2.5 'Inzoomer' information cards

Throughout the galleries, large (approximately A3 sized) laminated cards are available for visitors to borrow that contain more in-depth information about selected objects in the museum. While not labelled as such, these cards are called 'Inzoomers' because they encourage visitors to 'zoom in' and focus on details of a work that they may not have noticed before. They also provide in-depth information; the information can range from details about narrative to further information about how an object was produced.

In each gallery space, information cards are available for between one and three selected objects. These range from decorative art pieces to sculpture and painting. At first glance, it would appear that the cards were developed to provide information on popular or significant objects, such as would be selected for a multimedia tour. However, it was later learned that this was not the case, and the criteria for selection was based on whether or not a particular object had a lot of stories to tell. This will be discussed further in regard to the production of the cards in section 4.5.2.

In room 2.1, there was one Inzoomer card available to accompany this painting, *Allegory on the Abdication of Emperor Charles V in Brussels*:



Figure 9 Allegory on the Abdication of Emperor Charles V in Brussels, Francken, c. 1630 - 1640 (Source: Rijksmuseum.nl)

The Inzoomer card here is double-sided, featuring the same image on both sides; the front is focused on looking more carefully at the painting ('see more'), while the back is focused on providing additional information ('learn more'). In the image on both sides, selected areas of the painting are highlighted in circles with lines leading to snippets of text; the areas not highlighted are faded out.

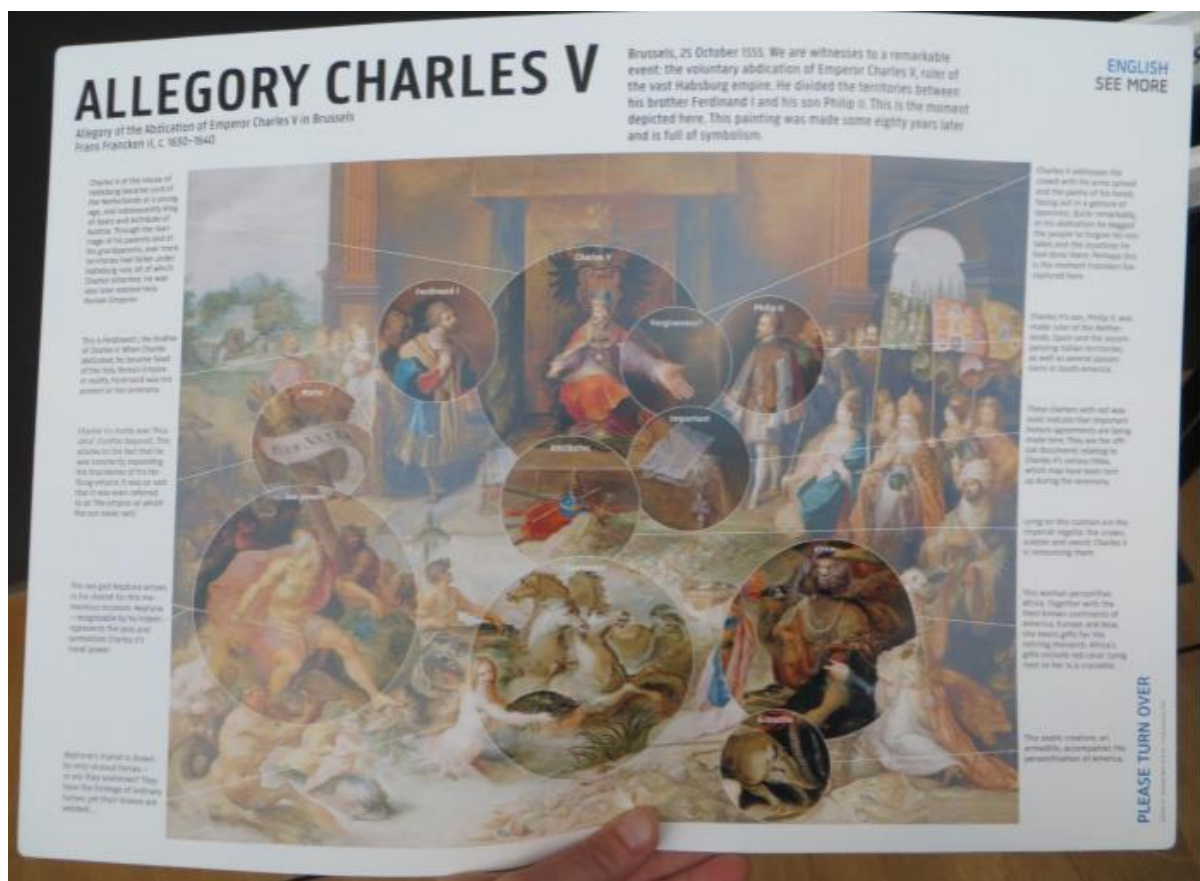


Figure 10 Allegory of Charles V Inzoomer Card (Source: Author)

Looking closer at the Inzoomer card (fig. 10) the 'see more' side uses a complex combination of pictorial and narrative frames to encourage the viewer to look closely at details in the painting. For example, the hand of Charles V is circled and labelled with the caption 'forgiveness?', and the connected text on the Inzoomer states:

Charles V addresses the crowd with his arms spread and the palms of his hands facing out in a gesture of openness. Quite remarkably, at his abdication he begged the people to forgive his mistakes and the injustices he had done them. Perhaps this is the moment Francken has captured here. (fig. 10)

This description focuses on the gesture represented in the painting and what it symbolises, then goes on to describe the historical event in the second sentence. The final sentence, by using the word ‘perhaps’, suggests an attempt at leaving the interpretation open.

In an adjacent bubble on the Inzoomer card, a figure of Philip II is highlighted and uses a biographical framing to discuss his significance in the painting. The connected text reads:

Charles V’s son, Philip II, was made ruler of the Netherlands, Spain and the accompanying Italian territories, as well as several possessions in South America. (fig. 10)

Elsewhere on the ‘see more’ side, other bubbles and texts use a combination of pictorial, narrative and biographical frames to explain the various elements in the painting; this suggests a primarily art historical approach to interpretation.



Figure 11 Inzoomer card, *Allegory of Charles V*, 'See More' side (Source: Author)

On the reverse 'learn more' side of the Inzoomer card, a combination of narrative, biographical and technical frames to provide further detail about the painting. An example can be seen in figure 11, in which a section featuring a selection of flags has been highlighted. The text on the Inzoomer card reads:

On the green flag are the coats of arms of the Seventeen Provinces of the Habsburg Netherlands. Technical investigation revealed that Francken originally painted only seven shields. They were painted over and augmented at some later date, when the Habsburg Empire changed yet again. (fig. 11)

This section uses a technical frame to discuss how the painting came to look as it does today. Other sections of the 'learn more' side of the card focus on historical facts, stories of the abdication ceremony, and biographical information about the figures in the painting.



Figure 12 Inzoomer card, *Allegory of Charles V*, 'Learn More' side (Source: Author)

The wall text for this painting, limited to 60 words, attempts at discussing the

painting through a variety of frames, but is fraught with tension, attempting to combine a reading that incorporates pictorial, biographical, narrative and symbolic aspects into one short label (fig. 12).

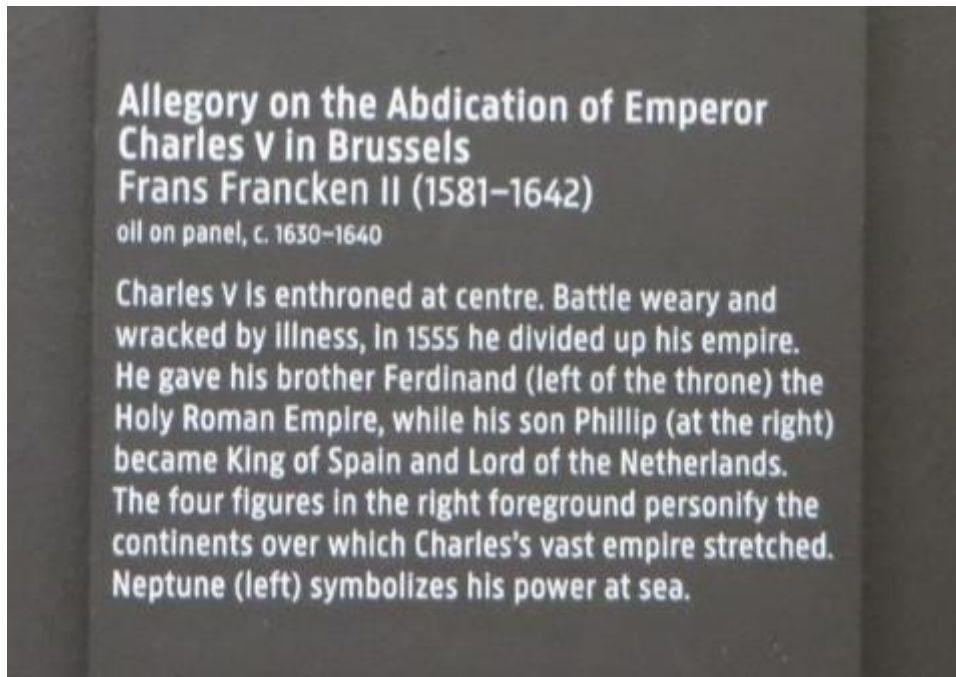


Figure 13 Wall text for Allegory on the Abdication of Emperor Charles V in Brussels (Source: Author)

Missing from this label are traditional art historical approaches to interpretation. The focus of the label is on the historical events of the painting, and on symbolic elements that tell the story of these events. Throughout this room, the labels predominantly focus on telling the story of events in Dutch history, using paintings, sculptures and other art objects to illustrate them. The Inzoomer, however, provides more multifaceted interpretation that brings together both historical and art historical (or visual) perspectives. The next section examines the multimedia guide, which incorporates an even wider range of perspectives – including those from outside the institution.

4.2.6 Multimedia guide

Within Room 2.1 are a number of text labels marked with a number, which indicate that there is information available on the multimedia guide. Visitors can choose to pay for use of the guide upon entry or can download it for free to their own devices. A variety of options are available: visitors can choose a guided tour or can seek

information about individual objects. The English version of the multimedia guide features a layered approach to interpretation; for the majority of objects, there are three options – the first layer provides basic information, the second layer is called ‘see more’ and the third layer is called ‘learn more’- echoing the approach taken on the Inzoomer cards.

The ‘see more’ selection on the guide provides the visitor with more information about what can actually be seen or uses images or video to reveal a part of the object that is not visible. This selection guides visitors to look more closely at the object. The ‘learn more’ selection features discussion about the object by a range of ‘experts’- these may be individuals who work in the institution, or those who do not. In Room 2.1, the ‘learn more’ selections feature the voices of an historian, an artist, a lecturer in art history and a conservator. Other sections of the guide contain selections featuring the Director of the museum, a nun, a philosopher and others. In total, 161 different ‘experts’ featured on the guide (as of July 2015).

Like the Inzoomer cards, the multimedia guide selections offer the visitor insight into the objects through a multiplication of interpretive frames. For example, the selection that accompanies the *Lidded Ewer* (fig. 14) consists of three layers: it begins by using an evolutionary frame, describing how the artist came to be known for the style of the piece. Then, in the second, ‘see more’ layer, it uses a type of pictorial frame, utilising a video to illustrate details on the object that are difficult to see. Finally, in the third ‘learn more’ layer, a material-technical frame is used to discuss how the object was made; this third layer features a discussion by the metal conservator at the museum, who shares her expert knowledge.

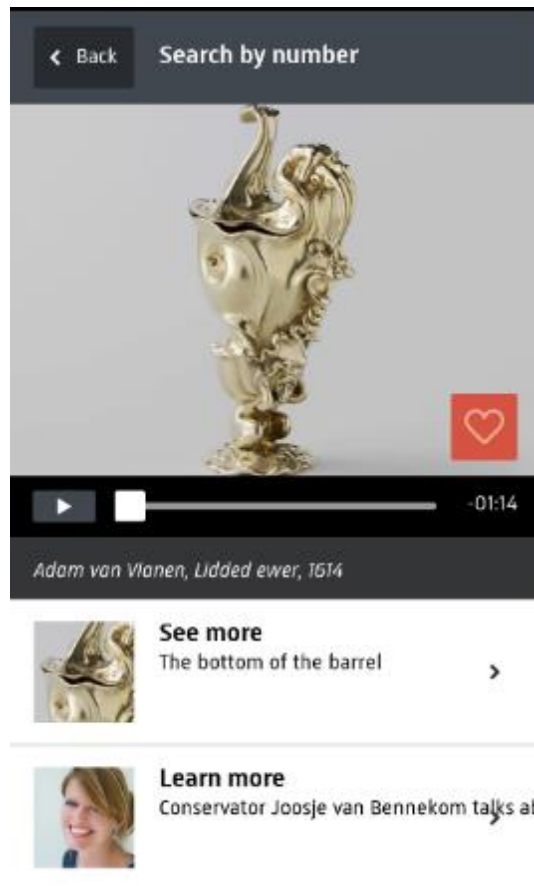


Figure 14 Rijksmuseum Multimedia Guide screenshot, Lidded ewer, Adam van Vianen, 1614 (Source: Author)

An additional feature of the multimedia guide is the use of sound to generate emotion. For example, in the selection that accompanies van Haarlem's *Massacre of the Innocents* (1590), the sounds of screaming babies and mothers precedes the description of the work. This type of interpretive framing, one which might evoke emotion in the visitor, could be described as an emotional or affective frame – a type of framing not discussed by Whitehead (2012), but rather one that has emerged from this study. This type of emotional-affective framing is used in many of the multimedia guide selections and moves beyond both historical and art historical approaches.

4.2.7 Interpretive strategy in room 2.1 and its relationship to the museum as a whole

The combination of narratives in one room, while not seamlessly interwoven, suggests a complex interpretive strategy that uses a multiplication of interpretive frames. Wall texts and labels in room 2.1 mainly draw on historical events rather

than examining formal elements of art objects, though the Inzoomer and in the multimedia guide incorporate art historical approaches in more depth. The use of a primarily historical narrative in the wall texts foregrounds events in mainstream Dutch history, linking artworks and decorative art pieces with historical objects via textual interpretation. When examining the texts closely, evidence of disciplinary traditions of interpretation can often be discerned: for objects originating from the history collections, often narrative, biographical and technical frames are used. For objects originating from the fine art and painting collections, often pictorial and narrative frames are used. The Inzoomer cards pull together interpretive information using all of these frames and others; this is clear in the *Allegory Charles V* Inzoomer card but is even more obvious in other Inzoomer cards in other areas of the museum.

The multimedia guide goes even further, using not only framings used in traditional museum practice, but including perspectives of those outside the museum. It evokes an emotive response in the visitor in many cases through the use of sound, therefore immersing the visitor in the stories told throughout the displays. Museum exhibitions and displays are not sites for the reproduction of knowledge – they are sites for the *generation* of knowledge and experience (Macdonald and Basu 2007); it can therefore be concluded that the overarching narrative present in this room brings together perspectives from history, art history and experts outside of traditional museum practice to generate a new, multifaceted story; one which is threaded together by a unifying interpretive strategy that uses text, video, imagery and sound. The next section in this chapter seeks to examine in detail how this interpretive strategy was developed and how the structure of staffing in the Rijksmuseum affected the development of new narratives throughout the new displays.

4.3 Organisational Structure and Overview

The Rijksmuseum's organisation chart (fig. 15) provides an illustration of how work is divided among museum staff. The main divisions are indicated by the colour orange in the diagram. At the top of the chart sits a triangular section entitled 'Board of Directors', composed of the General Director, the Director of Collections and the

Director of Finance and Operations. As suggested by the chart, these three individuals work together to oversee all other staff; however, they are monitored by a supervisory board, as indicated in grey. The General Director is the main head of the organisation.

Beneath the board of directors are three divisions: Collections, Presentations and Business. The Collections sector is responsible for the care and preservation of artworks and historical objects and for conducting collections research. Curators work within this sector. Curators at the Rijksmuseum are divided into specialisms within the departments of fine and decorative arts and history. While the redevelopment of the permanent collection involved a great deal of collaboration, the organisational structure indicates that curators are still primarily responsible for their particular disciplinary areas.

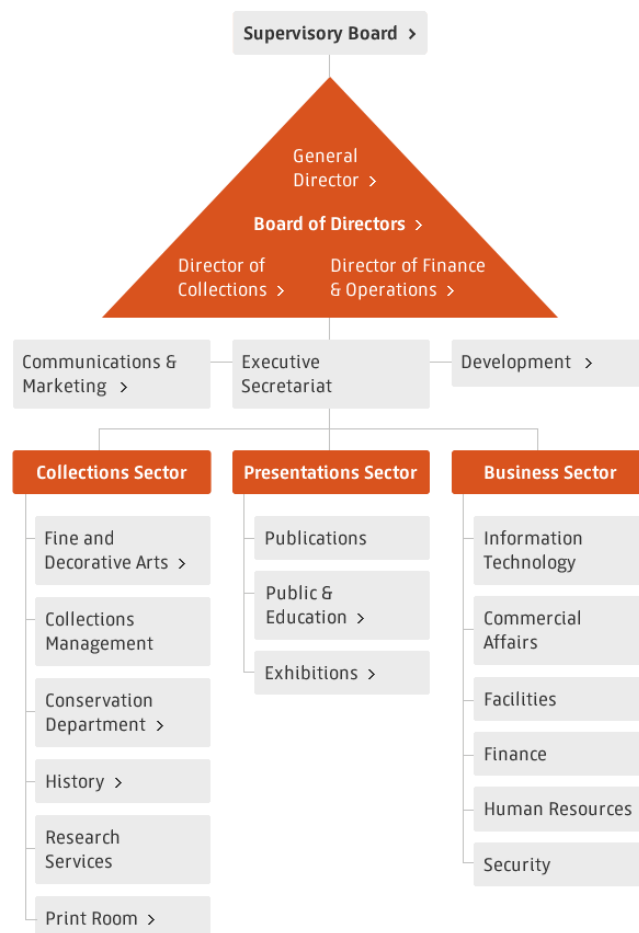


Figure 15 Rijksmuseum organisational chart (Source: Rijksmuseum.nl, accessed March 2016)

The Presentations Sector consists of all staff responsible for presenting objects, artwork, publications, interpretation and educational programming to the public. Interpretation specialists work within the department of Public and Education, who are in charge of producing educational programmes and events alongside interpretation resources in the galleries. While it is impossible to separate the Business Sector from the workings of the Collections and Presentations Sectors, this branch of the organisation will not be examined in detail due to the scope of this thesis.

The location of the Collections, Presentations and Business sectors on the chart, all positioned on the same tier, suggest that equal weighting is given to each of these three areas in the running of the museum. However, research, collections management and curatorial departments are grouped separately to publications, public & education and exhibitions. The grouping of departments in this way illustrates that there is a divide between curators and educators; the departments in the Collections Sector can be viewed as possessing knowledge while those in the Presentations Sector translate and communicate this knowledge. Even the titling of these sectors demonstrates an attitude that the museum has a collection of knowledge which must be presented to an audience. The physical location of these departments also partially separates them: the entire department of Public and Education operated in a separate building dedicated to education.

While the organisational chart is useful in picturing the structure of the museum, the complexity of how staff actually work is much more difficult to map through a diagram. Organisational charts cannot illustrate all relationships and hierarchies in an organisation or map-out informal working relationships. There is no indicator on this chart, for example, of the way integration (Jones 2001; Cunliffe 2008) occurs; in other words, the chart cannot communicate how team members work together, who communicates with whom, and which departments come together to produce exhibitions. The interviews conducted for this project helped to shed light on the complex relationships between interpretation specialists and others in the organisation, moving beyond the simplistic representation shown in the organisational chart. Interviews also provided contextual information about how the organisational structure has changed over the years. The next section looks more

closely at the Public and Education department's growth and their relationship with the institution as a whole, providing context for subsequent sections.

4.4 The Department of Public and Education at the Rijksmuseum

Unlike the other case studies examined for this project, there are no job titles within the organisation containing the word 'Interpretation'. Interpretation, as translated in Dutch, does not have quite the same meaning as it does in English, so the staff responsible for producing interpretive resources are instead called *Medewerkers* – translated as 'Education Officers' by Meijer. *Medewerkers* work within the department of *Publiek & Educatie*, or 'Public and Education'. Public and Education is managed by a department head, Annemies Broeckgaarden, and is divided into subsections based on the audience groups they produce resources for; interpretation is the responsibility of staff who focus on adult audiences and the general public. Three staff share this role: Renate Meijer, Pauline Kintz, and Inge Willemsen.

The department of Public and Education has grown substantially since 2008, growing from one full time and two part time staff members to 18 staff at the time of data collection. The department's remit prior to this time was primarily to produce programmes for adult audiences, however, the appointment of Annemies Broeckgaarden as Head of Education in 2008 marked a shift in institutional priorities around public engagement and education. Broeckgaarden's title was later changed to Head of Public and Education, reflecting an institutional vision for the team as facilitators of connections between collections and the public. Broeckgaarden's appointment was a pivotal point in the transformation of the museum; a new director, Wim Pjibes, had been hired and wanted to change the museum's approach to working with the public. His appointment of Broeckgaarden in 2008 marked the beginning of this new approach, as Broeckgaarden explained in an interview:

When I started there were only three people, only one full time, working in the education department... and there was no policy or plan for the new Rijksmuseum. So it was a big challenge to start from scratch and it started with defining the educational policy and also defining the identity of the Rijksmuseum... From then on, we tried to build a specific policy towards

audiences, to define the audiences we wanted to reach. (A. Broeckgaarden, personal communication, 22 June 2015)

Broeckgaarden went on to describe how the Teekenschool was formed, a physical extension of the museum that houses spaces for educational programming and the Public and Education departmental office. The Teekenschool was not part of the original redevelopment plan; the building it is situated in was originally planned as a library. However, after Pjibes' appointment and the subsequent formation of the Public and Education department (and after Broeckgaarden's appointment), the building was redesigned as a learning space. This decision reflected the Rijksmuseum's redeveloped vision to facilitate stronger connections between the collections and audiences; it also resulted in the increase in staff within the department.

The allocation of the building extension for educational programming combined with the appointment of a Head of Public and Education was the beginning of a significant shift in the focus of the new Rijksmuseum. Broeckgaarden led on the expansion of the department, broadening the museum's aims and leading an ambitious audience development programme. An audience engagement policy was developed, and educational programming was developed to target particular audience groups. Broeckgaarden described the main aim of the new Rijksmuseum: "What we aim to do is make the collection accessible to a very broad public and make them, to give them a sense of time and a feel for beauty...". She went on to describe the museum's main target audience groups: "cultural tourists, art lovers, teachers, primary and secondary schools, families and children... professionals and we have a group that we call 'potentials'...".

The group Broeckgaarden described as 'potentials' are those (Dutch people) who visit museums when travelling abroad, but do not visit them in the Netherlands; who have curiosity and an interest in museums but this interest is not, as she describes, 'activated'. Prior to the redevelopment of the building, visitors to the museum were often either in educational groups or were visiting from other countries. The challenge that Broeckgaarden described was in how they could build local (and national) audiences and break down the barriers that prevented these groups from visiting. Broeckgaarden spoke often about 'products and services', highlighting in

her interview that “if you know the needs of the public very well, or a specific type of public, then you are able to make the right connection with the right products and the right services”.

Between 2008 and the time of interviews in 2015, the department of Public and Education grew to 15 full time permanent members of staff and 100 others who deliver or support educational programmes in some way, ranging from docents to actors to photographers. The growth of the Public and Education department reflects a shift in the priorities of the museum as a whole; in her role as Head of Public and Education, Broeckgaarden is part of the senior management team and has an influence on decision making processes. The mission described by Broeckgaarden of making the collection accessible and open while respecting history and aesthetics (the ‘feel for time and beauty’) is one that is shared by all departments in the institution.

The growth of Public and Education has also meant that individual team members are now able to take on more specialist roles. The specialist role of producing interpretation falls to Education Officers in the department whose main remit is to develop programming for adult audiences; Meijer, Kintz and Willemsen all agreed that their specialisms are in producing interpretation for the general public. Meijer’s main job responsibility has been to produce both the multimedia guide and the Inzoomer information cards; Kintz’s primary responsibility has been to develop live interpretation such as tours and talks, while Willemsen’s focus has been on the production of textual interpretation. However, all three staff had a significant role in the production of text labels for the new museum.

The next section will discuss the processes the team underwent to produce interpretation for the redeveloped museum. The section will first look at the process involved in selection of objects, then will focus on how text labels, ‘Inzoomers’ and the multimedia guide were produced. These three forms of textual interpretation have involved input from staff in other departments and offer physical evidence of knowledge production and are the main forms of interpretation available to the general public in the gallery spaces.

4.5 Processes of Production of Interpretation

The recent redevelopment involved a complex approach to producing interpretive materials, in which Meijer, Kintz and Willemsen worked collaboratively with curators and exhibitions staff. They were also involved in discussions around object selection and theming of gallery spaces. Because the majority of the new displays involved breaking up disciplinary groupings and re-installing objects by date and theme rather than by type, the staff were arranged in teams according to the century they were working on; on each team was an art curator, a history curator, an educator and a chairperson. The exception to this was the redisplay of the special collections. For the chronological displays, teams chose objects for display according to the policy of *redengeving*: a word, translated as ‘rationale’, used often by interviewees to describe how each object chosen had to have a strong reason for being on display. With only 6,000 objects on display out of a collection of more than a million objects, staff were asked to prepare written statements of why each object was important enough to be displayed in lieu of others. The *redengeving* often defined the way the text label was written, according to curator Femke Diercks: “Ultimately the type of label you write is tied closely to why you’ve chosen an object to be there” (F. Diercks, personal communication, 26 June 2015); further discussion on text labels will follow this section. The choice of objects, along with the reasoning why, was (in theory) a shared decision among team members, including education staff. In each century team, the balance of power was slightly different – sometimes, Meijer and her colleagues from Public and Education were influential in object selection, other times, they played the role of mediator between art and history curators, who struggled to come to a consensus on which objects were most important in the new displays.

When asked about the role of interpretation specialists within the organisational structure, most interviewees (no matter their department) reflected on the way interpretation specialists serve as a link between curatorial departments and the Public and Education department. There were also comments on how interpretation specialists help to regulate information, as discussed by Diercks:

I think in these (project) teams, there was always an educator, or interpretation person... so that helped in making sure that the message didn't run away art historically, so to speak. It helped ground the message. (ibid)

Diercks' comment on how interpretation specialists help ground the message of an exhibition reflects the boundary broker's role in 'filtering' information (Haas, 2015). Interpretation specialists also serve to 'translate' information, rather than just filter it, as discussed by Kintz:

That's how I started.... Organising and coordinating information for the public. And after that I got the job where I am now, being responsible for translating.... The knowledge that the curators have. The Rijksmuseum being an institute of knowledge, producing knowledge; knowledge is produced for our curators, scientists for a part. I translate this knowledge for the public. In all kinds of ways. By way of writing texts, making audio tours... So that's in general how I see my job – translating. You have this beautiful word in English, 'interpretation'... We are really eager to somehow use this. So that's how I see our job... translating. (P. Kintz, personal communication, 23 June 2015)

Kintz went on to describe her role as a link between curators and the practical workshop staff who deliver educational programmes:

I am the link between them (workshop staff) and the curators, because me being an art historian, I know more about that field... so I'm also translating the curator's knowledge, the contents of an exhibition, the contents of a catalogue. I communicate this to my colleagues being responsible for the workshops downstairs. The creative workshops. So they can have the material to do that. (ibid)

Kintz occupies an interesting space in between two organisational groups: curators and workshop staff. Kintz has a PhD in art history, but also has a great deal of experience in conducting tours and working with the public. Her description of 'translating' the curator's knowledge for workshop staff illustrates her role as broker between communities and shows how these two communities speak a different 'language'. Pawlowski & Robey (2004: 650) examine brokering activities in the work of IT professionals, who occupy a similar position in between boundaries; they state: "translation becomes a critical function of knowledge brokering because it allows members of two communities to understand each other's language". IT professionals in the study identified themselves as both translators and interpreters,

“reframing, explaining and clarifying information in the context of the work practice of a particular group” (ibid: 659).

Meijer also described how interpretation specialists provide a link between departments:

All three of us [who are involved], if there is an exhibition, one of us is put into the project team of that exhibition and we represent the department. And that also means... so we're in charge of the text... but, if there's a workshop or lecture or programme, we need to coordinate that and make sure the other people in our department are informed and things are done... [we're] the link with the exhibition team. (R. Meijer, personal communication, 24 June 2015)

This linking role is also described in Pawlowski & Robey's (2004) study and is described the action of 'crossing boundaries'; they discuss the way IT professionals communicate across department boundaries, similar to the way interpretation specialists do within the museum.

Meijer also went on to discuss the difficulties of the role of interpretation specialist, focusing on their work during the recent redevelopment of the museum:

I think we were sort of intermediaries sometimes. I think a lot of time we weren't really taken seriously and maybe we didn't really seriously have something to say about a lot of issues because they were just too specific, and we represent the general public. (R. Meijer, personal communication, 24 June 2015)

This statement, like previous statements from other interpretation specialists in other institutions, shows how the value of brokers can be overlooked and misunderstood. While institutions continue to implement cross-disciplinary projects that bring in the perspective of curators, exhibition designers, educators and others, there can be a real disregard for the brokering role that interpretation specialists play. The process of producing text labels and the role of interpretation specialists will now be explored.

4.5.1 Text labels

In developing text labels for the new displays, a complex and lengthy process ensued which involved curators, exhibition managers, educators, the Director and others.

The Rijksmuseum's overarching approach to interpretation is to provide information about each and every object on display, with the only digital interpretation available being handheld multimedia guides and a few iPads in the Special Collections galleries. Tim Zeedijk, Head of Exhibitions, described his ethos of interpretation at the museum:

The most ideal form [of interpretation]... would be a curator whispering in your ear whilst looking at a work of art or an object in a museum, that would not be standing in between the work and you but standing at your side and helping with the questions. (T. Zeedijk, personal communication, 23 June 2015)

While this is Zeedijk's personal view on the role of interpretation, it is reflected in the way the museum approaches interpretation throughout the galleries. 60-word text labels are provided for every object in the chronological galleries. The larger introductory wall texts at the ends of each room provide an overview of each room or section. The only digital technology visible in the galleries is found on handheld multimedia devices available for visitors to borrow. More in-depth information about selected objects is presented on the Inzoomer cards, but these are limited to one or two per gallery at most. The reliance on text labels to convey the most salient information about each object, therefore, required a great deal of negotiation.

Meijer discussed this process at great length, providing both a detailed document outlining the process and a recorded interview discussing it from her perspective. The document (appendix A) shows a graphic representation of the process which was divided into three stages: *schrijven* (writing), *redigeren en corrigeren* (editing and correcting) and *vertalen, vormgeven en controleren* (translation, design and checking). The first stage involved mainly curators and collections staff, the second stage heavily involved public and education staff alongside translators and Dutch language editors, and the final stage involved a combination of curators, educators, designers and the Head of Exhibitions, with the department of Public and Education having the 'final responsibility' for text. The entire production process took more than three years. Meijer summarised it in her interview:

So, 20 curators wrote; the three of us [Meijer, Kintz and Willemsen] were editing; and our department had the final responsibility, which was really important in this process for us. And it was very complex, there were over 12

parties involved. I forgot how many departments – maybe 6 or 7 departments in the museum were involved. (R. Meijer, personal communication, 24 June 2015)

This comment illustrates the sheer number of voices involved in the text writing process. It also indicates that the department of Public and Education's role was to bring these voices together, to edit them, and to have the final say on what would be presented to the public.

During her interview, Meijer also described how the museum has, over time, done extensive visitor research on text, and this played a part in interpretive planning for the new displays. The research suggested that visitors preferred to find information near an object, and that most visitors don't bother to read introductory text panels – in studies, they wandered around, found an object that interested them, and started reading there. This approach informed the decision to provide text labels for all objects, excluding those in the special collections gallery.

This and other visitor research commissioned by the museum led to a policy for text writers. The policy consists of 8 points that text writers must follow, here translated by Meijer to English:

- *Veronderstel geen voorkennis*: “Don't presume that people know something”
- *Spreektaal, geen jargon*: “Use language that you speak in instead of writing language, no (art historical) jargon”
- *Puntig, fris, maar neutraal*: “Try to be to the point, fresh and neutral”
- *Niet te populair; Rijksmuseum = autoriteit*: “Don't try to be too popular because every time we tried to do that and test it – don't try to be funny – they expect the Rijksmuseum to be an authority”
- *Maar wel ruimte voor twijfel*: “Leave room for doubt. we don't know everything”
- *Slechts een of twee mededelingen per etiket*: “Only one or two points or facts per label”
- *Kijkaanwijzingen (geen beschrijvingen)*: “Give visual clues, not a description of what you can see yourself. Link it to something you don't know.”
- *Expliciet en concreet*: “Be explicit and concrete. A lot of texts that education gets from curators have a lot of implicit knowledge, vague texts that no one really gets. Say two things clearly rather than ten things vaguely”

(R. Meijer, personal communication, 29 June 2015)

Meijer went on to explain: “So this is more or less what we told our authors, the curators. Because the previous director already said that the curators were supposed to write... and we, education people, were the editors”.

The guidelines above help to steer curators into writing more accessible text. Prior to the Rijksmuseum’s redevelopment, often education staff were responsible for writing text labels – not just editing them. However, the redevelopment project changed the process to be more consistent, so that now, curators abide by the guidelines set out above, then interpretation specialists within Public and Education edit and revise texts. Because the ‘final say’ is within the remit of the department of Public and Education, they hold more power, as Meijer commented:

Now... it’s not as normal anymore [to write the texts] but it is clear that we’re responsible for the texts. So, that is also worth a lot. So even if we’re not writing it, we have a much firmer position, a stable position, a stronger position than we used to have. (R. Meijer, personal communication, 29 June 2015)

So, while interpretation specialists, or educators (as they refer to themselves), do not have the authority to write as many text labels as they did in the past, they now have a position as strong as those who have the final say in what is produced. This positions interpretation specialists as boundary brokers in between the many different departments and voices that contribute to the production of textual interpretation in the galleries. They bring these varied facts, stories and disciplinary perspectives together through the process of editing, serving as intermediaries in a process fraught with complexity and occasional conflict. The final products, the text labels (and other forms of textual interpretation within the galleries) represent a conglomeration of perspectives which have been drawn together, filtered and then polished by interpretation specialists. Thus, the final product not only combines the knowledge of curators but includes the expertise of staff who contribute knowledge of communication, styles of learning and the needs and preferences of audiences. This chapter now turns to looking more closely at the production of the Inzoomer information cards.

4.5.2 Inzoomers

Section 4.2 presented an analysis of the displays and interpretation in room 2.1 and looked at the interpretive resources within the room, including the Inzoomer cards. Meijer provided further contextual information on the cards. She clarified that all of the 50 Inzoomers are double-sided; on most, one side has a 'See More' theme and the other side has a 'Learn More' theme; some do not have a 'Learn More' side. This see and learn approach was a strategic decision, and therefore the approach was used in the multimedia guide as well. Meijer explained that the aim of the See More side of the Inzoomer was indeed to encourage the user to look at details within a painting or on an object, and to provide information relating to the highlighted detail. The aim of the 'Learn More' side was to provide additional information that is not provided via the text panel, and to go beyond the visual. Some of the 50 Inzoomers feature more than one object, which Meijer described as a 'showcase', while others have maps, drawings or diagrams on the back.

The process of producing an Inzoomer involved several iterations, starting with the first version in 2006. At this time, they were nicknamed 'placemats' and were piloted as part of a temporary exhibition on the life of Rembrandt; four cards were produced, and educators observed how people used them in the galleries. Over time, their understanding of how best to utilise the format developed, resulting in the decision to produce 50 cards for the redeveloped galleries.

These 'small research projects', as described by Broeckgaarden, took a year and a half to produce. The process involved not only internal staff but brought in external writers as well; the Public and Education department managed the process. The role of curators in the process was mainly to correct them and check for accuracy, thus resulting in a reversal of roles – instead of authoring the Inzoomers, curators became editors.

The selection of objects for the Inzoomers was led by interpretation specialists; the criteria for selection involved choosing 5 or 6 Inzoomers for each wing on each floor of the museum. The aim was to cover different themes and type of objects, and these needed to be objects with a lot of detail that could be 'zoomed in' on. The objects also

had to have documentation that provided information from multiple angles; so, the best Inzoomer objects were those with multiple stories and details.

The process of developing content for each Inzoomer was managed by Meijer, who gave direction and focus to external authors. The text went back and forth between Meijer and these authors, until a final version was agreed upon and sent to the curators for checking. While the curators did not write the text for each Inzoomer, they did provide information that informed what was written. Meijer described the process of creating Inzoomers as one which connected art history, applied art, history, education, and the expertise of external parties, and connected curators that had never worked together before. It can therefore be argued that this process of connecting staff knowledges resulted in the creation of *new* knowledge about each selected object. In bringing together many disciplinary perspectives in one resource, a far more detailed, multi-layered story of each object emerged. Rather than being categorised solely as works of art, decorative art objects or historical artefacts, the interweaving of histories and information blurred the disciplinary boundaries of 'art' and 'history' that previously separated objects in the Rijksmuseum collections.

Drawing on Star and Griesemer's (1989) definition of a 'boundary object', the Inzoomers were used as a tool for linking various departmental specialisms, thus producing an interpretive resource that tells the story of an object from many angles. Boundary objects are not just artefacts, such as documents, but are also defined as discourses and processes (Wenger 2000). The process of working together to produce an Inzoomer involved negotiation, weaving together of different narratives and bridging the gap between the traditionally separate departments of art and history. By bringing together groups who did not normally work together to create these objects, both Meijer and her departmental colleagues and the Inzoomers themselves served as a link between different disciplines and forms of expertise. The next section examines the production of the multimedia guide.

4.5.3 Multimedia guide

While text labels and panels are the most noticeable form of interpretation in the galleries, visitors can often be seen using the multimedia guide produced by the museum. During the period of data collection for this project, a large proportion of

visitors were observed using the guide. The process of developing the multimedia guide that accompanies the new displays was less fraught with tension than the process of developing textual interpretation and involved less collaboration than production of the Inzoomers. Because of the possibility of layering information within the guide, and because of the potential for changing it over time, interpretation specialists within the Public and Education department were given a great deal more autonomy in developing its content.

At the time of data collection, the multimedia guide was available in both Dutch and English; however more information was available on the Dutch version. The development of the guide began with visitor research commissioned by the Public and Education team to determine what audience groups would use the guide. This later informed the selection of objects. Meijer explained the aims behind each layer on the guide: both the first layer and second layer were scripted and edited, and she had the final say in what was included. The aim of the third layer was to provide a more subjective viewpoint, bringing in the voices of those who the department determined were experts in some way.

The definition of 'expert' varied, and this third layer was most interesting in terms of providing alternative viewpoints on objects in the galleries. Meijer gave examples of experts they invited to contribute to the guide – these included artists, art historians, curators, the Director of the museum, musicians, a nun and others. In total, 166 different experts shared their knowledge on the guide. In discussions with Meijer, it was clear that this was an approach to interpretation that her team had spearheaded:

This is what I'm really proud of with this third layer that we've produced over the last year. The nun, I think, is a very good example where she is absolutely an expert in her area, but she has a very different expertise than our curator. But he couldn't have told her story.... (R. Meijer, personal communication, 29 June 2015)

Meijer went on to explain that the Public and Education team made a conscious effort to try to include a range of viewpoints in each gallery, to provide what she called a 'nice mix' of expert knowledge. The multimedia guide also provides a more

flexible means of combining various disciplinary knowledges with experts from outside the museum.

Because the multimedia guide is a more open means of communicating information about objects, and allows for different viewpoints to be included, it was less contentious and involved more democratic methods of production. However, some curators were less involved in the process, less concerned with its content, and therefore the mix of viewpoints was not as balanced as that of the text labels, as indicated by Meijer:

We made all the choices together with [the curators who are responsible for the 20th century]. At the other end of the spectrum is the curator in charge of the 18th century – he didn't really bother to read all my texts, he just said 'well whatever you do, it's fine'... [but] there was a history curator who was really involved... and in selecting the objects, in the end, I thought... this is quite an historical tour. (ibid)

Whereas a much more complex system of checks and balances existed with the production of text labels, and the Inzoomers were a highly collaborative research project, the multimedia guide involved less back and forth between curators and interpretation specialists. Often the text would not be reviewed by a curator before it was made final, thus giving most decision-making power to Meijer and her team.

Some conflict did arise during the production of the multimedia guide; often this was due to disagreements about either factual inaccuracies or the choices made about what the focus of interpretation would be for a particular object. This required a process of negotiation with other staff members but was not as formal as the processes of developing text. The production of the multimedia guide required decisions around the personality or style of a presenter, the design of the app itself, and accessibility. Ultimately, Meijer and her team were given control over content as these areas were more aligned with the remit of the Public and Education department.

4.6 Summary: Negotiating Boundaries at the Rijksmuseum

This chapter has aimed to illustrate how interpretation specialists function as boundary brokers in museums, serving as a link between departments and helping

facilitate the consolidation of various types of knowledge in displays. Display analysis of room 2.1 in the Rijksmuseum has illustrated how interpretive wall texts, labels, Inzoomer cards and a multimedia guide, all produced either by or with interpretation staff, serve to thread together art history and historical narratives into a coherent whole. The redevelopment of the museum aimed to bring art and history together to tell the story of Dutch history, and it is through the boundary-brokering work of interpretation specialists that this aim was achieved. Boundary practices at the Rijksmuseum during its redevelopment consisted of brokering, the use of boundary objects, and the formation of boundary projects. Boundary and knowledge brokering was done by interpretation specialists (educators) who helped facilitate the process of unifying curatorial knowledges and translating this knowledge for audiences. Inzoomer information cards served as boundary objects alongside more traditional planning documents, and the collaboration of departments in production of Inzoomers makes them part of a boundary project. The knitting together of knowledges is evident in displays and interpretive resources, as illustrated through the display analysis in the first half of this chapter. While the combination of art and history is not perfect, as illustrated by the segregation of art and history in some aspects of display, the overall interpretive strategy ties together disciplines that had not merged in the past. The work of interpretation specialists was integral to this process, contributing to the creation of what Kintz called a 'red line' running through many possible narratives. In other words, the interpretation within the gallery spaces helped tell a story that visitors could better follow and connect with.

Finally, one could argue that the entire renovation of the museum, with an aim to bring together the story of the Netherlands through art and history, is one very large boundary project – one that connected contrasting but complementary knowledges within the institution to tell a story that weaves these knowledges together.

Chapter Five

Walking Through Time at Tate Britain

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents analysis of data collected at Tate Britain, aiming to examine institutional approaches to interpretation and the organisation of knowledge in its galleries. Through display analysis, analysis of semi-structured interviews with staff and an examination of institutional documentation, the chapter will investigate how organisational changes have impacted both interpretive strategies and resulting representations of art history in Tate Britain's recently redeveloped permanent collection display. This permanent collection display, titled the *BP Walk through British Art*, opened in 2013.

The *BP Walk through British Art* (also referred to as the WTBA or the 'circuit') was the initiative of the museum's newly appointed director, Penelope Curtis. Curtis advocated for a new, chronological approach to the display of Tate Britain's collection after a long period of thematic approaches instilled by previous directors. The shift towards use of thematic juxtapositions in place of a chronological approach happened initially in 2000, alongside the opening of Tate Modern. Curators' attempts at superseding linear chronology in the new displays were met with unfavourable criticism. For example, the late art critic David Sylvester stated:

It is all very well for curators to want to ignore chronology. But chronology is not a tool of art-historical interpretation which can be used at one moment, discarded at another. It's an objective reality, built into the fabric of the work. (Sylvester 2000:20)

In line with this argument, the re-visioning of Tate Britain's collection displays sought to return chronology to the agenda, but with a new slant. The finished result was described as a 'simple' timeline of art objects, one which intends to provide an overview of the collection without the structures of theming and art historical movements that are commonly used in permanent collection displays.

Resisting the institution's traditional approach to the provision of contextual information in gallery spaces, Curtis initiated the removal of extensive text labels in the new display, simplifying available information and instead placing the focus on aesthetic experience. The new display is arranged in a circuit around the perimeter of the building, with paintings and sculpture displayed together in rooms according to date; this was intended to allow visitors to 'travel through time', starting and ending at any point and experiencing the works on display without the 'interference' of curatorial theming or textual interpretation. While the main circuit is intended to allow visitors to focus on an aesthetic experience, several 'Spotlight' displays along the route provide a more in-depth look at aspects of the permanent collection and incorporate more extensive contextual information.

The approach taken to interpretation in the *BP Walk through British Art* was unusual for Tate, as typically the institution seeks to provide 'information at the moment of encounter' – a phrase coined by former director Nicolas Serota as part of the institutional interpretation strategy. This information typically takes the form of wall texts, captions and labels, graphics and other devices in the gallery spaces. Multimedia and audio guide were no longer available to hire to accompany a visit to the permanent collection galleries, and while online information was available, visitors had to rely on their own mobile devices to access this. In-gallery textual interpretation was limited to two or three 'extended captions' (or text labels) per room and brief object labels. This approach was a move away from changes in the way education and learning have been viewed in cultural institutions since the start of the 21st century, with a move from passive to participative, from a didactic model to a co-learning model and from communicating with a single authorial voice to plural voices (Cutler 2012).

This chapter seeks to analyse the interpretive strategy in place at Tate Britain in 2015, with a focus on the approach to interpretation in the *BP Walk through British Art*. Through display analysis, the chapter also aims to examine the effect of using a chronological 'timeline' approach on the organisation of knowledge in displays. The chapter then moves on to analyse the relationship between organisational changes at Tate and the results of change on the production of interpretation, seeking to

examine how changes to organisational structures, hierarchies and power dynamics in the institution affect the representation of knowledges of art.

Firstly though, we shall investigate how the introduction of a powerful new actor affects the agency of others in the organisation, and how this disruption of agency and of ways of working affects the construction and organisation of knowledges of art. The next section will begin to examine these questions through display analysis.

5.2 Display Analysis: The Walk through British Art

5.2.1 Context and interpretive strategy

Tate Britain is located in the heart of central London, on the north bank of the River Thames. Despite its central positioning, it is situated in the quiet residential area of Pimlico away from other tourist destinations and shopping centres. For this reason, it is not a gallery that visitors stumble upon, but instead must make a concerted effort to reach. Established in 1897, the gallery's imposing neo-classical architecture and steep entrance steps emit a feeling of tradition and authority, while a statue of Britannia sits atop the entrance. Flags hanging outside the building announce its current exhibitions, and at the time of data collection, they also stated that Tate Britain held the 'world's best collection of British art'. The institution's remit is to collect and display British art from the 16th century to the present.

In spring of 2013, Tate Britain finished a significant redisplay of its permanent collection. The display was intended as a departure from a thematic approach, instead displaying both well-known and lesser known works of fine art and sculpture together in chronological order around the perimeter of the building. The redisplay happened in conjunction with a larger redevelopment project, entitled the 'Millbank Project'. One of the aims of the Millbank Project was to reconnect the past with the present:

The opening up of the space at the heart of the undercroft, at the crossing of the original rotunda, allows us to suggest the unique history of the site where we, and our visitors, stand. Thinking of our building from the ground up, we

return quite literally to our foundations, and use this space to speak of our physical and intellectual origins (Curtis 2015:50).

The redeveloped building, coupled with a redisplay of the collection, contributes to “rethinking the space of the museum” (MacLeod 2013:185) by revealing stories of its history. The result brings together architectural references to the past with chronological display methods, placing an emphasis on notions of time.

The resulting display acts as a type of timeline, featuring works arranged in rooms purely by date rather than by school, genre or other system of categorisation based on art history. Each room is identified by a date range (fig. 16). The first room spans a period of 110 years, starting with the year 1540. As one moves through each room in date order, the span of time represented in each room gradually decreases until the 1890 room is reached; from here each room represents approximately one decade of time. The significance of these intervals and of chronological approaches to display will be further explored in section 5.2.2.

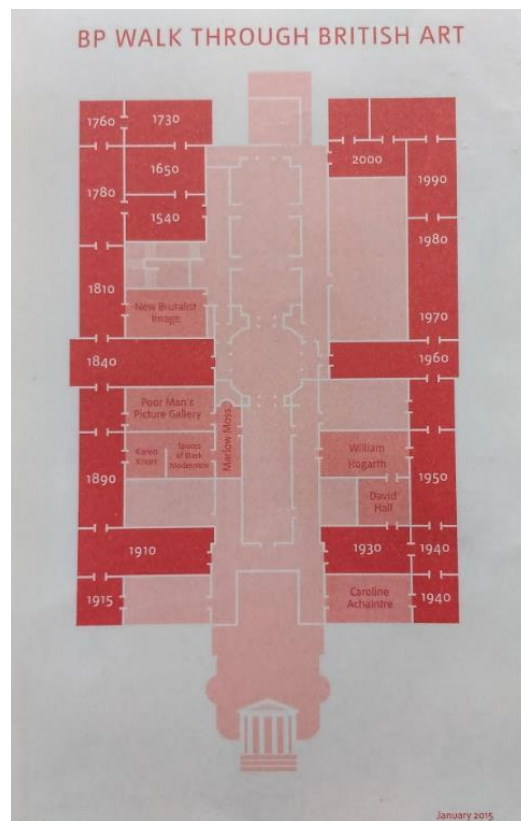


Figure 16 Walk through British Art, map leaflet, Tate: January 2015 (Source: Author)

Alongside this chronological circuit are several ‘BP Spotlight’ galleries, featuring themed exhibitions drawn from the permanent collection. While the main circuit

was intended for visual pleasure, the Spotlight galleries were designed as an opportunity for visitors to gain a more focused understanding of a particular aspect of the collection, using more sophisticated interpretive strategies.

In addition to the WTBA circuit and Spotlight galleries, Tate Britain hosts a frequently changing temporary exhibition programme and is home to semi-permanent collection displays of J.M.W. Turner, Henry Moore and William Blake. Temporary exhibitions typically incur a fee to enter and are wide ranging: at the time of data collection (March 2015), the temporary galleries held exhibitions on Victorian sculpture, fashion and photography. The interpretation strategy for temporary exhibitions is vastly more complex than that for the permanent collection display, including extensive wall texts, information booklets, audio or multimedia guides and other digital resources.

For the WTBA, the interpretive strategy is layered, indicated by the 'Find out more' section of the *Meet Tate Britain* visitor map (Tate 2015a, fig. 17). The institution attempts to make this clear to the visitor, explaining that the displays are "accompanied by different levels of information" (ibid:13). The first level, the "underlying framework" (ibid), is indicated as the chronological structure of the display that frees the visitor of distractions and allows for "visual pleasure" (ibid). Further layers consist of engagement with staff through tours, talks, events or conversations, through the purchase of books, accessing information online and by visiting information points at the start and end of the circuit. Although not indicated on the leaflet, in-gallery text was an additional layer of the strategy – tombstone labels were present for each object and two to three brief and unobtrusive text panels were placed in each room.

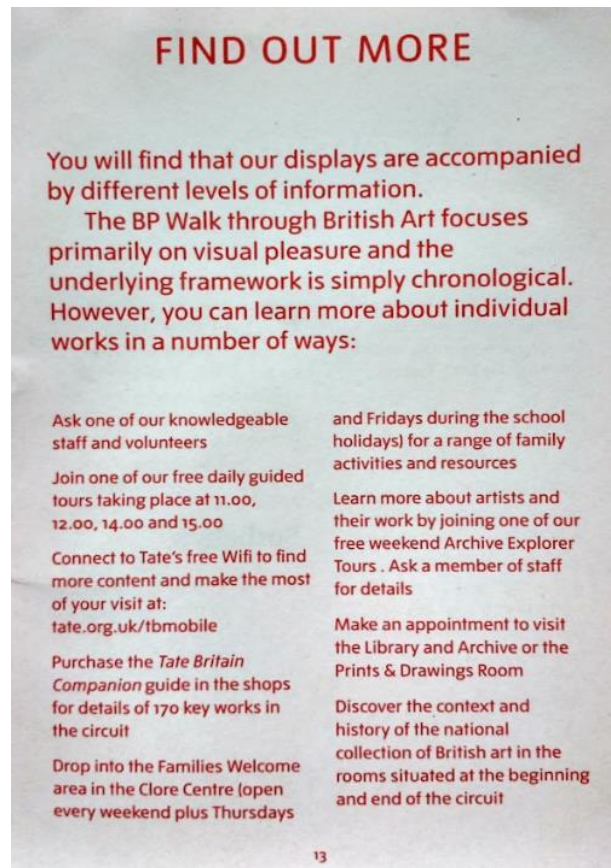


Figure 17 'Find out more' section of map leaflet, Tate: January 2015 (Source: Author)

The interpretive resources described in the 'Find Out More' section of the leaflet privilege visual experience. Some of the resources listed involve interaction with a tour guide or a member of staff, while others encourage self-directed learning via digital methods or exploring literature or Tate's archives. While little textual information was available in the galleries, other means of discovering more were available in other ways. It could be argued that these supplemental interpretive resources left room for visitors to more freely experience the visual within the displays. In the section that follows, a more critical examination of curatorial strategies will be presented through display analysis.

5.2.2 Curatorial strategies of display

Tate Britain's 19th century architectural design is laid out in an enfilade of galleries and lends itself to a mode of display in which works are displayed in sequence or as an unfolding narrative. The WTBA circuit takes advantage of this design, utilising the galleries around the perimeter of the building as points on a timeline. Each room in the circuit is identified by a date, representing the beginning of a period of time and

indicated by gold plated numerals set into the floor. These markers serve as the primary orientation for the visitor as she navigates through the circuit, with no introductory text available to provide context. Tombstone labels are present in each room, along with two to three small texts near selected objects.

As the galleries are arranged chronologically, there is a logical start and end point, with the beginning marked as the year 1540. Moving through the rooms, time is marked not by century or even half century, but instead moves forward in various increments. The 1540 room represents a time span of 110 years, while after this time spans represented in each room gradually reduce until the 20th century is reached. The 20th and 21st century galleries each represent one decade per room. The decision to speed up time by representing a larger span in earlier rooms, then slows down time by representing a shorter span in later rooms can be connected to the notion of 'historical time' (Koselleck 2000), where time accelerates when there is a period of intense change. Section 5.2.6 of this chapter will explore some ideas around the representation of time in more detail.

In most rooms of the circuit, a similar approach to the arrangement of objects is taken. Objects are evenly spaced yet are displayed near to or in a loose grouping with objects that visually connect to one another – either through colour, or form, or subject matter. This approach is used throughout, no matter the date of the room. An exception to this is the 1840 gallery, which sees paintings hung one on top of another to emulate the style of the Victorian picture gallery. The galleries are arranged in an “art style” (Lindauer 2008) with an emphasis on the aesthetic qualities of objects and use an “architectural” approach (Whitehead 2012:91) in which text is avoided and the arrangement of artworks in relation to each other serves as the primary interpretive strategy. The word ‘juxtapositions’ is used throughout institutional literature to describe this strategy of placing artworks in a type of conversation with one another.

Object emphasis throughout the circuit is evenly weighted. Spotlights are not shone on single works, nor are individual objects housed in a room all to themselves. By de-emphasising individual works, the WTBA seems to ask the visitor to first notice how objects relate to one another before zooming in on each object. De-emphasising

individual objects also allows for less well-known artists' work to be perceived as having equal value as those which are well known; for example, in the 1650 gallery, the relatively unknown work of Mary Beale – identified as Britain's first female professional painter – is placed in the same space and with equal emphasis as works by well-known male artists of the time.

As one moves through the rooms in date order, there is a subtle and gradual lightening of wall colour, from a dark grey in the earliest rooms to white in the latest rooms. This gradual lightening of colour relates to the idea of progress and innovation over time: moving from dark to light, from old to new. Tanaka (2016) argues that chronological time fosters the notion of continuity: "While such linearity might appear neutral and natural, it has usually been deployed with some value system: new is better than old, recent is superior to past, and the future will be better" (p.162). Again, we will return to ideas around time and explore chronology in section 5.2.6; for now, the chapter will turn to a closer look at textual interpretation.

5.2.3 Use of textual interpretation in the WTBA

As utilised in the previous case study chapter, this analysis will also use Whitehead's interpretive frames to critically examine selected texts in the WTBA circuit. While a limited number of texts were available to analyse, it was felt these provided a window into the institution's ways of thinking. For the purposes of this analysis, a text from the 1840 room will be looked at in more detail. As mentioned earlier, in each of the rooms preceding the 20th century section of the circuit, the only available texts (at the time of data collection) were tombstone labels and two or three short 'extended captions' of approximately 100 words. These extended captions were positioned near selected objects, rather than as introductory texts at the start of a room.

The small selection of extended captions within the first quarter of the circuit utilise a combination of evolutionary, biographical and socio-historic framings that focus on art historical movements, the significance of particular artists and on historical figures and events that have either been portrayed in the works or are related to them. The language of the texts is accessible yet contains elements that may be

familiar mostly to those with an interest in art history. There is a heavy weighting on provision of biographical information on artists and how art genres and movements developed in Britain.



Figure 18 Text panel from 1840 room, Tate Britain (Source: Author)

The interpretive approach is illustrated in the above text panel (fig. 18). This panel starts with an introductory paragraph describing the importance of beauty and the beauty industry in the time period, using a type of evolutionary and socio-economic framing. It then moves onto biographical, narrative and formal framings in the second paragraph, describing Burne-Jones' beliefs, pointing out what is visible in the painting and discussing rhythm and harmony in the painting. This is a closed reading of the painting that suggests we view the subject of the work from the perspective of the artist, and that the imagined beauty represented in the painting is superior to that found in the real world.

It is after the 1840 room that time spans within the galleries begin to decrease, appearing to illustrate more rapid change in the art world. The text panel in figure

18 uses a critical-historical framing to illustrate the role of artists in a changing society – the first paragraph outlines trends in society and how a focus on beauty came to the fore; the second paragraph indicates that artists questioned ideas of beauty and sought to rebel against what was happening in society at the time. While very brief, this text does more than describe an art object or give the viewer information about the artist – it begins to theorise about the relationship between society and artists.

Other text panels in the WTBA use similar tactics to provide the visitor with brief contextual information, either by highlighting aspects of an object or giving the visitor a brief paragraph about a significant event or trend of the time. This approach leaves the visitor to draw her own conclusions about the relationship of the objects on display and with what was happening in the art world at the time the objects were created. More information is provided at the beginning and end of the circuit – at the beginning, a timeline is provided, and video stations are placed at the end. In section 5.2.4, these additional forms of interpretation will be critically examined.

5.2.4 Additional forms of in-gallery interpretation

As illustrated in figure 17, additional interpretive resources are available to help visitors gain a deeper understanding of the works on display in the WTBA. However, of the suggested methods of obtaining additional information, three of these involve live interpretation (tours and workshops for example) and none are freely or easily accessible while standing in front of an artwork. The exception to this is information obtained online via a mobile device. As this section focuses on in-gallery interpretation, it will not examine mobile content. Instead it will briefly discuss the two rooms mentioned on the ‘Find out more’ page of the map (figure 17): these rooms are situated at the beginning and the end of the circuit.

At the start of the WTBA (not indicated clearly on the map) is an area containing a timeline; as indicated in the leaflet (fig 17) this area is meant to help visitors “discover the context and history of the national collection of British art” (Tate 2015a:13). This timeline, which utilises both text and image to illustrate the history of collecting British art, wraps around three walls (fig. 19). Visitors to the *BP Walk*

through British Art travel via this room to reach the first room of the chronological circuit.



Figure 19 Gallery with timeline titled 'Collecting British Art', Tate Britain (Source: Author)

The timeline emphasises how the collection came to be, starting with a description of what early art collectors focused on (fig. 20) and pays tribute to Tate Britain's benefactors throughout history, illustrating the development and growth of the institution. As Lubar (2013) explains:

The timeline carries with it assumptions about the narrative structure of history, about the primacy of chronological understanding, and about progress. It makes it seem as though history is a path to the present (p.169).

The timeline seems to be a common feature within Tate's displays: from the layout of the permanent collection to its interpretive resources, Tate seems to be attempting to lay out a path for the visitor that shows how art of the present is the result of the 500 years of art that precedes it. This timeline, situated at the beginning of the circuit, presents a visually attractive and interesting story and utilises a familiar chronological approach. But for a visitor with little prior art historical knowledge, it doesn't shed light on why particular objects are included in the display that follows beyond it.

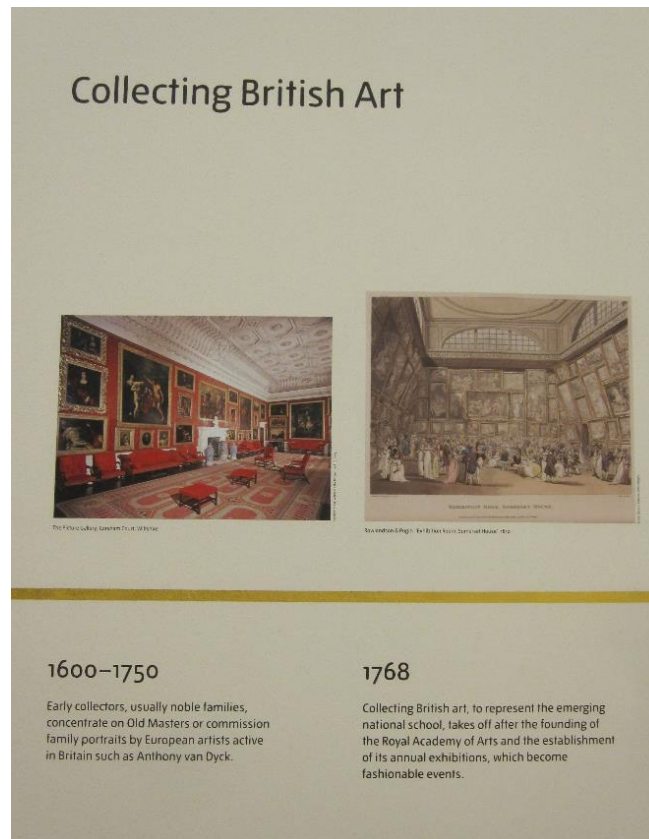


Figure 20 Detail of *Collecting British Art* timeline, Tate Britain (Source: Author)

At the end of the circuit are a selection of video stations where visitors can watch Tate Britain curators discuss the significance of the works on display. These videos provide an in-depth examination of art historical movements and detailed explanations of particular works, providing the visitor with a more comprehensive understanding of what is visible in the galleries. A selection of these videos has been made available online as well (Tate 2015b). In each video segment, a curator shares her or his specialist knowledge with the viewer. The videos use a variety of interpretive frames; for example, in discussing a painting in the 1540 room, curator Tim Batchelor uses evolutionary and narrative framings to explain the work, but he also uses a type of institutional intentional-explanatory framing – a frame similar to the intentional-explanatory framing used by Whitehead (2012), but rather than explaining the artist’s intent, it explains why the institution has chosen to display it. In the video, Batchelor states: “this painting is a real favourite and an icon of the Tate collection because it’s so unusual and so striking in its appearance...” (Tate 2015b), then goes on to discuss other objects in the room that are particularly significant to Tate and what makes them unique.

The commentary provided on these video segments combine knowledge of art history with stories of why particular works are significant to the institution, using a combination of interpretive framings. An evolutionary framing appears to be the most common way of discussing the collection, an act which suggests an attempt at encouraging the visitor to see how art has developed over time and how artists relate to one another. However, as with any chronology, particular moments in time are highlighted – in the case of each video segment, ‘icons’ of the collection or unusual works are chosen for discussion.

5.2.5 Interpretive strategy in the Walk through British Art vs. BP Spotlight galleries and temporary exhibitions

While the *Walk through British Art* presents what the institution calls a ‘walk through time’ that focuses on the visual and aesthetic experience of the visitor, Tate Britain’s approach to provision of interpretation in other areas of the building is quite different. The BP Spotlight galleries, which are meant to branch off the chronological circuit to offer a more in-depth look at a moment in time, provide in-depth textual interpretation. A combination of introductory texts, individual captions and labels and additional interpretive resources provide an detailed exploration of particular aspects of the collection. Temporary exhibitions, on the other hand, can be curated in-house or by other galleries and often present an argument or thesis using a combination of curatorial strategies and highly layered interpretation.

In a small room located in the basement of the gallery, a gallery guide written by Penelope Curtis was on display titled *Tate Britain: A Short Guide* (fig. 21). This book, an interpretive tool produced for the gallery and not available to purchase, provided an overview of the gallery’s history and explained the rationale behind the chronological circuit from her point of view. In one section of the book, titled ‘New Juxtapositions’, the book states:

Using a simple chronology allows us to hang more kinds of paintings and sculptures together. Rather than concentrate on the groupings which have traditionally made up art history, we can bring more unexpected works into the mix, on occasion using visual harmonies to bring pictures together (Curtis 2015:np, fig 21).



Figure 21 Selection from *Tate Britain: A Short Guide 2015* (Source: Author)

This book, subtly displayed in a basement room, clarified the intentions of the new display; by arranging the museum as a timeline, an attempt was made to ‘simplify’ traditional art historical approaches to the organisation of knowledge – in other words, to de-emphasise the hierarchies that have made some objects and artists rise to prominence while others have remained in the shadows. Curtis’ statement lays out her intention of using the power of display to restructure knowledges of art, bringing ‘unexpected’ works out of the stores and telling new stories, revealing hidden narratives and theorising about art history in new ways. By re-displaying the permanent collections in this way, the institution has succeeded in opening up new ways of looking at art – visitors could construct their own interpretations in the main circuit, then dive deeper into specific subjects within other areas of the gallery.

The open nature of the main circuit did appear straightforward to the visitor, lacking in the subjective information often provided through text labels and panels. Visitors could choose to explore the BP Spotlight galleries or temporary exhibitions for a more directed or focused experience. The use of a chronological approach in exhibitions is also simple yet powerful:

The motion of your body through the exhibition seems to re-create historical time. As you move from the beginning to the end of an exhibition, you move, in a metaphorical way, from earlier to later, from the beginning of the story to the end. The timeline provides a powerful framework for presenting history. (Lubar 2013:169)

A chronological approach was a significant shift for the institution that simplified the experience of viewing the permanent collection, and this type of approach is often seen as objective and neutral. However, chronology is actually subjective in nature. The next section will unpack some of the existing arguments and issues around the use of chronology in museum displays.

5.2.6 Chronology as a 'framework'

Tony Bennett, in his pivotal book *The Birth of the Museum*, writes of “organized walking as evolutionary practice” (1995:179). Bennett argues that the late 19th-century museum, when viewed as what Thomas Huxley termed a ‘backteller’ or ‘retrospective prophet’ who “affirms that so many hours or years ago, such and such things were to be seen” (Huxley 1882:133 in Bennett 1995:178), gave the visitor an organized experience of walking through evolutionary time. He argues that the museum (when arranged chronologically) compresses time, making it visible; that it is a narrative machinery that allows the visitor to experience a condensed journey through history.

Timelines, or graphical representations of a period of time, are a common device used in museums. Rosenberg and Grafton, in *Cartographies of Time* (2010), describe many examples of the use of timelines by large museums – physical timelines such as the *Cosmic Pathway* at the American Museum of Natural History, virtual timelines such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s *Timeline of Art History* on its website, or artistic representations of time such as Sarah Fanelli’s *Tate Artist Timeline* at Tate Modern. The timeline metaphor is so often used within museum practice as it is presumed to be a universally understandable means of representing historical time. However, Lubar (2013) makes the point that timelines, while useful and powerful, hide assumptions about the narrative structure of history.

The WTBA uses two variants of a timeline metaphor: firstly, the arrangement of the galleries is chronological and each room is dated, making the circuit a type of three-

dimensional timeline which allows the visitor to experience the museum as 'backteller', viewing the progression of art and artists as she walks through the physical space of the museum. Time is speeded up at certain points, and slowed down at others, by the representation of longer periods of history in earlier rooms and shorter periods in later rooms. Secondly, graphic timelines are used as both interpretive tools and as orientation devices throughout the building.

The concept of the timeline is sometimes seen as one that projects "objectivity, neutrality and simplicity", giving the visitor a "grand synthesis" of history (Rosenberg and Grafton 2010:238). This view is echoed in the comments made by curator Chris Stephens about the WTBA:

There is a certain radicalism in the simplicity of the approach to the new displays at Tate Britain. The works are not organised by the traditional art historical devices of movements, genres or themes. Instead, one gets a more accurate view of the range of art that was being produced at any one moment in time. This chronological circuit has been developed by a team of curators representing different period specialisms. All were surprised at how difficult it was to dispense with deeply embedded art historical conventions. The claim for radicalism stems from the recognition that the art history of our past displays was not especially historical, insofar as history, as a passage of time, was subordinate to other forms of taxonomy such as style, genre and movement. (Stephens 2013:np)

While Tate Britain's approach is described here as 'radical' and simple by Stephens, it is, in fact, not as radical or as simple as it appears. Chronology is an abstract construct, defined by the Oxford English Dictionary (2017) as "the science of computing and adjusting time or periods of time, and of recording and arranging events in the order of time". Tanaka (2016) argues that time is a metric external to life and events to which they are adjusted, recorded and arranged; chronological time dominates our understanding of history. Chronological time is linear, consisting of a flow from earlier to more recent. This linear flow is not simply neutral, but is embedded with value judgments – for example, newer is better than old and recent superior to past. Tanaka also explains that chronology serves as a filter: the datable event is privileged, and possible to plot on a timeline, in taxonomies or in categories. Martinon (2006) argues that museums, whether following the dialectical model that organises collections either chronologically or thematically, always utilises a methodological approach that seeks to establish either truths or uncertainties.

The belief that chronologies privilege certain events as well as seek to establish truths, is echoed in Stephens' further comments about the selection of objects for display:

One advantage of this approach is that it allows not only for the inclusion of the major figures of British art, but also for the display of different phases of their careers... In making the selection of more than 500 works, we deliberately sought to balance such famous names and familiar works with artists, subjects and styles that would be less expected. We also wanted to draw out certain threads that might be seen to run through the chronological circuit, such as the development of landscape imagery or the impact of migration on British art, and we endeavoured to demonstrate the rich contribution of women artists... (Stephens 2013: np)

Stephens' comments illustrate an attempt by the institution to bring less 'expected' artists to the fore, privileging these and other artists and placing them on the timeline of art history. The attempt at identification of 'threads' running through the circuit contradicts the attempt to remain neutral, instead attempting to build a narrative of the development of British art. It also suggests not a simple and neutral timeline, but one which still contains some value judgements and taxonomies. This act could be seen as a way of mapping the evolution of art and artists, of weaving a narrative through the display in order to suggest connections and relationships between artists, artworks and time periods. It could also communicate Tate's views of the evolution of British Art. This view of chronology has also been argued by Tanaka:

Chronology facilitates the classification of pasts. Pasts shift from something living in people to the past, a repository of now finished, earlier moments that are serially arranged to explicate the grandeur of some political institution or the rise of some collectivity. (Tanaka 2016:167)

Koselleck (2000) argues that there are two categories of time: 'natural time' and 'historical time', with historical time arising from natural time but being largely metaphorical. Chronologies and timelines represent historical time, accelerating and slowing down natural time by allocating varying amounts of space for different periods of history. This is very often seen in museum displays, and is evident in the WTBA.

The layout of the WTBA is also described as a “walk through time” (Tate: n.d.). The visitor moves through space, encountering objects from different time periods, experiencing an unfolding of the history of British art. However, the speed of this history unfolding accelerates in some rooms, while it decelerates in others. For instance, as one travels through the first room, a span of 110 years is represented, followed by a span of 80 years in the second room. As one moves further through the circuit, the span of time represented decreases, ultimately slowing down to ten-year spans of time per room. Thus, more than half of the new display is dedicated to works of the 20th and 21st centuries. An uninitiated viewer unfamiliar with art history might not understand why this is.



‘Natural’ time



‘Historical’ time as represented in the WTBA

Figure 22 Representation of time in Walk through British Art (Source: Author)

The allocation of display space in this way suggests institutional priorities lie in showcasing the work of the last hundred or so years, relating to Tate’s history of collecting. At the entrance to the 1540 gallery, a timeline stretching over three walls traces the history of collecting in the institution, marking out dates related to significant acquisition periods in Tate’s history. Entries on the timeline mention significant donors, bequests and the founding of organisations and funding bodies that have contributed to acquisitions. The historical time represented throughout the WTBA is accelerated and decelerated not by societal changes or artistic movements, but rather by the significance, volume and value of acquisitions throughout the institution’s history. While the institution’s remit is to showcase works of British art from 1545 to the present, the emphasis of collecting has, over the last century, been on acquiring more recent works (or recent for the time). While

the resulting display naturally corresponds to the proportions of the institution's collection, the presentation of this display as a 'walk through British art of the last 500 years' does not make this clear to the visitor; instead, it claims to present a 'simple chronology' that allows the institution to present a wider variety of works. But even 'simple' chronologies are not neutral – something that might not be clear to visitors.

There are complex factors that influence art museum collections and the act of collecting, and therefore the range of objects available for display. For example, the availability of objects from particular time periods and their economic value have a significant role in whether or not they are represented in a particular collection. The history of art production and the contexts in which art objects emerge from suggest that there are simply more 18th and 19th century paintings *available* to collect than there are 15th century paintings. The rarity and expense of objects from earlier periods make them more difficult to obtain, thus there are likely to be imbalances in representation within a collection. Therefore, the scarcity of works in the earliest periods represented in the WTBA could simply reflect what collections material was available to work with. This is one way the timeline (or a chronological approach) is not neutral.

The imbalance of proportions of time periods or categories of objects represented in a collection also results from the many ways in which they are acquired or may reflect the interests of directors and curators over time. The trajectory of how Tate Britain's collections came to be is partially illustrated in the Collecting British Art timeline (see fig 20 above), which highlights key points in institutional history that have influenced the contents of the gallery's permanent collection. The Turner Bequest, for example, consists of 37,500 accessioned works (Tate, 2018) and has been the focus of extensive research, attention and financial expenditure over time. It can be argued that the significance and value of this collection to Tate Britain will have played a role in the emphases of the new display. Again, this shows that chronological approaches are not neutral.

As argued by Tanaka, chronologies are embedded with value systems and are arranged so as to chart the evolution of an organisation or collectivity. In Tate

Britain's case, the arrangement of the collection chronologically showcases the institution's growth and its significant position and role as connoisseur. The description used by the institution describes the new display as a 'simple chronology', one that breaks free of designated themes or movements. It is intended to remove these structures from the experience of viewing, allowing the visitor to notice for herself the relationships between objects. However, the act of dating artworks and placing them in chronological order in and of itself structures experience. Chronological time encourages the thought that because something comes after, it is new and improved (Tanaka 2016). Structuring artworks by date can suggest thinking of each work as a breakthrough rather than a recombination of existing ideas and forms (ibid).

The arrangement of the WTBA as a chronology, therefore, serves as an 'alibi of time' (ibid: 179), playing to the commonly held view that chronology is natural and neutral. Even though it uses a familiar and powerful way of communicating history (Lubar 2013), it is not free of value judgements or subjectivity. The WTBA speeds up time at intervals by showing fewer works from a broader time span then slows it down at others by showing more works from shorter time spans. This act of selective display places emphasis on moments in time where the artwork produced is seen to be of higher value to the institution.

Further acts of selection and inclusion and exclusion from history are seen through the choice of works displayed. While 'traditional favourites' are included, reinforcing their historical and cultural value, an attempt to include once-excluded works has been made as well; for example, the work of Mary Beale, a female artist. This reflects the Director's conscious awareness of the power of institutions to affect and construct art history through display. The theories put forth by arrangement of Tate's collection in this way are an attempt at restructuring art history, breaking apart conventions such as theming and periodisation and 'freeing' the visitor of other imposing structures. In many ways, the display succeeds in its aims. But the choice of arranging works by date does what Tanaka (2016) argues about chronology: "Often, even when we think we are being 'critical', we often reinforce what we intend to oppose" (p. 164).

In section 5.2, display analysis of the *Walk through British Art* at Tate Britain revealed how a chronological framework structures the organisation of knowledges of art through display. Overall, the use of chronology as utilised in the Walk Through British Art succeeded in its aims to promote a primarily visual experience that allowed visitors to make connections between different artists working within the same time period. The removal of textual interpretation allowed visitors to stroll through history, room by room, without the structures of art historical movements, periods and other devices to influence their thinking.

The use of a timeline or chronological approach can be a powerful means of presenting history, but need to be critically considered:

Timelines are useful, even powerful, but— like all narratives—should be used with care. The timeline carries with it assumptions about the narrative structure of history, about the primacy of chronological understanding, and about progress. It makes it seem as though history is a path to the present. More to the point, it hides those assumptions remarkably well. Timelines seem natural. (Lubar 2013:169)

It could be argued that despite a belief that timelines are simple, neutral and objective, they actually facilitate value judgements and classification which leaves little room for critical debate. The removal of vast amounts of textual interpretation, intended to ‘liberate’ the visitor and encourage an aesthetic experience, instead might limit understanding for those uncomfortable without such assistance.

The organisational dynamics of the production of exhibitions will be explored in the section that follows, seeking to understand how the WTBA was produced and how the power and status of organisational actors contributed to what was chosen in the final display.

5.3 Organisational Analysis

5.3.1 Overview and context

Before going in-depth into the processes of production of exhibitions and interpretation at Tate, it is useful to gain an understanding of the organisation’s structure and the context in which it operates. As a large, multi-site organisation, Tate has by far the most complex organisational structure of all three case studies

examined in this thesis, with four sites: Tate Modern, Tate Britain, Tate Liverpool and Tate St. Ives; each site has its own director, while the organisation as a whole was (at the time of writing) headed by longstanding director Nicholas Serota. The organisational chart in figure 23 illustrates the positions of the various senior directors in the organisation, showing Serota at the top. Site directors sit one level below this.

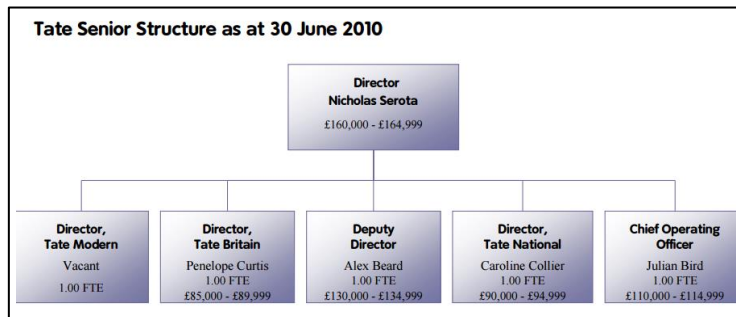


Figure 23 Tate senior structure, June 2010 (Source: tate.org.uk, accessed 01.10.15)

Alongside site directors in the organisational hierarchy, the director of Tate National oversees learning activity across all sites; this complex arrangement means that the director of Tate Britain is responsible for managing exhibitions curators but not learning and interpretation staff. In figure 24, a more detailed view of the staff working beneath the Director of Tate National can be seen – including the Director of Learning, who directly manages learning staff across sites, including interpretation curators.

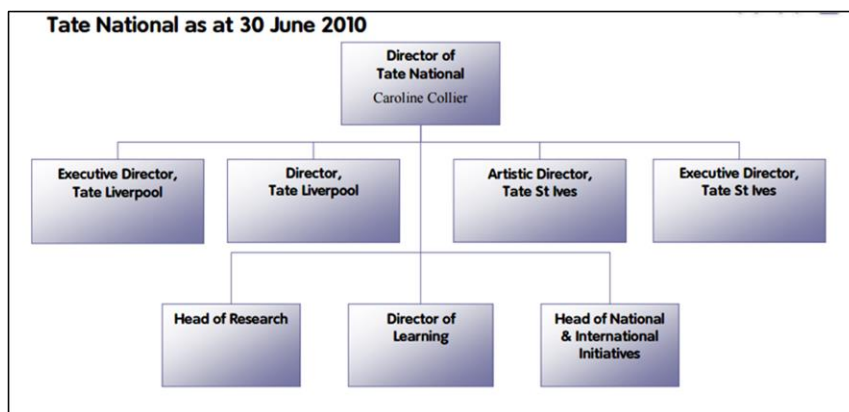


Figure 24 Tate National structure, June 2010 (Source: tate.org.uk, accessed 01.10.15)

The creation of a Director of Learning post was the result of a change initiative undertaken in 2010, and coincided with the appointment of a new director. This

occasion marked what interviewees identified as a 'big change' in how learning activity and interpretation was perceived in the organisation; this was the second wave of organisational change identified by interviewees, the first occurring in 2000 with the opening of Tate Modern. The following section will briefly chronicle some of these changes, providing some context to how interpretation functioned in the organisation at the time of data collection.

5.3.2 The role of interpretation curators

A potted history of organisational changes at Tate Britain was provided by interviewees as they discussed the roles of learning and interpretation at Tate. Long-time curator Martin Myrone, in particular, provided a chronological overview of two distinct periods of change in the last fifteen years: each corresponded with a major event in the institution's history. The first, beginning in 2000, coincided with the opening of Tate Modern. The second, 2010, coincided with the appointment of director Penelope Curtis. Each of these dates marked a period of reorganisation and restructuring of staff that aligned with new institutional priorities.

Myrone, a curator at Tate for more than 25 years, chronicled the creation of a separate curatorial team in 2000 that was tasked with the job of programming Tate Britain; he also identified this period of change as a time when the role of interpretation staff changed:

... the tradition up to that point had been to have interpretation, what we would call interpretation, as purely an editorial role.... Basically, what they were doing was editing, quite lightly, texts that were generated by curators. So the organisational change around the creation of Tate Britain and Tate Modern were at least, in principle, meant to make interpreters more fully part of the curatorial process and more fully part of an exhibition team, more fully part of the programming team.

There was the expectation, which I think was novel, that an interpreter, one of the interpretation team would be part of the project team. More or less from the outset and contribute to the planning of an interpretation strategy (M. Myrone, personal communication, 22 April 2015).

Myrone identifies the year 2000 as the beginning of one era for the organisation – the beginning of new ways of working due to the opening of Tate Modern, and also

of the integration of interpretation staff into the process of developing exhibitions. This new 'era' corresponded with wider changes across museums:

I think it had come in other organisations, I'd come from the V&A previously and there was something similar going on there, where there was a sense that the curatorial function had an interpretive aspect to it and the interpretive function was more than editorial (ibid).

These wider changes relate to the so-called 'culture wars' of the late 1990s; Prior (2006) describes the shifting position of the museum, a move away from a 'top-down model of museums' and passive audiences and the resultant changes to interpretation: "...museums are embracing mixed arrangements aimed at opening up audience interpretation beyond the linear narratives of traditional art history" (p. 516). The V&A's British Galleries are an early example of an art museum including an educator on a project team, as Durbin (2004) explained:

The British Galleries project led to a fundamental rethinking of the way the V&A offers interpretation in its galleries... the museum moved from a position where the focus of gallery redevelopments was overwhelmingly, if not exclusively, the selection and display of objects to one where the needs of visitors became central to every aspect of the project, including object selection and design as well as interpretation (p.38)

This shifting landscape also corresponds to the changing views of education and learning in cultural institutions described by Cutler (2012) whereby passive, didactic approaches have been replaced by more participatory and dialogic models. By creating exhibitions through a project team approach, one which includes staff with specialisms in learning and interpretation, cultural institutions have attempted to present exhibitions that appeal to wider audiences.

The second period of change identified by both Myrone and other interviewees occurred just after Penelope Curtis was appointed director in 2009. In 2010, an organisation-wide change initiative was put in place that saw the reorganisation of staff and priorities once again. During this period of change, a Director of Learning was appointed to oversee learning activity across all Tate sites, and this senior post raised the profile of learning-related activity across the institution. Interviewees viewed this appointment as a significant moment in organisational history:

There was a complete restructure across the whole of Tate, and Learning was part of that... Anna [Cutler] became Head of Learning initially but that role was increased in importance and it became 'Director of Learning'... so she now sits with directors, which I think is very important ... it means that she is at all director-level meetings, so now, hopefully the directors and trustees – she does presentations to the trustees – they know what Learning is doing. Whereas before I think no one knew what Learning was doing. (K. McSwein, personal communication, 20 March 2015)

I think she [Cutler] was one of the first ever directors of learning within an art gallery/museum context. There are others now but it was quite a unique thing to happen at that time. Which is some ways is very relevant because it shows that learning is being placed at the higher level in the institution. (S. McGuire, personal communication, 18 March 2015)

This reorganisation of staff also included the repositioning of interpretation curators in the organisational structure. Prior to this period of organisational change, there were departments of 'Education and Interpretation' at Tate Britain and Tate Modern. This was changed to a cross-site Learning Department. The retitling of the department was part of a 'learning review' which saw interpretation curators become 'part of learning' rather than separate from it. This brought with it a redistribution of power and status among teams and departments, a phenomenon which we will now look at in depth.

5.3.3 Power and status

Inter-departmental power struggles are an area of interest within the study of organisational behaviour, and these closely relate to both organisational politics and conflict. Theorists such as French and Raven (1959), Saunders (1990), Handy (1993), Morgan (2006) and others describe sources of power in organisations; these are wide-ranging and complex, relating to the possession of financial resources, the dependency of other departments, the centrality of the function of a department to the organisation and myriad other factors. Over time, Tate Learning had gained in power and status, drawing its power from its ability to generate income, the perceived importance of learning in both Tate and among museums and galleries more broadly, and the view that learning activity was central to the functioning of the institution. For the interpretation team, who did not generate their own income

and who are highly reliant on the work of the curatorial department, the incorporation into the learning department was seen as a positive step:

It's a good thing for us to be in Learning... but the flip side of that is, we have agency to push back to Curatorial if they are saying something that, you know – you're suggesting a text that isn't very accessible – as part of the Learning department and sitting outside of Curatorial, we have agency to push back which we wouldn't have if we were part of their department because you would be outranked. (S. McGuire, personal communication, 18 March 2015)

This 'agency' of interpretation curators to 'push back' reflects a view that, by working within the learning department, interpretation had gained what French and Raven (1959) and Handy (1993) call 'expert power', and what Handy calls 'position power'. McGuire's comments about 'suggesting a text that isn't very accessible' indicates the interpretation team have expert knowledge of writing texts that are understandable by a wide range of visitors. She goes on to say that the team might not have their expertise acknowledged if they were still part of the curatorial team, as they would be 'outranked'. This suggests that, despite having 'expert power', it is their alliance with Tate Learning that boosts their 'position power'.

Weber's (1947) definition of power illustrates what is happening here: "...power is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will, despite resistance and regardless of the basis on which the probability rests" (p. 47). Whereas before, an interpretation curator may have wanted a text to be changed, but resistance and lack of power might have prevented this from happening. By gaining position power from their role in the learning department, interpretation curators have more of a say in the content of exhibitions.

Despite the results of the 'learning review' and the subsequent gain in expert and position power, interpretation curators still felt a lack of power in regards to their workload. Saunders (1990) describes one type of inter-departmental power as 'dependency' – when one department relies on another to conduct work and be effective, the one which is relied upon gains power. This is illustrated through this comment:

In a way, we are just part of a chain; we are not developing our own programme. There are elements of our programme that we develop that sit outside, but everything is an exhibition or display, so Curatorial are leading our workload in a way that isn't true of other learning teams. (S. McGuire, personal communication, 18 March 2015)

By describing their work as 'part of a chain', McGuire echoes the sentiments of interpretation specialists at the Rijksmuseum (see Chapter Four); interpretation specialists serve as 'boundary brokers', connecting separate departments and communities of practice within the organisation. This comment, however, also suggests that the interpretation team are highly dependent on the curatorial department to set their workload – suggesting that the curatorial department retains more power than the learning department. McSwein went on to explain how, in practice, the most influence over their daily work comes from site director level:

It's more the personality of the director... the way we work day to day is much more about the new director of Tate Britain (K. McSwein, personal communication, 20 March 2015).

As the site director has herself a great deal of position power, and heads the curatorial team, the scales of power at Tate Britain seem to be tipped in the curatorial department's favour. So, while the interpretation team has gained status and power over time and have more 'agency' in the process of producing exhibitions and displays, power negotiations still ensue. This was particularly evident during the process of redisplaying the permanent collection, which the next section investigates.

5.3.4 Negotiations of power in the redisplay of the Walk through British Art

The vision for the new permanent display came after many years of thematic displays at Tate Britain. Under Curtis's leadership, curators were also restructured into 'period teams' where they worked together to reorganise the galleries in chronological order. However, despite an interpretation strategy in development that emphasised access to information about its collection (figure 25) and a tradition of providing individual captions, Curtis defied traditional working practices by

reducing interpretation in the gallery spaces and placing the aesthetic encounter first.

Tate Interpretation Strategy

1. Tate has the ambition of promoting understanding and enjoyment of art by a broad public ranging from first time visitors to the specialists with a deep knowledge of the field.
2. Tate believes that any encounter with art is enhanced by an understanding of the context that encouraged its creation.
3. Tate seeks to make available such information, in a form that respects the integrity of the work, at the moment of an encounter.
4. The form and extent of that information will necessarily vary according to the circumstance, but will be agreed jointly by the curator working on the display or exhibition and the curator of Interpretation. In the event of disagreement, the head or senior curator responsible for displays or exhibitions will make a final decision.

Figure 25 Tate Interpretation Strategy, from internal document (Tate, 2015)

This decision was one which staff struggled with, and one which was seen as restrictive:

... they (curators) found it quite difficult initially, the idea that you wouldn't have individual captions or discursive captions accompanying works of art. (M. Myrone, personal communication, 22 April 2015)

It runs against what is quite a persuasive logic – that you are here to look, should look and see... your visual experience should be primary. A lot of us within curatorial, and probably within interpretation, struggle with that and challenge that. (ibid)

... what's been enforced in Tate Britain displays is that there's never room for conversation anymore. This is the way it is, and this is where the label sits (in the circuit). And that's interesting. It's taken, even if we were to say, you are choosing to display a work that's incredibly complex and people aren't going to understand, there's some context really needed – the parameters for us to work within have been really restricted. (S. McGuire, personal communication, 18 March 2015)

Whereas Curtis described her views on interpretation as follows:

I don't like (the word 'interpretation') because I think that no one can tell someone else what their interpretation is. That's for the recipient... I think people don't come to love art by reading, they come to love art by looking.

And after they've looked, then they want more information (P. Curtis, personal communication, 17 March 2015).

Exercising her agency as director of the gallery, Curtis disrupted the working practices of both exhibition curators and interpretation curators, taking the decision that exhibitions and the Spotlight galleries could contain extensive amounts of textual interpretation – but the chronological circuit should not:

I have quite a different view about interpretation in exhibitions, I feel that exhibitions do very often have an argument and you want to know what that argument is... whereas I see permanent collections as very different... something that is large and won't have a middle, beginning and an end and should be very free for people to enjoy in a huge number of ways (ibid).

By removing or reducing interpretation in the chronological circuit, Curtis attempted to create a more enjoyable experience, freeing the viewer from the burden of traditional art historical narratives. She explained this simply:

My aims were to make it more enjoyable. And easier. I didn't want people to feel that they had to know something before they could look at it (ibid).

Curtis's use of words such as 'free', 'easier' and 'more enjoyable' illustrate an assumption that textual interpretation creates a more stressful experience for the visitor, distracting them from the presumably relaxing experience of looking and seeing. This view echoes the sentiments of museum directors throughout the 20th century; interpretation has long been seen by some as a 'distraction' or as an 'intrusion' (McClellan, 2003).

At Tate Britain, however, viewing interpretation as a distraction was not the norm and captions for works had long been integral to displays. Despite objections from both curatorial and interpretation staff, and organisational unease with the idea of removing interpretation, Curtis used her 'position power' in her role as director to disrupt established working practices in the organisation.

5.3.5 Resulting knowledges of art in the new display

The chronological approach to display, absent of extensive interpretation, has removed the narrator from the story of British art. The visitor's experience of seeing "a range of art made at any one moment in an open, conversational manner" (Tate

2015a:5) and of viewing a “cross-section that is representative of what we know as ‘British art’” (ibid) seem natural, neutral and obvious. Lubar (2013) explains:

Within the narrative, the appearance of inevitability serves political power. By the very fact of appearing neutral – by hiding the narrator – the narrative suggests that the story can only be told one way (p.170).

Lubar goes on to discuss the appeal of chronological narratives to museums, explaining that they provide a simple, “easy-to-follow visitor flow” (ibid:171). As visitors follow the ‘easy’ and ‘enjoyable’ path through 500 years of British Art, looking at oil paintings, sculpture and contemporary works, they are coerced into a feeling that what they see before them is an unbiased story of how British art evolved.

Described in the introductory guide as ‘simply chronological’, the visitor is lulled into a false belief that objects were randomly selected and hung only according to date, with no hierarchical ordering or grouping by school, theme or art historical movement. The lack of introductory text panels in each room also contributes to a sense that what is seen in each room is impartial – that the objects on display have not been brought together by a curator, or the room’s theme authored. What is presented to the public *appears* to be a completely neutral, unbiased story that shows the progress of British Art.

By removing extensive textual interpretation such as individual captions and introductory panels, the institution removes the opportunity to question what is stated in the text and establishes itself as an authority. Witcomb (2012) discusses the chronological design in the Los Angeles Museum of Tolerance, arguing that “the result is an absence of space within which critical questions might be asked and a historical understanding of the events and processes gained” (pp.582-583). In many ways, the WTBA does the same. It presents visitors with a display lacking in enough information to enable dialogue and debate, such as that which comes from text panels or multimedia guides - unless they have come equipped with a great deal of prior knowledge.

Ultimately, the knowledges of art that have been represented in the WTBA are not ‘simple’ by virtue of being displayed chronologically and without a great deal of

interpretation. Instead, the display presents a selective version of history based on the tastes of the director and Tate curators.

5.4 Summary: Walking Through Time at Tate Britain

The data presented in this chapter illustrates how the stories told through display can be altered by organisational change, and how the agency of actors in the organisation can be affected by the introduction of a powerful new actor – in this case, a new director. Interpretation curators at Tate Britain have, over time, gained power in the institution, gaining recognition for their expertise and becoming a core part of exhibition teams. As the result of a long period of change, the role of interpretation curators grew from a purely editorial role to an authorial role while their position as boundary brokers and project coordinators expanded their remit. Their repositioning from being part of the curatorial department to being part of Tate Learning increased their power and status, a move which was partly due to the rise in importance of learning activity across all sites.

The institutional philosophy of providing ‘information at the point of encounter’ had become a longstanding tradition at Tate Britain. Exhibition curators and interpretation curators had become accustomed to providing extensive textual interpretation throughout all displays and exhibitions in the gallery, as per the vision and mission of Tate’s former general director, Nicholas Serota. With the appointment of a new director of Tate Britain, however, power relations shifted and this tradition was disrupted. While interpretation curators still produced extensive interpretive texts in exhibitions, their level of involvement during the redisplay of the permanent collection was greatly reduced.

The *Walk through British Art* took a chronological approach, presenting a seemingly neutral timeline of British art free of extensive texts, individual captions or theming. While in other areas of organisational work, interpretation curators served as content producers, editors and as project coordinators, for the WTBA they had a very minor role. The elimination of theming and extensive texts allowed curators to select objects that may not have previously fitted into neat art historical categories and allowed lesser known artists to join well known artists on a new “conveyor belt

of history” (Serota 1996:55); however, the combination of a chronological approach and lack of text in the new display made this difficult to discern.

The resulting display presents an art history based primarily on objects defined as painting or sculpture, presented as a progression over time. Regardless of its silences, the display presents both an evolutionary model of art history where the viewer is invited to observe how art has evolved over long periods of time, and a causal model where we are encouraged to examine how artists influenced one another within a given time frame. The focus is more on objects than on process, with aesthetic placement a key device in encouraging the visitor to make comparisons between works. Because of its chronological arrangement, however, the dominant association made when viewing the display is one of ‘time as progress’ – as we walk through the display, the history of art ‘unfolds’ before our eyes, presenting us with a sequential narrative.

Organisational power struggles were at play during the process of producing the display, with departments vying for influence in processes of decision making. While curatorial teams worked together in ‘period teams’, combining their knowledge and gaining ‘expert power’, the director utilised her ‘position power’ to override traditional working practices. The power of interpretation curators was reduced as a result, meaning they had less input into the WTBA’s development. The outcome of the process was the production of a visually appealing permanent collection display based largely on the vision of powerful actors in the institution.

Power dynamics shifted once again after this study was conducted, when Curtis left her post as director in March 2015. A year later, captions for each individual work were reinstated.

In response to visitor feedback and in line with Tate’s commitment to provide information ‘at the moment of an encounter’, colleagues in Curatorial, Interpretation, the Design Studio and Art Handling have collaborated to increase visitor engagement with the works on display. Almost four hundred captions have been reviewed, redrafted and written, and will be presented on labels designed to preserve the integrity and visual flow that are the strengths of the unfolding chronology.

(Tate, memo to staff, 2016)

Power dynamics are, as seen in this chapter, a force that can alter many aspects of an organisation's work. In the case of Tate Britain, a powerful actor was able to step in and influence the production of art historical knowledge through modes of display. Chapter 7 will explore power dynamics in more depth and in relation to all three case studies. In the meantime, we turn to Chapter 6 where further aspects of organisational practice will be explored in relation to the production of interpretation at the Peabody Essex Museum.

Chapter Six

Transformation and Connection at the Peabody Essex Museum

6.1 Introduction

From its beginnings as the merger of the Peabody Museum and the Essex Institute in the 1990s, the Peabody Essex Museum (PEM) has developed an approach to interpretation that blends a variety of approaches: “a scholarly but often playful mix of old and new, Yankee and international, fine, folk and decorative art – that throws out traditional aesthetic hierarchies” (Cook 2008). PEM’s aim is to connect the past with the present, uniting its eclectic collections in a ‘constellation’: “a word used by Walter Benjamin to describe a Marxist project of bringing events together in new ways, disrupting established taxonomies, disciplines, mediums and proprieties” (Bishop 2013:56). PEM also has a strong focus on visitor experience, utilising non-traditional approaches that aim to transform the way its audiences think about art and culture.

According to its mission and vision statement, more than a decade ago the museum “began a comprehensive campaign to conceptually and physically integrate, interpret and exhibit the full breadth of museum collections for the first time in its 200-year history” (PEM 2016a). As a result of this campaign, the organisation instigated a long-term process in which the concept of interpretation was ‘interrogated’, while interpretive planners were hired and a ‘core team’ model of exhibition production was implemented. The use of interpretive planning is reflective of a broader trend among art museums, particularly in North America, and is described as a deliberate process for thinking about, deciding on and recording the museum’s educational and interpretive initiatives for the purpose of facilitating meaningful and effective experiences (Wells et al 2013). The interpretive plan is prepared collaboratively by a ‘core team’ consisting of staff with a wide range of expertise, from collections knowledge to education. As PEM’s focus is on customer

'experience', declaring itself a "people-centred museum" (PEM, 2016b) and an organisation that "emphasizes the creation of experiences which stimulate curiosity, engagement, and a range of emotional responses" (Fry 2015:211), the use of interpretive planning and a core team model allow for more attention to be paid to how exhibitions and displays are received by audiences.

This chapter aims to understand how both the process of interpretive planning and a focus on visitor experience has influenced the knowledges present in PEM's exhibitions and displays. The chapter will present analysis of data collected at PEM in January 2015, aiming to examine in more depth the approaches taken to interpretation and the processes involved in its production. The structure of this chapter is as follows: section 6.2 will examine the museum's philosophical positioning as demonstrated in its mission and vision statement; this will be followed by display analysis in section 6.3, which aims to examine permanent and temporary exhibitions in the museum to better understand how knowledge is organized. Section 6.4, marking the second half of the chapter, will turn towards an analysis of the processes of production, using interview data and documentary evidence to better understand how PEM's organisational structure and its use of multidisciplinary project teams influences exhibition production. Nonaka and Takeuchi's (1995) and Fong's (2003) theories of organisational knowledge creation will be drawn upon to better understand the activities of project teams. By connecting the knowledges presented through PEM's exhibitions and displays with the processes used to create them, a deeper understanding of the relationship between process and product will emerge.

6.2 Philosophical Positioning: PEM's Mission and Vision

A closer look at PEM's mission statement provides insight into the institution's philosophical positioning on the role of art, history and culture and the goals of the organisation:

The mission of the Peabody Essex Museum is to celebrate outstanding artistic and cultural creativity by collecting, stewarding and interpreting objects of art and culture in ways that increase knowledge, enrich the spirit, engage the mind and stimulate the senses. Through its exhibitions, programs, publications, media and related activities, PEM strives to create experiences

that transform people's lives by broadening their perspectives, attitudes, and knowledge of themselves and the wider world (PEM 2016b).

This statement illustrates PEM's focus on art as a 'transformative' medium, with an emphasis not on the art object but rather on the experience of engaging with it. This view of the function of art appears to be influenced by a Deweyan perspective in which the aesthetic experience is privileged over the material object – "For Dewey the essence and value of art is not in such artifacts, but in the dynamic and developing experiential activity through which they are created and perceived" (Shusterman 2005:127). This focus on experiential activity is evident in many areas of the museum, as seen in displays and text that focuses on the processes of art production or on the creativity of the makers. Visitors are invited to participate in creative activities throughout the museum: testing out ideas in the 'Maker's Lounge', handling tactile materials in the 'Art and Nature Center', and learning from digital interactive media in temporary exhibitions – to name but a few.

PEM's mission is highly visitor-centred, with a focus on stimulating the creativity and 'transforming' the lives of its audiences through engagement with art objects. The concept of the transformative experience relates to Dewey's vision of 'art as experience':

For Dewey, art functions as experience. Processes of inquiry, looking and finding meaning are transformative, extending connections with what is good and right. Expanded perceptions open venues for understanding and action. Attention to detail excites potential for meaning, yielding important societal insights, previously taken for granted. *Transformative experiences* occur when people intuit new concepts that occasion seeing in valued ways... Art communicates moral purpose and education. Dewey believes moral purpose is justifiable, art conveying messages that stimulate reflection on purposeful lives (Goldblatt 2006: 17 – 34).

Deweyan sentiments are present in PEM's mission statement; art is seen as something to be 'celebrated', as something to 'enrich the spirit', and a medium which 'transforms people's lives by broadening their perspectives, attitudes, and knowledge of themselves and the wider world'. This idea of art as 'transformative medium' also connects with Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning theory, which views learning as constructivist in nature. Transformative learning involves a multi-step process of critical self-reflection that challenges the learner's worldview;

PEM's mission statement suggests that a visit to the museum will contribute to this process. A related alternative to Mezirow's theory, the psychoanalytic view, suggests the significant role of emotion in transformative learning (Boyd & Meyers 1998), arguing that "the exploration of emotions that emerge from deep within becomes a way to gain access to our internal sources of knowing, thus causing us to reconsider how we structure meaning" (Kokkos 2011:482).

Looking in more depth at PEM's extended mission and vision statement reveals more about the way in which art history is mapped in the museum:

(PEM) create(s) a richer experience for visitors by bringing art, architecture and culture together in new ways, and by presenting art in the world in which it was made... (PEM) is now able to interpret its singular collection in ways that invite visitors to discover the inextricable connections that link artistic and cultural traditions, connections that have always influenced art and culture and that now characterize our lives in a global community. By presenting contemporary and historical work, the museum can help link the past and the present. (PEM 2016b: np)

This statement illustrates Benjamin's concept of the 'constellation', which Bishop (2013) relates to the actions of the collector in her book *Radical Museology*:

For Benjamin, the collector is a scavenger or *bricoleur*, quoting out of context in order to break the spell of calcified traditions, mobilizing the past by bringing it blazing into the present, and keeping history mobile in order to allow its objects to be historical agents once again (Bishop 2013:56).

PEM's approach to juxtaposing work from across time periods, disciplines and cultures from its diverse collection reflects Benjamin's notion of the constellation; the past comes into the present, historical objects and contemporary objects engage in conversations that refuse to conform to traditional methods of presenting art history. The canon is not present in PEM's displays (a sentiment echoed in an interview with Dr. Juliette Fritsch, then Chief of Interpretation and Education: "You won't find the canon here!") – objects are classified as 'art', no matter their age, origin or medium. Instead of attempting to shoehorn a unique collection into traditional chronological, disciplinary or geographical categories, leaving them stagnant and firmly in the past, PEM's mission communicates an aim of re-contextualising its collections into a constellation that allows for both historical and

contemporary works to interact, connect and encourage new meanings and knowledges to be constructed.

In the section that follows, display analysis of both the older permanent galleries and a temporary exhibition will examine how the institution is attempting to achieve its multiple goals: of linking the past and the present, of challenging visitors to create new connections, to transform their thinking, and to create memorable experiences enhanced by a multisensory, emotive approach to exhibition design.

6.3 Display Analysis

6.3.1 Setting and atmosphere

PEM's suburban setting in the small town of Salem, just north of the city of Boston, make it a museum somewhat off the beaten track. Situated amongst the historic streets of Salem, a once crucial seaport that now draws tourists to its witch trial-themed attractions, the museum's contemporary glass panelled entrance sets it apart from the surrounding buildings. The museum's publicity labels it as a museum of 'art and culture', with an emphasis on the 'art'. If traveling by car, one of the first encounters visitors have with PEM is via a brightly lit LED billboard next to the highway junction for Salem. The sign, announcing "ART. RIGHT. HERE." is a simple statement reminiscent of the American roadside diner signs of the 30's, 40's and 50's that would later inform artists of the Pop generation and beyond. This quirky statement suggests that the museum is a place to stop off and refuel, a comfortable, inviting place where travel-weary drivers can feel at home.

The main entrance to the museum is through a modern glass entryway, just off a pedestrianised street in the town. On the first day of data collection for this study, a friendly staff member stood at the door greeting visitors, setting a welcoming tone for the visit. While an entry fee is charged for admission, staff at the tills were equally friendly as they issued admission tickets. The customer service orientated staff served to minimise 'threshold fear' (Gurian 1995), engaging in conversation and providing information.

Moving past the reception area into the centre of the building, visitors are met with a large, light glass-covered atrium, a café area and soft music. Emotions are engaged

through the design and sensory qualities of the space, creating an 'affective atmosphere' that creates a sense of calm. Anderson (2009) discusses affective atmospheres, explaining Böhme's (2005) ideas around the relationship between architecture and atmosphere: "By creating and arranging light, sounds, symbols, texts and much more, atmospheres are 'enhanced', 'transformed', 'intensified', 'shaped', and otherwise intervened on" (p.80). Architect Moshe Safdie designed PEM's central atrium to reflect elements of Salem's architectural history and to serve as a type of 'village green' or gathering space (PEM 2016a). Surrounding this central area are the entrances to galleries and to the courtyard in which the Yu Tang Chinese House is located. The design of this central area combined with staff interaction and sound creates a type of affective atmosphere that serves to engage the visitor's emotions even before they encounter an art object.

Branching off the central atrium are galleries of American, Maritime and Native American art, the 'Art and Nature Center' (an 'all-ages' interactive gallery) and the entrance to the courtyard in which the Yin Yu Tang Chinese House has been rebuilt after relocation from China. Beyond these galleries are further exhibition spaces covering three floors and 250,000 square feet. The museum's holdings also include 22 historic buildings scattered throughout Salem; for the purposes of this analysis, only the main building and galleries will be examined. Analysis will now turn towards a closer inspection of the American Art and Maritime galleries, one of the first sections visitors might encounter after entering the atrium.

6.3.2 American Art and Maritime Art and History galleries

The prominently located American Art and Maritime Art and History galleries are situated immediately to the left after entering the atrium, their prime location suggesting that these disciplinary categories form the core of the museum's collections. Across from the galleries, the entrance to the Yin Yu Tang house might cause the first-time visitor to question the connection between what appear to be traditional and historical subjects of American and Maritime art and history with a reconstructed Chinese House. Before long, however, the story of Salem as a centre of international trade in the early days of the United States becomes clear through interpretation.

The American and Maritime galleries are two halves of a large exhibition space. Installed in 2003, they offer an interesting glimpse into the institution's philosophy of connecting time periods and genres and offer a snapshot of institutional history. Unlike some museums of art that group objects together by discipline or through chronology, PEM's approach in the American and Maritime galleries is thematic. Contemporary and historic objects are displayed alongside one another in 'worlds', placing decorative pieces alongside works of sculpture and painting to draw the viewer's attention to the theme presented. The focus of much of the space is on the people of 18th century New England, yet contemporary stories are woven into the displays through objects and interpretation. One of the first 'worlds' one comes across in the American Art section is the 'World of Women', where the text reads:

The World of Women

In the 18th century, dressing tables and tea tables in the latest London style signified the importance of fashion and social ritual in daily life. After 1790, a greater emphasis on education for women inspired American cabinetmakers to introduce the lady's secretary, piano, and worktable. Portraits combined the documentary and the interpretive as they reflected a woman's social position, identity and accomplishments (PEM 2015a).

Grouped in this section are a selection of 18th century objects: a desk grouped with a landscape painting and a sofa with a small still life. Alongside these objects is a contemporary hat in a display case and a large abstract painting of a woman, both made in the 21st century. The grouping of historical objects alongside contemporary art pieces appears to be an attempt to encourage visitors to make connections between the purpose of historical objects, their social significance at the time, and how these themes are relevant in today's age.

This could perhaps be related to Whitehead's idea of the 'conceptual-affinitive' frame, which he uses to describe contemporary art displays at Tate Modern:

The frame involved here might be termed conceptual-affinitive, in seeking to identify points of contact between works of different ages and from different places, and also in fashioning a specific kind of supportive dialogue between artworks which are forced into a regime of mutual interpretation. (2012:81)

By using a conceptual-affinitive framing, juxtaposing historic and modern, an attempt at bringing history into the present moment is made. Whether or not this creates a kind of 'supportive dialogue' between historic paintings and furniture and contemporary art is questionable, however – and whether or not visitors appreciate this is not known.

Moving into the Maritime Art and History section, we can see more juxtaposing of historic and contemporary and a further emphasis on people. We also see how museum curators of the early 2000s had begun to introduce multisensory elements to displays and to create what Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998) calls 'in-situ' installations: in contrast to an 'in-context' display, which places objects in taxonomic or formal relationships with one another, in-situ displays "enlarge the ethnographic object by expanding its boundaries to include more of what was left behind, even if only in replica, after the object was excised from its physical, social, and cultural settings" (p.20).

A small room has been turned into a 'recreation of a salon' on Cleopatra's Barge, America's first private yacht. Using an in-situ approach to display, visitors walk through the space and view objects as they might have been placed in the salon. The display area is roped off, so it is merely an opportunity to look; however, as visitors move across the floor, the floorboards creak as they might have done on the yacht. The ceiling is low, the lights flicker and there is a feeling of intimacy. The visitor's act of moving through the space is intended to recreate an experience, connecting the present with the past. It is, however, an earlier attempt at creating an affective environment, one that lacks in sophistication.

Throughout the American Art and Maritime galleries, the emphasis is on how the objects in the collection relate to people of the past, how they functioned within their lives and how New England artists established themselves in the newly created Republic. While considering these stories of the past, visitors are also encouraged to think of their relationship with the present. By juxtaposing contemporary and historical objects, visitors are encouraged to break from traditional art historical categorizations of discipline and period and instead focus on the relationships between today's world and the worlds of early New England.

These two galleries make up only a fraction of the collections displays at PEM. Beyond the central atrium are galleries containing African, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Native American and Oceanic art. Throughout these galleries, the interpretive strategy remains the same: to create connections between time periods, cultures and art forms. In the American and Maritime galleries, these connections were made by grouping objects into 'worlds' and thematic clusters. Throughout these two galleries historical and contemporary sit side by side, asking the visitor to relate art of the present day with relics of the past.

Human stories are presented throughout the museum, told through the medium of objects. How objects relate to the people who owned, used or made them is a core part of PEM's interpretive philosophy and is an approach which encourages visitors to think not just about art and artefacts but about their modes of production and the sociohistorical contexts in which they were produced. In the next section, we will look closer at a more recent attempt to bring the stories of the past to life and to connect the visitor's experiences with objects through an analysis of a temporary exhibition, *In Plain Sight: Discovering the Furniture of Nathaniel Gould*.

6.3.3 Temporary exhibitions as a site of experimentation: display analysis of In Plain Sight: Discovering the Furniture of Nathaniel Gould

In Plain Sight: Discovering the Furniture of Nathaniel Gould was a temporary exhibition on display at PEM between 15 November 2014 and 29 March 2015. Nathaniel Gould was an 18th century cabinetmaker based in Salem, and newly discovered business ledgers had led to new scholarship on his work and its significance. Before the discovery of the ledgers, Gould was a relatively obscure figure; however, the meticulously kept records enabled furniture experts to attribute many hundreds of pieces to Gould and his workshop – pieces which would have been commissioned by many very wealthy and important clients. The exhibition featured twenty of Gould's furniture pieces displayed in conjunction with paintings, decorative art objects and interactives that provided a look at how his work was produced and the role it played in privileged New England homes at that time.

Both the discovery of the ledgers and this subsequent exhibition attempted to raise the profile and status of Gould and his work. An approach to display that considered visitors of varying backgrounds sought to consolidate knowledge of the discovery for furniture experts and novices alike. While small in size, the exhibition provided many layers of interpretation that were intended to appeal to a range of audiences. Text panels and labels provided contextual information, while a range of tactile labels were included that allowed visitors to engage with objects through the sense of touch. Also included in the exhibition were two digital interpretive elements, both of which encouraged visitors to participate in an activity to enrich their understanding of the topics presented. Through this layered approach to interpretation, PEM sought to bring the past to life through a sensorial approach that integrated sight, sound and touch with narrative.

Located in one of PEM's 'special exhibition' galleries, *In Plain Sight* was arranged in three clusters around the perimeter of the space with most of the exhibition visible upon entering the room. The introductory panel explaining the exhibition was sited outside the main door, encouraging visitors to pause to read about the room's contents before entering the double doors. The contents of text panels will be discussed in the section that follows. Once inside, the exhibition's layout seemed to suggest visitors should zig-zag through the space - while the far end of the room was clearly visible at the entrance, dividing walls were installed at various angles, disrupting the instinctive circular path one might normally take.

Furniture pieces were grouped on simple platforms alongside portraits and display cases containing Gould's business ledgers. One area of the exhibition also featured a wedding dress and wedding waistcoat, both on stands between a stand table and large ornate desk, floral wallpaper adorning the wall. The emphasis of the room was on this centrally placed section, drawing the eye towards the domestic-style setting. The walls of the room were painted in varying shades of muted blue, a colour often associated with American colonial interiors. The gallery was brightly lit, with soft spotlighting directed at each object.

Off to the left, a small room was set up to resemble a furniture-maker's workshop. This room featured an innovative digital interactive: along a 'workbench', visitors

could choose a section of a chair (for example, a 'splat', or back section) and place it on the workbench; a sensor detected which object was requested and a video projection then showed contemporary woodworker Phil Lowe using traditional methods to make the item onscreen. Lowe remained silent; all that could be heard was the 'tap, tap, tap' of a hammer or the sound of a saw. These sounds bled slightly into the gallery space, breaking up the silence of the room.

The layout of *In Plain Sight* emphasised both looking at objects and imagining how they might have been used, what they might have felt like to touch and how they were produced. Siting furniture alongside portraits and items of costume connected the pieces with the people who commissioned their production and who may have used them in their homes. The inclusion of interactives that show the process of production provided another layer of understanding, encouraging closer inspection of the furniture pieces themselves and enabling visitors to imagine what it might have been like to produce them. We now turn to a more in-depth analysis of the exhibition, relating interpretive strategies to theory.

6.3.4 A closer look: frame analysis of *In Plain Sight*: Discovering the Furniture of Nathaniel Gould

This section will utilise interpretive frames (Whitehead 2012) to further investigate the content of *In Plain Sight*. The main displays of the exhibition were divided into three subsections, titled 'The Art of Selection', 'The Written Word' and 'Objects of Desire'. Moving clockwise around the space, the first subsection (The Art of Selection) contained several chairs and chests of drawers. The introductory text focused on the choices a client could make when commissioning a piece of furniture, providing the visitor with a comprehensive overview of the types of furniture Gould was capable of making. In this introductory text, as in many other texts in the exhibition, the cost of Gould's furniture is mentioned. This strategy utilises a socio-economic framing to prompt the visitor to consider the high economic value of each object.

In an object label for a side chair in this section, the focus then turns to Gould's design influences. The text uses an evolutionary framing to discuss the influence of prestigious British designer Thomas Chippendale on Gould's work:

Gould gleaned some of his furniture designs from British pattern books, including Thomas Chippendale's *Director*, the most influential design book of its time. While most American cabinetmakers simplified and adapted Chippendale's patterns, Gould is the only New England maker to faithfully copy one of Chippendale's chair designs. Plate 14 inspired the dramatic, pointed, Gothic-style splat, or chair back, on this side chair (PEM 2015b).

By connecting Gould with Chippendale and emphasising how influential his pattern books were at the time, the text serves to elevate Gould's status through the use of a type of comparative, evolutionary framing. An introductory text in another subsection of the exhibition, 'Objects of Desire', uses a socio-historical framing to position Gould in New England society (fig 26):

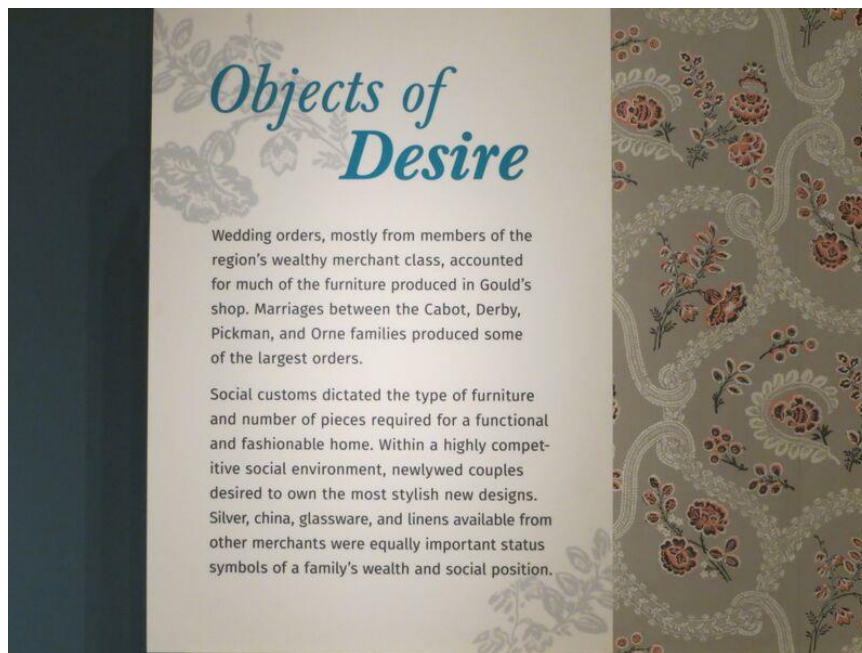


Figure 26 Text panel for 'Objects of Desire' section of *In Plain Sight* exhibition (PEM 2015) (Source: Author)

The focus of the first half of this introductory text panel is on Gould's wealthy clients and their role in elevating his status as a cabinetmaker in 18th century New England society. The focus of the second half moves away from Gould himself and towards a socio-historical framing that more broadly describes the importance of particular items of furniture and other household objects for wealthy families at this time. A great deal of the text throughout the exhibition also uses a socio-economic frame to place emphasis on how the pieces of furniture in the exhibition were 'expensive' (a word repeated throughout the exhibition) and were purchased by wealthy families with high social status. This repetitive focus on expense and Gould's role as

cabinetmaker to the wealthy throughout the exhibition seems to be an attempt at emphasising his importance and the value of his creations.

The third section in the exhibition relates to the recent discovery of Gould's business ledgers, which has helped furniture historians identify Gould's work. The introductory text panel explained the differences between the types of records Gould kept, again using a socio-historical framing to help visitors understand the purpose and context of the ledgers on display. The text then explains the significance of a particular entry in the ledgers, using a socio-economic framing to make clear that this was a large and costly order of goods. The text appeared as follows:

The Written Word

Discovering Nathaniel Gould's 18th-century ledgers uncovered his life as a prolific Massachusetts cabinetmaker. He kept two types of business records: a day book (left) to record daily transactions, and an account book (right), listing each client's name alphabetically, with a separate page for credit and debit transactions. Together these ledgers were the key to tracing extant furniture directly to Gould.

Both ledgers are open to entries that relate to a large furniture order that Jeremiah Lee placed on April 9, 1775, for his daughter Mary's wedding dowry. The third item in the list, an expensive desk-and-bookcase, is displayed on the adjacent platform (PEM 2015c).

The socio-economic and socio-historical framings used in the introductory text panels throughout this exhibition serve to remind visitors of the significance of these items of furniture to the wealthy 18th century families who owned them. The text panels in this exhibition appear to be aimed at visitors with a limited knowledge of furniture history and set out to explain how and why such pieces of furniture are significant. This is perhaps because these types of furniture are common throughout New England and are therefore often overlooked – an observation also commented on in interviews with staff.

Throughout the exhibition, another type of interpretive framing is used that can be seen throughout the whole of PEM, one which invites visitors to engage with artworks using touch and sound. This could be called a 'sensory framing', as it seeks to engage the senses in order to evoke a more emotive experience. The first example

of interpretation that uses a sensory framing are the tactile labels situated in front of some of the displays (fig 27):



Figure 27 Tactile label from In Plain Sight Exhibition (PEM 2015) (Source: Author)

These tactile labels are not targeted towards children but instead invite visitors of all ages to touch a small replica of one of the pieces of furniture on display. Through the use of the sense of touch, visitors could engage corporeally to develop a deeper aesthetic and historical understanding of the objects on display. This interpretive strategy combined textual interpretation with a tactile experience to facilitate the production of embodied knowledge. While tactile experiences in galleries are not new, using a tactile element on a text panel designed for the general visitor is an approach not often seen in art museums. While the language used is simplified, it is not written for a child. This combination of language, the height of labels and their seamless integration into the display gives a general audience the opportunity to experience elements of this 'tactile-sensory' framing.

The use of sound is another affective device used both in this exhibition and in other areas of the museum. Within this exhibition, subtle background sounds utilised a type of 'audio-sensory' framing that contributed to a more immersive atmosphere. Ambient sound in gallery spaces is not often found in historical art museums, as it is often thought of as intrusive – sound is more often to be found on personal multimedia devices or via headsets, as art museums are traditionally thought of as

spaces for quiet contemplation. Sound in this case is used as a means of ‘setting the scene’ – in the workshop space, it creates an immersive atmosphere, prompting the visitor to suspend disbelief for a moment in order to more carefully observe the skills and labour of the cabinetmaker. Once out of the workshop space, it serves as a subtle reminder of the involvement of the human hand in the production of the furniture on display.

The inclusion of both sound and touch in *In Plain Sight* connect visitors to the human elements of production. Whereas often in museum displays, the focus is solely on the objects themselves – their form, their function, their materials – here, visitors are asked to think about Gould’s skills, the process of constructing an item of furniture from start to finish, and the sheer amount of time it would have taken to produce a piece. This brings us back to Dewey’s ideas about the aesthetic experience:

When artistic objects are separated from both conditions of origin and operation in experience, a wall is built around them that renders almost opaque their general significance, with which esthetic theory deals. Art is remitted to a separate realm, where it is cut off from that association with the materials and aims of every other form of human effort, undergoing and achievement. (Dewey 1934:3)

Dewey’s argument suggests that, rather than simply focusing on an art object, we need to consider the experience of making it and of interacting with it; it must be connected with everyday life, with humanity. *In Plain Sight* used numerous strategies to encourage visitors to think about ways in which the objects on display connect with their makers, with the people who used them, to the patrons who purchased them and to the visitors who engage with them. It contained sensory elements that encouraged more emotive responses to the exhibition, contributing to deeper learning as suggested by transformative learning theories. *In Plain Sight*, while a temporary exhibition, could be seen as a “site of experimentation” (Macdonald and Basu 2007) as the institution prepared to embark on a redisplay of further galleries; however, many of the approaches used in this exhibition are paradigmatic of approaches used throughout the museum. Next, a discussion of how these approaches contribute to the construction of knowledge will be briefly set out.

6.3.5 Knowledges of art

Throughout PEM's many galleries, we can see evidence of an approach that seeks to create 'connections': for example, between art objects across time periods and disciplines, between art objects and past peoples and between visitors' personal experiences and objects. We can even see the use of the word in its publications: PEM's blog is called 'Connected', while its members' magazine is similarly titled 'PEM Connections'. The frequent use of the word illustrates an institutional position on the role of art in society: it is not something to simply look at, to think about or to learn from, it is something to connect with, to participate in and to gain inspiration from. Objects of the past relate to objects of today, while the many connections, links and juxtapositions and 'constellations' present in displays allow for new constructions of art historical knowledge.

Within the American and Maritime galleries, the blending of historical and contemporary objects throughout the displays allowed the historical objects on display to be seen in a fresh context. While the focus of much of the textual interpretation was on the different historical contexts in which objects might have been placed, the inclusion of contemporary works encouraged visitors to relate these objects to similar objects of today. *In Plain Sight* took a slightly different approach, focusing solely on the historical within the main display area but provoking visitors to 'step into the past' by engaging with interactives (both digital and analogue) that stimulate the sense of touch, utilise sound and create a transformative learning experience. Although a different approach to connecting the past and present, *In Plain Sight* still presented new knowledges of art and history: by creating a multisensory and interactive environment, visitors were able to participate in a type of digital re-enactment; one which enlivened history and connected the processes of production with the presentation of final products. An understanding of how a cabinetmaker produces an object combined with contextual information about the socio-historical and socio-economic conditions in which it was made move the viewer beyond form and design, towards a deeper appreciation for both the artist and the object.

Curatorial strategies at PEM aim to provoke ‘transformative’ learning, an approach to learning in which emotion plays a large part. From PEM’s earlier displays through to current exhibitions, we can see efforts in place to attempt to engage visitors emotionally, on different levels. From including narratives that focus on peoples of the past in relation to art objects, to the provision of participatory activities throughout the museum, PEM’s focus is clear: to encourage visitors to connect personally and emotionally to what they see, and to think about how events of the past relate to the world today.

In order to curate exhibitions that consider not just a narrative, but also how a visitor might react, engage, or feel requires a very broad set of skills and a comprehensive interpretive plan that involves staff with a range of expertise. In the next section, we will examine PEM’s organisational structure, the key ‘players’ involved in producing exhibitions, the development of institution’s interpretive planning model and how these relate to the production of art knowledges.

6.4 Organisational Analysis

6.4.1 Overview and organisational structure

PEM was founded in 1992 after the merger of the Peabody Museum and the Essex Institute – the former a maritime museum and the latter a museum of early American history. Wishing to broaden its scope and remit, PEM began a process of establishing a new identity with a more global perspective. PEM’s director, Dan Monroe, set out to transform PEM into “a new kind of art museum” (Dobryzynski 2013: np) that turned local residents into repeat visitors. Monroe’s mission was to draw 65% of its visitor base from the local area and 35% from tourists, a reversal of what the museum had done previously. The museum moved away from focusing largely on history, and instead branded itself as a museum of art and culture. Monroe stated in an interview that these strategies were a response to trends in American cultural tourism at the time and a move towards building relationships with the community in order to develop a “support base” (ibid).

Over time, this mission led the institution to grow and develop, with several structural changes happening along the way. The focus of this analysis is on changes that have occurred since approximately 2011, when the post of Chief of Education

and Interpretation was created. A significant moment in PEM's recent organisational history, the appointment of the post signalled the beginning of a period of significant changes in how interpretation is produced at PEM. This post, unlike the previous Director of Education post, is part of the Executive Leadership Team – giving more power and agency to education and learning staff. The new post also incorporates 'interpretation' into the title, indicating a strong emphasis on both education and interpretive planning.

As in previous case study chapters, a visual representation of the organisational hierarchy helps to illustrate the structural positioning of the various team members involved in the production of interpretation. As a smaller organisation, PEM's structure is less complex than that of the Rijksmuseum and Tate with only one level (the Executive Leadership Team, or 'ELT', indicated here as all posts on the same level as Chief of Interpretation and Education) situated between the Director/CEO and interpretation specialists; the chart reproduced here only illustrates those staff who work within the Interpretation and Education Department. Within the department are posts dedicated to both education and the production of interpretation; the most recently created post at the time of data collection was that of 'Lead Interpretive Planner'.

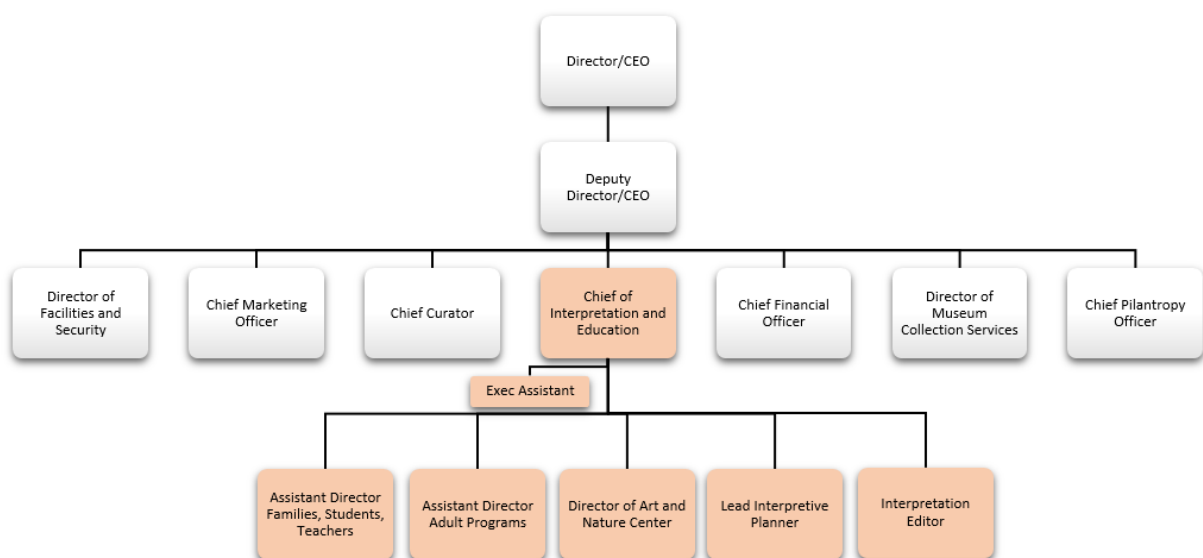


Figure 28 PEM's organisational structure as of October 2014, simplified (Source: PEM internal document 2014, with permission)

While the Interpretation Editor's role had been in place for some time, at the time of data collection the role of Lead Interpretive Planner had only been in existence for one year. The post holder, Emily Fry, stated in her interview that the primary purpose of this newly-created position was "to facilitate the interpretive planning process for the entire institution" (E. Fry, personal communication, 23 January 2015). The concept of 'interpretive planning' is described in the literature as more than just the process of planning exhibitions. Wells et al (2013) have focused on institution-wide interpretive plans that "describe strategic goals and desired outcomes for visitor experiences" (p. 20), thus turning the main focus of exhibition development away from the objects and towards the integration of "visitor perspectives". Wells et al discuss the importance of visitor studies and evaluation in this process, as well as the consideration of relevant learning theory in designing exhibitions and displays.

Exhibitions at PEM are developed by a 'core team' of staff that includes curators, interpretation specialists, evaluators and educators. In these collaborative working groups a broad range of knowledge and expertise are brought together that inform exhibition content and design: collections expertise, knowledge of learning theories, an understanding of PEM's audiences and technical design expertise. These complex teams are guided by the interpretive planner who functions as a boundary broker in the process, helping to coordinate and connect the team. This way of working has altered power dynamics within the organisation, giving more agency to educators, evaluators, designers and interpretation specialists in deciding on exhibition content. Exhibition production is a coordinated effort rather than a curator-led process.

In conjunction with developing a team-based approach to exhibition design (an approach that was, at the time of data collection, still in development) PEM has undergone a period of change in which the concept of interpretation was 'interrogated' and a shared vision of the future of the organisation was developed. In the next section, this process of developing a shared interpretive philosophy will be examined.

6.4.2 Developing a 'shared vision' of interpretation

In 2011, as the museum planned for further expansion and growth, it also sought to redevelop its corporate identity and institutional focus – a process that involved developing a 'shared vision' (Senge 1990). Through a long-term series of consultations and workshops with all members of staff, from front-of-house to director level, the concept of 'interpretation' was discussed, 'interrogated' and redefined. Much of this change was led by (then) Chief of Education and Interpretation Dr. Juliette Fritsch, whose level of expertise in both the theory and practice of interpretation spanned many years and countries. Fritsch's doctoral studies focused on the visitor experience; in 2008 she organised a conference on interpretation with experts in the field and later edited an academic book on interpretation (Fritsch (ed.) 2011). As discussed at length in an interview with Fritsch:

But the biggest thing is that we have been through this huge museum-wide thinking process about what interpretation is... What we did was launch this huge initiative which we have just come to the end of, which was about talking about all these issues and interrogating them with a huge section of staff in the museum – and not just the people who might typically be involved very directly with interpretation, but a much larger, wider group of people.

We had these big meetings where we talked about some kind of, you know, what might interpretation be. Then we asked everyone, we broke the big group up into small teams of 3 or 4 people and we asked them to go away and brainstorm completely – like no barriers – don't worry about cost, feasibility, whether or not it is physically possible, any of that and we just asked them to work on pitches for what 'would you do if you could do anything', 'what kind of exhibition would you do in the museum' and we specifically put people into very, very mixed groups so they were working with people who they didn't typically work with.

... it was really a thinking exercise in some way in tandem with internal culture shift that Dan Monroe has been very interested in which is related to the mission of the museum (J. Fritsch, personal communication, 21 January 2015).

This process reflects Senge's (2006) idea of the 'shared vision', a process of "unearthing shared 'pictures of the future' that foster genuine commitment and enrolment rather than compliance" (p. 9). A shared vision creates a common goal,

creates connection, promotes experimentation and is essential for an organisation to learn. Shared visions emerge from personal visions (ibid: 197), and success often comes from involving members of the organisation from all levels. Senge describes varying attitudes towards a vision: from apathy to enrolment to commitment; when a shared vision is built from personal visions, higher levels of commitment result.

Through PEM's development of a shared vision, the museum's 'interpretive philosophy' was developed, moving it away from a more traditional view of art museum interpretation as information or explanation, and towards a view that interpretation is a process, involves learning, is multisensory and involves the entire experience of visiting. In her interview, the Lead Interpretive Planner (Fry) explained her take on PEM's interpretive philosophy:

I think there is often a tendency to think about interpretation as a deliverable – as things such as labels, or interactives, or actual things – when PEM, and even how I, define interpretation is really about a fluid process that involves audience research, it involves collaboration with other people to facilitate how we are going to develop an audience experience and how we are going to invite meaning-making in the galleries (E. Fry, personal communication, 23 January 2015).

Fry's explanation of PEM's shared vision of interpretation as a 'fluid process' and one that involves audience research and collaboration suggests a process of organisational learning. A 'learning organisation' is defined as one in which "people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free and where people are continually learning how to learn together" (Senge 2006:3). Through processes of collaboration and of ongoing audience research, interpretation is continually re-invented, ideas emerge and connections are made. The resulting 'interpretive philosophy' as written for the public is described here:

Presentation and interpretation of outstanding contemporary and historical works of art and culture resides at the core of the museum's mission and methods. PEM presents and interprets works of art and culture in ways that connect art to the world in which it is made by creatively fusing art, culture, and history; connecting the past to the present by acquiring and exhibiting both contemporary and historical works; and encouraging people to discover and explore the rich interconnections among international artistic and

cultural expressions and traditions. As a people-centered museum, PEM's resources are dedicated to providing compelling and meaningful experiences to diverse audiences. PEM aims to make a lasting and positive difference in the lives of the public it serves (PEM 2016b).

PEM's interpretive philosophy emphasises an interdisciplinary approach, one which brings together a diverse collection and seeks to encourage visitors to discover its 'rich interconnections'. The overall audience experience is the result of a team effort, coordinated through a process of interpretive planning. In the section that follows, we will examine this process, how it influences exhibition content and what it means for the production of knowledge.

6.4.3 Exhibition planning teams and interpretive planning

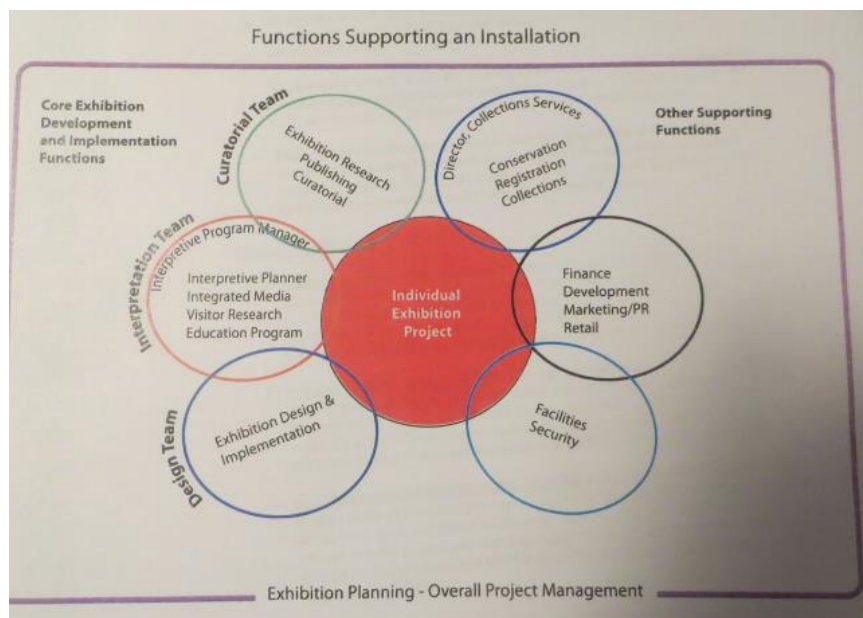


Figure 29 'Functions Supporting and Installation' diagram, PEM internal document 2015 (with permission)

The 'core project team' model used by PEM involves departments and individuals from across the organisation (fig. 29). On the left of the chart are the 'core team' members: the Curatorial Team, the Interpretation Team and the Design Team. Curatorial Team members focus on exhibition research, publishing and general curatorial tasks; the Interpretation Team includes an interpretive planner, an integrated media specialist, visitor researchers and educators. Finally, the Design Team consists of staff who design and implement the exhibition. Supporting these players are the 'supporting functions', which include most other departments in the museum.

For exhibitions initiated by PEM (as opposed to travelling exhibitions), an idea is proposed by a curator and the core project team is assembled shortly thereafter. While curators are responsible for proposing the subject matter and initial concept of an exhibition, it is through a series of core team meetings that the interpretive plan is collaboratively constructed. These interpretive planning meetings are headed by an 'interpretive liaison' who guides the team to think about concepts, audiences and exhibition design – focusing on the overall experience visitors will have. Fry explained:

So once that core team is assembled then we meet I would say, probably a series of three to four times, and within those meetings is when the interpretive liaison really takes the lead in steering what are the initial concepts of the show, and thinking about the audience, and whether there needs to be any audience research (E. Fry, personal communication, 23 January 2015).

As indicated by Fry's description of the initial phases of planning, the curator proposes initial exhibition concepts but the interpretive liaison directs the team to develop the key themes and design of the exhibition. While the initial concept is the basis for discussion, quite early in the process the core team is asked to incorporate audience research into the exhibition design. Fry's use of the phrase 'takes the lead in steering' suggests that interpretive liaisons have significant agency in guiding the team away from or towards particular goals and outcomes. The process culminates in an 'interpretation and design presentation', where the final plans for the exhibition are announced:

... all these series of meetings lead up to the interpretation and design presentation. So, that's a presentation that is led by an interpretive liaison and it is given to not only the core, the rest of the team but also a broader PEM staff. So they understand the interpretive approach with the story we're trying to tell, the experience we are trying to create – what that's like (ibid).

As illustrated in this excerpt, the initial curatorial concept is the basis for the exhibition project but is built upon, expanded and elaborated by the core team. The final exhibition plans are then negotiated through the interpretive liaison.

The 'core team' model was still under development at the time of data collection, and throughout interviews it was apparent that establishing a successful exhibition

planning system was a continual learning process for the organisation. Fry explained that her aim for future exhibitions was to use the series of planning meetings to focus more strategically on the 'audience experience' through various methodologies:

... it could be concept mapping, it could be emotional mapping, it could be doing a deep dive into audience personas, maybe there is some foreign audience research that is brought to the table and that's used as a discussion (ibid).

These methods all demonstrate an attempt at better understanding how audiences react to, make meaning from and learn from exhibitions and displays. The use of metaphors like 'doing a deep dive' and 'bringing to the table' suggest an institutional commitment to research and collaboration, but their shared use by other staff are also a feature of communities of practice (Wenger 1998).

Consideration of learning theory, audience research and 'experience design' have become important aspects of the interpretive planning process. While audiences have not yet played a significant role in determining the outcomes of an exhibition, Fry indicated in *Interpreting the Art Museum* that PEM hoped to involve them in future (Farnell 2015:221); in the meantime, staff drew upon both visitor studies and academic research to incorporate more thinking about the overall audience experience during the planning process.

The use of project teams connects individuals from different departments and with a range of knowledge and expertise. Working collaboratively brings these areas of expertise together, enabling the team to develop collective knowledge. As in the galleries, where the focus of interpretation is on facilitating connections, behind-the-scenes connections and collaboration are also the focus. We now turn to organisational theory to better understand the impact of multidisciplinary project teams on organisational knowledge creation.

6.4.4 Multidisciplinary project teams and 'knowledge creation'

Through the lens of organisational theory, a new exhibition can be viewed as a 'new product': "a package of features and benefits, each of which must be conceived, articulated, designed and 'operationalised', or brought into existence" (Dougherty

1996:425). In order to develop a new product, it is essential that new knowledge and perspectives are created (Fong 2003).

In organisational theory literature, organisations are seen as 'distributed knowledge systems' (Tsoukas 1996) composed of knowledge assets that, when managed well, give firms competitive advantage (Choo and Bontis, 2002). Un and Cuervo-Cazurra (2004) argue that new organisational knowledge is created through the interaction of individuals with diverse knowledge sets; knowledge is defined as shared beliefs constructed through social interactions (Berger and Luckmann 1966).

Exhibition teams at PEM are made up of members with diverse specialisms: the 'core' team is made up of members from curatorial, interpretation, visitor research, digital media, education, and exhibition design. Alongside these members of the team are supporting functions: for example, marketing, facilities management and finance. The unique knowledge and expertise of each member of the team come together, producing new combinations of insights that contribute to the content and design of an exhibition. Knowledge sharing in planning meetings was discussed in interviews; for example:

Well I think curators also... their ideas may not be thought of from the perspective of the visitor experience too... So you can tease out what that that idea might look like, or how the experience may feel. And using our toolkit of knowledge of audience research you can say that is something we should pursue or for these reasons it's probably not a good avenue to go down, and they are typically amenable because they don't have that knowledge base (E. Fry, personal communication, 23 January 2015).

Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) and Fong (2003) have examined how new knowledge is produced within multidisciplinary project teams. Nonaka and Takeuchi's 'SECI' model demonstrates how knowledge is shared and new knowledge created by the sharing of both tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge; tacit knowledge is shared through practice, dialogue and observation while explicit knowledge is shared via codified sources. Fong (2003) elaborates further on knowledge creation, emphasizing the processes of multidisciplinary knowledge creation.

By viewing exhibition production as a process of developing a new product, theories of organisational knowledge production provide insight into the way

multidisciplinary project teams contribute to the creation of new knowledges through display. Fong's five-step process in creating new knowledge begins with the crossing of boundaries, one of which he defines as team members of different disciplines. Utilising both boundary brokers (interpretive liaisons, in the case of PEM) and boundary objects (interpretive plans) serves as a pre-requisite to creating new knowledge. (Fong 2003).

Fong's second and third processes involve knowledge sharing among team members and the generation of new knowledge through discussion and interaction. In PEM's project teams, this could be seen in planning meetings, where educators and interpretation specialists shared their knowledge of learning theory to inform the development of an exhibition (fig. 30). This photo shows the notes left behind on a whiteboard from a meeting where education and interpretation staff were sharing their knowledge of Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory with curators and designers:



Figure 30 Whiteboard notes from meeting, with references to learning theory (Source: Author)

When explaining the purpose and nature of the meeting in which these notes were taken (as I was not in attendance), Fry clarified that it was for putting together the interpretive brief that would inform content of a future exhibition. Education specialists shared their knowledge of learning theory with curators and designers to

better design the visitor experience and to collaboratively establish the aims and objectives of the exhibition. The process of developing an exhibition involved staff from curatorial, interpretation and design teams (see fig 29, above).

The fourth and fifth processes outlined by Fong involve knowledge integration and collective project learning. Through knowledge sharing and generation, team members learn from one another, developing a broader range of expertise. For example, over time, curators have begun to focus more on audiences, as these interview excerpts illustrate:

... you know certain curators like to work in certain ways, but I feel that it is really important within this beginning part, with having this team-based atmosphere to have everyone think about the experience, the audience experience from the audience perspective. (E. Fry, personal communication, 23 January 2015)

And so with something like the Present Tense Initiative [PEM's contemporary art programme]... if the museum is serious about connecting past and present, we need to be able to kind of deal with subjects of pressing concern to our communities. (T. Smith, personal communication, 29 January 2015)

The collaborative and multidisciplinary model of exhibition production at PEM involves a wide range of staff with diverse expertise. Working together to develop exhibitions involves crossing disciplinary boundaries, sharing knowledge, and generating new knowledge. Team members learn from these processes, integrating what they've learned from each other into future 'product' (i.e. exhibition) development. Serving as a boundary object that brings together diverse knowledge, the interpretive plan is a key part of this process. Section 6.4.5 will present a brief analysis of the interpretive plan produced for *In Plain Sight*.

6.4.5 The interpretation brief: combining knowledges

The 'Interpretation Brief' for *In Plain Sight: Discovering the Furniture of Nathaniel Gould* offers a glimpse into the ways in which knowledges are combined to produce exhibitions. The document begins by summarising the key messages of the exhibition, as decided through the process of planning meetings. The key messages were:

1. New discoveries can revolutionize the understanding of past artists
2. As the result of such a discovery, Nathaniel Gould is now recognized as one of America's outstanding 18th century furniture makers.
3. The discoveries reveal the formerly hidden world of an 18th century craftsman: his clients, materials, design approaches, role in elite society, and remarkable artisanship.

(PEM 'Interpretation Brief', 2014a)

Each key message relates to the 'thematic structure' present in the exhibition; each of the three sections were planned to 'support' various combinations of the key messages above. The Interpretive Brief also laid out who the exhibition's target audiences would be, and summarised the team's vision for the 'Visitor Experience'. Some excerpts from this section are as follows:

Visitors should feel enchanted and intrigued, brought along on an exciting journey of discovery into a past world.

The pace should be compact and intense... [spending] a third of [their] time in looking at objects or engaging in interactives rather than reading text.

Visitors should be... thinking about craftsmanship and creation and its role in making the things around us.

(ibid: 2)

In using words like 'enchanted' and 'intrigued', these phrases indicate a desire to create an immersive experience that will fully capture the attention of the visitor. As mentioned earlier (in reference to fig 30), the consideration of different learning styles in the planning process combines different areas of professional expertise: an understanding of how visitors learn with knowledge of the collection. Considering the pace of a visit (listed here as 'compact and intense') illustrates a consideration of not just what is said through interpretation, but how it is presented, how the exhibition is laid out, potential routes through the space and the amount of information made available. Further sections in the document focus on key content and design of the show. Within the 'Key Content' section, both the terminology to be used is outlined and the 'contextual frameworks' that visitors would need to engage with are provided. These are described as:

- 18th century Salem – a town with rich people, an international port city
- Social and gender roles of the time
- Class structures – elite, merchants, artisans, emerging middle class, workers
- Historical research – how does it work, what is the process by which new facts are revealed

(PEM 2014a:3)

The interpretive brief serves as an essential element of new knowledge production. Referring back to Fong's five-step process, we can see how the interpretive brief (and the contributions made by interpretive liaisons) fulfil the first step of the process, bringing together curatorial knowledge, knowledge of audiences and knowledge of learning theories and the role of emotions in this process. The interpretive brief also draws in the designers of both digital media and of the physical elements of display into the process. From here, the many project team meetings that are part of the exhibition development process provide fertile ground for knowledge sharing and collective learning. The interpretive brief and actions of the interpretive liaison help staff to cross disciplinary boundaries, generate new ideas and produce new knowledge of art.

It is through this collaborative working process, through the boundary-brokering activities of the interpretation staff and the function of the interpretive plan as boundary object that the many perspectives on Gould's ledgers connect into a cohesive exhibition. Recalling Benjamin's concept of the constellation (in Bishop 2013), history is told in new ways that combine disciplines and disrupt traditional taxonomies – elements of which come together via the collaborative processes of production.

6.5 Summary: Transformation and Connection at PEM

PEM's organisational structure and its approach to the production of exhibitions involve a high level of collaboration among team members with differing areas of expertise. From the earliest stages of exhibition production, curators, educators, interpretive planners, designers and other staff are involved in concept development. While initial ideas are most often proposed by curators, soon

afterwards these ideas are built upon, transformed and altered by the input of staff with differing perspectives.

Nonaka and Takeuchi's (1995) and Fong's (2003) theories of organisational knowledge creation offer some insight into the way disciplinary expertise is combined and transformed through this highly collaborative approach to the production of exhibitions. Both interviewees and institutional documents illustrate the way in which many perspectives are brought together in the process. The result are exhibitions and displays which do not simply communicate a curatorial agenda, but instead take into account how exhibitions might be experienced by audiences, and perhaps, how audiences wish to experience history.

Within older displays at PEM, earlier attempts at compressing time and contextualising objects can be seen. Through initiatives that saw the placement of contemporary works alongside historical objects, a disruption of traditional chronological or disciplinary approaches to display was evident. In more recent exhibitions, such as *In Plain Sight*, PEM went further by showcasing historical furniture within a modern context, giving a sense that history is not so distant – that all around us, the past is alive, and not 'foreign' at all.

Lowenthal (2015), in *The Past is a Foreign Country: Revisited*, states that for historians, the past grows ever more foreign – “but the public at large cannot tolerate an alien past and strenuously domesticates it, imputing present-day aims and deeds to earlier times” (p. 595). The past moves forward, the present moves back, and “rather than a foreign country, the past becomes our sanitized own” (ibid). Utilizing a project team approach enables museums to include the expertise of staff who understand visitors; they in turn create links between the interests and needs of visitors with historical events and art objects of the past. It could be argued that this approach ‘transforms’ how visitors view history by merging the past and present; alternatively, one could argue that this approach actually presents the ‘here-and-now’. As Benjamin (1940) noted:

The historian who proceeds from this consideration ceases to tell the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary. He grasps the constellation into which his own era has entered, along with a very specific earlier one.

Thus, he establishes a conception of the present as now-time shot through with splinters of messianic time (Benjamin and Arendt 1968:263).

While Benjamin's writings are unlikely to be the basis of PEM's interpretive philosophy, his writings provide a good illustration of the institution's approach to enabling engagements with the past. The way in which historical and contemporary objects are juxtaposed reflects Benjamin's concept of the constellation, aiming neither to recreate the past nor to present a chronology that indicates historical progress. Instead, PEM's interpretive philosophy seeks to illustrate the intersections between the past and the present, creating less temporal distance between the visitor and the collections.

While the knowledges produced at PEM are largely a result of a collaborative working practices, there are more complex factors at play that have contributed to the museum's approach. The museum's geographical, historical and economic contexts have all influenced its development. PEM's location outside of a major city has encouraged development of a strategy for increasing engagement with local communities, while at the same time developing innovative ways to attract 'out-of-town' audiences. Its eclectic collections have, over time, inspired a creative approach to display. Economically, PEM's funding structure – reliant largely on fundraising efforts and entry fees – has encouraged museum staff to think critically about how to create a unique 'experience' for visitors that attracts both new and repeat customers. This combination of contextual factors, a deliberate and extensive process of organisational change, and an institutional mission to unite its collections has resulted in the formation of a new 'constellation' of art historical knowledges.

Chapter Seven

Interpretation and Interpretive Practices: Convergence, Divergence and Contention

7.1 Introduction

This study set out to understand what factors have influenced a change in the way contemporary museums of art produce interpretation, to investigate the processes of production of interpretation in selected institutions and to better understand how structural changes relate to changes in the production of knowledge. The previous three chapters have explored the relationship between organisational structures and the production of interpretation in three distinct and geographically distant institutions and have uncovered several common themes: boundaries and the role of boundary brokers (Chapter 4), power, agency and the function of chronology as a display mechanism (Chapter 5) and project teams, collaborative working practices and temporal distance (Chapter 6). This chapter investigates the connections and disconnects among the findings, drawing together the three case studies and multiple themes in order to expand upon, critique and add to existing research in both museum and organisational studies.

Bringing together the themes from the preceding three chapters, this chapter will argue that knowledge produced in museums is influenced: 1.) by structural factors such as the configuration of staff, 2.) by the introduction of new and powerful agents to the organisational structure and 3.) by the processes through which exhibitions are brought to life. As evidenced in the preceding chapters, I will also argue that the position of interpretation specialists affects the process of knowledge construction. Interpretation specialists can connect, join, and build relationships between staff members, disciplines, artworks, the institution and visitors while the products of interpretation can demonstrate the merging of disciplines, the broadening of perspectives and the pushing of epistemological boundaries. Conversely, the position of interpretation specialists and the products they produce can also limit understandings of art, close down perspectives and disrupt knowledge flows.

This chapter will examine these dynamics through the lenses of three broad ideas: *convergence*, *divergence* and *contention*. In section 7.2, the chapter will examine the theme of convergence, examining how interpretive practices act as a unifying agent during the processes of knowledge construction. Section 7.3 discusses the concepts of divergence and contention, examining the ways in which interpretive practice can stand in the way of knowledge production and disrupt or limit understandings. This section also frames some of the challenges, tensions and difficulties faced by case study institutions in the production of interpretation.

Section 7.4 then draws together the preceding sections, using evidence of organisational processes to inform an analysis of the products of interpretation found in each case study institution. Taking paradigmatic examples of interpretive practice from each case study to highlight key differences, this section will argue that the processes of interpretation production and the 'structuring structures' of organisations clearly affect the embodied theories represented through exhibitions and displays. I will look in more detail at particular examples of practice: the Inzoomer information cards at the Rijksmuseum, an 18th century cabinetmaker's workshop at PEM and the chronological circuit at Tate Britain. Each 'case study within a case study' exemplifies how convergent, divergent and contentious approaches to the production of interpretation have an effect on exhibition narratives. Overall, the chapter will draw together the many issues and themes that emerged from the research, using them as a springboard for discussing the ways in which the dynamics of 'behind-the-scenes' organisational structure and culture connect with and have an influence on what is presented to audiences.

7.2 Convergence: Processes and Connection

'Convergence' describes a coming together of entities, or movement toward the same point. It is a word used in evolutionary biology to describe how diverse animals or plants begin to take on similar traits as they adapt to similar environments, while in geometry, it describes lines that become closer until they eventually meet at a common point. In each of the case studies we have discussed thus far, the term 'convergence' captures some of the institutional dynamics at play in the production of interpretation and the construction of knowledge. Whether

bringing together visitors and curatorial knowledge, or connecting staff with diverse professional expertise, interpretation specialists and the act of producing interpretation involves facilitating connections and encouraging convergence.

The knowledge that the curators have – the Rijksmuseum being an institute of knowledge, producing knowledge – knowledge is produced by our curators, scientists for a part. I translate this knowledge for the public. In all kinds of ways (P. Kintz, Rijksmuseum, personal communication, 23 June 2015).

Interpretation is one of those roles, that, very much like being an administrator, that you're building relationships... you're being a medium between people. Because, there's nothing, nothing, we produce in isolation (S. McGuire, Tate Britain, personal communication, 18 March 2015).

I think we were sort of intermediaries sometimes (R.Meijer, Rijksmuseum, personal communication, 02 July 2015).

We are the audience advocates at the table (E. Fry, PEM, personal communication, 23 January 2015).

We have to be a conduit for all of these departments (S. McGuire, Tate Britain, personal communication, 18 March 2015).

Despite their geographical distance from each other and the varied contexts in which they work, the interpretation specialists quoted above all had a common belief that their role in the organisation facilitated connections. They believed that they helped create connections between staff members and departments, between museum visitors and the institution, and between areas of knowledge and expertise. They also had a common belief that interpretation (as a product) facilitates connections with, and an understanding of, art.

So, how does interpretation *connect*? Whether referring to the role of interpretation in the institution, the act of interpreting or the products of interpretation produced by an institution, interpretation brings people, ideas, groups, and communities of practice together in many ways. This section will examine how organisational practices and interpretation specialists contribute to the convergence of knowledges and ideas within museums of art. Section 7.2.1 will examine the 'boundary brokering' role of interpretation specialists and section 7.2.2 will look more closely at the role of organisational boundary objects (Star & Griesemer 1989; Carlile 1997,

2002) such as interpretive plans and timelines. Section 7.2.3 will investigate boundary practices and the way in which the configuration of staff affects knowledge production. Overall, this section explores the ways in which knowledges converge through the production process, informing later discussion on how new knowledges are manifested through exhibitions and displays.

7.2.1 Boundary roles, bridges, and connecting aims and objectives

In all case studies, several themes emerged that relate to the act of connecting, the act of bringing different areas of expertise together, and to building links and partnerships across the institution. Interpretation, as a role in the organisation, was described as a 'bridge' between departments, functioning as a way of transferring knowledge across boundaries, facilitating communication, and helping to encourage the flow of information among actors and groups of actors. This was the focus of Chapter 5, yet this theme was significant among all three case studies.

Within all three institutions, there were designated interpretation-specific roles situated within the organisational structure. Job titles and the overall remit of these roles varied: at the Rijksmuseum (Chapter 5), interpretation specialists were given the generic title of 'Education Officers' and a major focus of their job was on ensuring textual interpretation met both educational and curatorial aims. They also served as editors, translators of curatorial information and coordinators who provided crucial assistance in bringing together curatorial departments of art, history and decorative arts in the redevelopment of the museum. At Tate Britain (Chapter 6), 'Interpretation Curators' served in a large part as project managers and 'conduits' for communication between different departments. They also felt that they had a significant editorial role, but also authored elements of exhibitions. At PEM (Chapter 7), 'Interpretive Liaisons' also facilitated communication among departments in order to connect educational and curatorial aims. Their role was not editorial *per se* – a separate 'Interpretation Editor' was employed to check text – instead, they focused more on ensuring all members of an exhibition project team were working together effectively.

Based on the findings, interpretation specialists could be described as ‘boundary brokers’ (Wenger 2010) or ‘knowledge brokers’ (Pawlowski and Rober 2004; Meyer 2010) because of the way they help circulate knowledge among departments. At the Rijksmuseum, interpretation specialists used the process of producing the Inzoomers to bring (previously separate) knowledges into relation with each other. The production of text labels also involved brokering by interpretation specialists, a complex and lengthy process involving up to 7 different departments. At Tate, Interpretation Curators brokered relationships between departments involved in producing exhibitions – namely between curatorial, learning, and design teams. Interpretation Curators facilitated communication, helped coordinate timescales and deadlines and saw themselves as ‘conduits’ in the exhibition production process. At PEM, Interpretive Liaisons used interpretive plans to support their boundary brokering role.

As explored in Chapter 2, the concept of ‘boundary brokering’ has been examined in both the social sciences and in organisational studies. From a social science perspective, Wenger (2010) discusses the way boundary brokers can introduce elements of one community of practice into another. If we look at the case studies from this perspective, it can be argued that communities of curators or communities of educators could be considered communities of practice, and interpretation specialists can be viewed as the boundary brokers that help these worlds to converge. From an organisational studies perspective, Ancona and Caldwell (1992) and Brown and Duguid (1998) argue that knowledge exchange in an organisation is important for its success and that boundaries are an obstacle to growth. In their role as boundary brokers, the interpretation specialists in all three case studies significantly contributed to knowledge exchange between groups, helping to break down boundaries and helping their organisations to progress.

Boundary brokering roles, while valuable, are also roles which are often overlooked. Wenger (2010) argues that boundary brokers occupy a type of marginalised space within organisations, and because they operate at the boundaries of practice, their contributions often go unnoticed. This was seen very clearly at the Rijksmuseum – interpretation specialists there have been grouped into the homogenous title of

'education officer', illustrating a type of invisibility, a lumping together of their role with that of all members of the education department. In comparison to the other two case studies, where interpretation specialists were identified as distinct from curators and educators, at the Rijksmuseum there was no such separation. The significant facilitation, mediation, negotiation and translating roles taken on by Rijksmuseum interpretation specialists played a very important part in the outcomes of the new permanent exhibition. They were key in moving knowledge between departments; yet, the value of this essential connective function appeared to be undervalued in the organisation.

While structurally situated under the umbrella of the learning department, Tate's Interpretation Curators worked independently as part of their own small, largely self-managed team. They described themselves as 'conduits', helping to circulate and coordinate information and knowledge among curators and other staff involved in the development of exhibitions. Much of my interviewees' responses focused on the coordinating aspects of the role and how, in addition to creating and editing interpretive texts and managing the production of visual and digital interpretation, these staff members served as a 'point of contact' for the many individuals and departments involved in producing exhibitions in a large institution. This interview excerpt encapsulates this idea:

McGuire: ...we're a huge team – other art institutions are aghast at the size of our Learning Team. We are like, six times bigger than the biggest Learning Teams in other arts institutions – it's crazy. And I do wonder if part of having a curator for interpretation is for that very reason.

Interviewer: To bring all those voices together... like you are the bridge, the bridge between lots of different voices?

McGuire: I definitely think that is what we do now, yes. Absolutely. And it is about being a... I can't think of the word... it's linking - but really disparate groups at times – there's the Tate Style publication is written for, I think, web teams. People who write the Tate Guide. They adhere to it in a way, much more closely than we do. What we write is also feeding into what they write and what they write is coming back to us. A press release will get written before interpretation for a text is written, for an exhibition. So there is this

really interesting role and they're doing something totally different to the work we're doing. But we have to be, I guess we have to be a conduit for all of these departments (S. McGuire, personal communication, 18 March 2015).

These comments illustrate both the role of the broker (the Interpretation Curator) and the role of the boundary object (the documents that facilitate communication, to be examined more in section 7.2.2). McGuire's description of the team's role as a 'conduit' shows how they feel they play an essential part in improving communication between 'disparate groups'. Ancona and Caldwell (1992) argue that better team performance is achieved when individuals cross the boundaries of organisational groups, and knowledge is more effectively diffused and utilised. The existence and function of an interpretation team that facilitates communication between groups contributes significantly to knowledge sharing. In McGuire's anecdote, we can see how this happened between web designers and interpretation curators and how it affected the writing produced by both parties, but this could be applied to communication between any groups in the organisation.

At PEM, the title of 'Interpretive Liaison' was coined to identify members of staff from a range of departments who took it in turns to help coordinate the interpretive plans and content for upcoming exhibitions. While their boundary brokering roles were temporary, their work was acknowledged during the time they worked in this capacity. Through the act of 'liaising', these staff contributed to the movement of ideas and knowledge throughout the exhibition teams and the organisation as a whole. Fry described the interpretive liaisons as "the audience advocates at the table", suggesting that she felt their role spanned the boundary between institution and the public and brought the knowledge gained from working with audiences into the planning process. Interpretive liaisons were viewed by Fry as boundary spanners who act as links between the museum and its environment (Leifer and Delbecq 1978; Cross and Prusak 2002) and act as audience representatives.

In summary, this section has highlighted the boundary brokering role of interpretation specialists interviewed for this study. These staff members helped facilitate communication among groups, helped move knowledge across organisational boundaries, and brought ideas and knowledges together through

professional social interactions. In section 7.2.2, we will move on to examine some of the management tools used to support their roles. In doing so, we will begin to see more clearly how interpretation specialists contribute to the production of new knowledge.

7.2.2 Organisational boundary objects: interpretive plans, timelines, and other project management tools

In each of the three case studies, a key aspect of the interpretation specialist's role involved producing documents that served as organisational 'boundary objects' (Wenger 1998, 2000). These documents, ranging from interpretive plans to exhibition timelines, served as a point of connection for all staff involved in the production of an exhibition or permanent display. At PEM, 'interpretive briefs' were used, and at Tate Britain a variety of scheduling documents, timetables and the 'Tate Style Guide' were key coordination tools. At the Rijksmuseum, the text production document ('tekstproductie') was one example of a boundary object. This flowchart (appendix one) illustrates the countless steps of the process and was a point of reference for the individuals who took part in producing text labels.

The 'interpretive brief' at PEM was a key document that included the aims and objectives of an exhibition. The interpretive brief connected the thematic structure and content of exhibitions with wider educational aims, asking exhibition teams to consider not only the key messages and format of an exhibition, but to also think carefully about the exhibition from a visitor's perspective. Interpretive briefs included sections that helped team members formulate the key messages of an exhibition. In one such interpretive brief (appendix two), used for planning *In Plain Sight: Discovering the Furniture of Nathaniel Gould*, headings included:

- Key messages
- Thematic structure
- Target audiences
- Visitor experience
- Key content (objects)

- Design elements
- 'Interpretive opportunities'

Combining these separate elements of production into one document allowed team members to unify and centralise the work of multiple departments, creating what was described as a 'touchstone':

We have... a kind of constant reminder... the role of interpretive liaison is... using the interpretation brief as a touchstone and also as a working document too. In that things can totally change but there are some keys things on it that are really useful for us to keep referring to so we can help make informed decisions. That's the idea, but then a lot of people don't read it or they don't, I mean, I find it very important but others don't... but I think if we didn't have it there... if we didn't have that process, it would be kind of a free-for-all (E. Fry, personal communication, 23 January 2015).

The interpretive brief functioned as an organisational 'boundary object' (Star 1989, Carlile 1997). A boundary object, as discussed in Chapter 2, is defined as an object that is shared and shareable across different problem-solving contexts (Carlile 2002). Carlile (*ibid*) presents characteristics of effective boundary objects: they establish a shared syntax or language for individuals to represent their knowledge, they provide a concrete means for individuals to learn about their differences across a boundary, and they facilitate a process where individuals can jointly transform their knowledge. The interpretive brief document used at PEM meets all three of these criteria, and serves both practical and political purposes, as described by Carlile (*ibid*). As a practical document, the interpretive brief helps different individuals, departments and teams communicate across boundaries; it serves a political purpose by helping to facilitate a process of transforming current knowledge so that new knowledge can be created. In this case, the interpretive brief helped transform embedded practices of interpretation into newer, more innovative and more active, engaging practices.

The schedules and timelines produced by interpretation curators at Tate Britain (appendix three) also served as organisational boundary objects, helping to join together the work of curators with that of designers and the interpretation team.

The documents produced by interpretation curators not only aided in their production of text, but it served as a coordinating tool for all staff involved in the exhibition production process. In interviews at Tate Britain, it quickly became apparent that a significant role of the interpretation team was to be a 'conduit' between departments, encouraging information flows across the organisation and aiding in an efficient production process. While curators looked after 'intellectual content', interpretation curators ensured that this content was communicated effectively through clear text, interpretive materials, and through elements created by the Design Studio. Interpretation curators also procured and curated additional content to supplement exhibition messages. Generally speaking, interpretation curators collated, organised and managed exhibition content – except when this process was disrupted in the production of the *Walk through British Art*.

The Tekstproductie flowchart produced by Rijksmuseum interpretation specialists (appendix one) was a key tool used to coordinate staff in the production of text labels. This example of an organisational boundary object illustrates the lengthy process of producing labels for the new displays and was used by staff from across the organisation to regulate the process of production. Because of the vast number of labels that needed to be produced, and the large number of departments that were involved, the flowchart formalised who was responsible for what tasks along the way. Rijksmuseum interpretation specialists used the document as a coordination tool.

So far, we have looked at the brokering role and job responsibilities of interpretation specialists, and some of the documents they use to coordinate the work of different departments. We have seen that they are a central point of connection and communication in the institution, and they use organisational boundary objects to support the flow of knowledge between individuals and groups. Next, we will look at the concepts of 'boundary projects' and 'boundary practices' and relate this to knowledge production in each case study institution.

7.2.3 Boundary projects and boundary practices: structuring of project teams, configuration of staff

Organisational boundary objects were a key element of project work across all three case studies. With the assistance of boundary objects, team members from different disciplines or departments were able to more effectively communicate and combine their knowledge. In each of the examined cases, data revealed the existence of 'boundary practices', where "a boundary requires so much sustained work that it becomes the topic of a practice of its own" (Wenger 2010:129). These practices brought together many disciplines, departments, perspectives and communities of practice. PEM's 'shared vision' process, in which staff members from across the organisation were asked to participate in developing a vision for the museum, illustrated a boundary practice that aimed to overcome organisational divisions and to share knowledge among all areas of the organisation.

This process could also be described as a 'boundary project' (ibid: 130) in that it brought together members of different communities of practice within the organisation and more:

... participating in these kinds of projects exposes practitioners to others in the context of specific tasks that go beyond the purview of any practice. People confront problems that are outside the realm of their competence but that force them to negotiate their own competence with the competences of others (ibid).

The Rijksmuseum's change from discipline-based work teams to working in multidisciplinary project teams and Tate's move towards the formation of 'period teams' can both also be defined as boundary projects. The formation of multidisciplinary project teams allowed boundaries to continually be crossed – and new knowledge to be formed. Fong (2003) states that the collaborative nature of multidisciplinary project teams is essential in creating new knowledge – something that could be observed across case studies.

All of the examples of practice described here (PEM's 'shared vision' process and the project team approaches taken at the Rijksmuseum and Tate) centred on the structuring of staff and an attempt at moving away from a more traditional 'top-down' model. In a 'top-down' hierarchical model, curators or senior members of

staff make the majority of decisions: curators decide on content, layout and interpretation, then hand it down to other staff for the addition of educational resources, checking of text for readability and other tasks. This model retains the boundary between communities of curators and of educators, limiting the transfer of ideas between the two groups. At PEM, a much flatter model was used in which departments worked on exhibition content together from an early stage. At the Rijksmuseum, power and agency of education and interpretation specialists had begun to increase, though a top-down model was still very much in place. At Tate, the titling of educators and interpretation specialists as ‘curators’ and their significant role in the exhibition production process suggested a more equal structure – until the production of the timeline in the WTBA, when the process reverted to a hierarchical model once again. In all three institutions, negotiations of power and agency were ongoing, and boundaries continually being pushed.

While each of the case study museums had a different degree of change, each institution adopted an approach that involved more collaboration and more boundary crossing than before. If we look at the model adopted by PEM, for example, we can see that decision-making power was distributed more evenly through the organisation than at the Rijksmuseum or at Tate Britain, and disciplinary boundaries were more blurred. The ‘shared vision’ process involved the development of organisational aims and objectives with the input of diverse groups from all levels of the organisational structure. Incorporating the ideas of staff from varied backgrounds and with different levels of expertise acted as a boundary bridging exercise. This boundary practice transformed the knowledge of many of those involved - through the interaction of curators, educators, interpretation specialists, designers, front-of-house staff and others, participants all temporarily crossed a boundary to learn about others’ practices. They then returned to their area of practice, taking their learning with them. This was highlighted in Fritsch’s initial interview, in discussing the ‘shared vision’ process:

The whole process took ages and by the end of it there were some people who were like, “oh thanks very much, I’m done, that was enjoyable and I’ll go back to my normal job now”. But other people were like “if we ever decide to do this idea from my team, can I be a part of it?”, even though normally they would not normally work on that kind of project. So that was really

instrumental in making people kind of ‘interpretation-aware’ around the museum, and now we have these healthy debates (J. Fritsch, personal communication, 21 January 2015).

The sustained effort of connecting curatorial and educational aims that sprung from this activity became a long-term boundary project. The ongoing, continued processes of collaborative working at PEM included the involvement of interpretive liaisons in the production of exhibitions, taking them out of their day-to-day roles to work as facilitators and interpretive planners. This approach enabled repeated boundary encounters, continual learning across boundaries, and the exchange of knowledge across disciplines. Over a period of time, this contributed to the breaking down of disciplinary boundaries and the merging of curatorial and educational aims.

At Tate Britain, boundary practices that combined curatorial and interpretive expertise had begun many years prior, when interpretation had begun to work as part of exhibition teams. In an interview, Curator Martin Myrone explained:

When it came to forming an exhibition team for a project, to deliver an exhibition project, separately from displays – there was the expectation, which I think was novel, that an interpreter, one of the interpretation would be part of the project team. More or less from the outset and contribute to the planning of an interpretation strategy. And that interpretation strategy would be developed as a document with the curator (M. Myrone, personal communication, 22 April 2015).

The reconfiguration of curators into ‘period teams’ during the planning of the *Walk through British Art* was another example of a boundary practice that enabled different areas of knowledge to come together and interact in new ways.

At the Rijksmuseum, period teams included curators from specific disciplines as well as interpretation specialists. Here, the aims of art curators and history curators began to merge with those of the education department. The director had a large role to play in facilitating boundary practices, based on a desire for the entire institution to shift its priorities. Pauline Kintz, Education Officer, stated:

Wim Pjibes is somebody that is really saying, telling and acting for a part: ‘We are here for everybody. For the public. The public is our focus’. Not the works of art, but the public. That’s in theory, but I’m not sure that that’s practised. But that focus, even if it doesn’t work out in every corner in that way, the

focus is different. And the focus means that we, that it's easier for our department to communicate with the curators, with the board of directors. We have the same focus (P. Kintz, personal communication, 23 June 2015).

Ultimately the structural make up of teams in each institution allowed for the reconfiguration of a traditional, hierarchical, 'curator-led' model of exhibition production. This transformed working practices into a less hierarchical, more collaborative model. Through boundary practices and projects, teams combined expertise and knowledge to produce exhibitions that met a wide range of aims. All three museums, to varying degrees, demonstrated convergent approaches to the production of interpretation. We will return to the ways in which these factors affected the production of knowledge in the final section of this chapter.

7.3 Divergence and Contention: Processes and Disconnection

In contrast to the discussion set out in section 7.2, this section will examine the ways in which interpretation and interpretive practices acted as a 'diverging agent' within the three institutions studied in this thesis. We will also see how interpretation can be a contentious area of conflict, debate and disagreement. While interpretation and practices related to it can bring ideas and individuals together, at the same time they can cause them to move apart and separate. Interpretation specialists can be viewed as a filter or even a barrier, altering or blocking the flow of information across the organisation. Interpretive resources, such as text panels or multimedia devices, can be thought of as an interruption, limitation or diversion during the experience of viewing an object.

The processes of producing interpretation can also result in disagreement and conflict in organisations. This affected both knowledge production and the outcomes of exhibitions and displays. In some cases, the production of exhibitions and interpretation became contentious, resulting in power struggles that altered social dynamics, changed exhibition narratives and diverted the embodied theories within displays.

7.3.1 Interpretation as a diverging agent

The first area this section examines is the idea that products of interpretation (for example, text labels) ‘stand in the way’ of an artwork, interrupting the viewer’s experience and altering the visitor’s construction of its meaning. This sentiment was expressed primarily by curators. The most vocal opinion was expressed by Curtis, in discussions about the nature of textual interpretation in galleries. She stated, “people don’t come to love art by reading, they come to love art by looking” (P. Curtis, personal communication, 17 March 2015). This strong statement of personal conviction transferred into the design of the *Walk through British Art*.

Curtis expressed the view that interpretation detracts and diverts attention from the artwork, particularly in permanent collections displays. The decision to remove much of the textual interpretation from the permanent collections displays at Tate Britain was based on her aims: “My aims were to make it more enjoyable. And easier. I didn’t want people to feel that they had to know something before they could look at it” (ibid). In this respect, the interpretive texts were seen as a barrier as well as something that separated the visitor from the objects.

A similar idea was expressed by Smith about his work at PEM. In his interview, Smith said that interpretation can ‘close down’ an artwork, preventing the viewer from reaching her own conclusions. Interpretive resources, while intended to help visitors navigate a work or understand it more, could sometimes do the opposite – they could limit a viewer’s understanding, disconnect them from the work or even alienate them. Both Curtis and Smith expressed viewpoints found in the debates around art interpretation explored in Chapter 2, echoing the sentiments of Eco (1989), Serota (1996), Cuno (2004) and Carrier (2009). These theories focus on the experience of viewing art free from interference, but assume that the viewer has prior knowledge.

Interpretation was also discussed as something that interferes with ‘curatorial voice’. Myrone, for example, had a fairly set view that ‘interpretation’ happened in exhibitions but not in permanent displays. In his view, exhibitions are the stage where curatorial acts are to be set – presenting an argument or stating a thesis, for

example. Products of interpretation created by interpretation specialists thus had the potential of interfering with the authorial acts carried out by curators.

Interpretation specialists were also seen by some curators as types of 'diverging agents'. They were viewed as filters or 'police', checking curatorial material and approving or not approving it. As stated by Myrone:

The base level role for the interpreter in the museum is as a check. As a police man, police officer. And as a testing ground. Where you, curators, are guided and supported and also limited in what you can say and not say (M. Myrone, personal communication, 22 April 2015).

The role of the interpretation specialist can be seen not as a connector of ideas and individuals, or as a bridge across boundaries, but rather as a force that limits, alters or filters information and increases the divide between actors in the institution. Interpretation specialists can be seen to stand in the way, to deflect controversial or inflammatory messages communicated by curators and as a barrier to the flow of information in the organisation. Haas (2015) points out that boundary brokers "are sometimes presented in a negative light due to their unique position that allows them to control information flows" (p.1038). Both interpretation staff and the products of interpretation that they create have a filtering role, a role which can be accepted or contested.

In their discussion on the role of the political interplay between boundary objects and brokers, Kimble et al. (2010) state the following:

Innovation in groups depends on information and knowledge gained by crossing boundaries between communities of actors. This is a difficult and complex process because, for it to be successful, the actors from the different communities must first reach a shared understanding about what they are trying to do and how it might be achieved (p. 443).

Applying this to the process of production of exhibitions, it can be argued that the interpretation specialist's role as broker is more likely to be accepted when the aims and objectives of the project or the overall mission of the team are agreed ahead of time.

7.3.2 Power struggles, agency, contention

Stories of power struggles and disagreements were common among interviewees. PEM staff described the museum as an organisation that focused much of its efforts on collaboration and teamwork, with the integration of many departments into the early phases of exhibition production. However, while less conflict appeared to occur here than at Tate Britain and the Rijksmuseum, debates, struggles and negotiation were still an aspect of the process of producing an exhibition. Conflict at PEM, where identified, revolved around the relationships with outside stakeholders. As stated by the Project Coordinator, “There are a lot of outside stakeholders that still play prominent roles in the shaping of these (exhibition) experiences, even though we might want to approach them differently... there are external factors that are still constraining” (personal communication, 30 January 2015). Without revealing much detail, this quote suggested the existence of conflict at PEM that revolved around the desires of financial benefactors, leading the organisation towards decision-making that appeased funders. It is difficult to come to a definitive conclusion here, as the interview data only hinted at these conflicts – but concerns with meeting the expectations and demands of funders was a theme that emerged in all three case studies.

Other than this mention of meeting stakeholder demands, there was little to suggest heated conflicts within PEM. Interviewees discussed the institution in a very diplomatic way, describing the relationship between the Chief Curator and the Chief of Education and Interpretation as ‘close’ and ‘without tension’. This could reveal a true picture of the nature of the organisational culture at PEM, but it could also be a reflection of the position of the interviewees within the organisational structure – all staff interviewed were deemed to have a good relationship with the Chief of Education and Interpretation. The results may have varied if other staff had been interviewed – for example, front-of-house staff or other curators. Disagreements about the content of exhibitions were not mentioned, other than to suggest that they are not tolerated: “if I ever come up against someone unwilling to consider something regarding the audience experience, that’s just not... Linda (Chief Curator) would not approve... she would not let that happen” (E. Fry, personal communication, 23 January 2015).

While it is difficult to pinpoint particular disagreements at PEM, interviews at the Rijksmuseum and at Tate Britain described examples of heated debates, disagreements and conflict. Power struggles were reported to be present throughout the exhibition production process. From broader choices of layout and exhibition content down to the finer details of how text labels were to be worded, in both museums contention was common. Looking more closely at data from the Rijksmuseum, mentions of a 'tug of war' between the education department and curators was described:

Well, it's an ever-changing landscape. In the period I've been doing this it has always, and that's a general thing across the world, between education and curators – but there's always this... tug of war... it's always going on. But there have been periods where our position has been more stable, and periods when our position has been more debated or unstable. That depends very much on who is in charge and what space we're allowed to have (R. Meijer, personal communication, 24 June 2015).

Here we can see a description of the power dynamics in place in the organisational structure – the level of power an interpretation specialist has depends on leadership and whether they have been 'allowed' space. Looking specifically at the production of text labels, a lot of tension and struggle for decision making power was a common theme. Diercks, Junior Curator of Ceramics at the Rijksmuseum, described the 'wrestles over labels' that she felt were common in museum practice; she also discussed the territorial battles involved in label production:

The kind of wrestles over labels are happening everywhere. Those kind of things happen a lot. And I think that partly has to do with education having to reinvent itself to cater... there was a time when just writing a label and making sure the Dutch was proper was pretty much enough. Then there was a time where everything had to be catered to minority groups, which made things very difficult. And now we're sort of, a lot of it has to do with navigating new media and new ways of looking. There's so many possibilities that you have to navigate and make choices in (F. Diercks, personal communication, 26 June 2015).

Because of the very limited amount of text allowed per label, curators became "protective of this space, quite literally this small space, of the labels that you have to communicate with the public" (ibid). Because of the limitations of channelling a vast amount of potential information into a very condensed text label, the process led to

frustrations and contention.

Meijer's use of the term 'tug of war' echoed the sentiment of other interviewees across case studies who mentioned departmental 'battles', arguments and disagreements. Power struggles were a common theme among interviewees. At the Rijksmuseum, these tug of war games were common between curators of different disciplines, between curators and educators and even between the director and the rest of the exhibition team. At Tate Britain, these struggles also occurred along similar lines and among similar members of staff. The more limitations placed on the volume of interpretive information, the more potential for conflict and contention seemed to exist.

Interpretation Curators at Tate Britain discussed the way in which decision-making on exhibition content had been a fairly balanced process involving negotiation and 'conversation' among participants. The content of exhibitions, especially those with contentious or controversial material, was decided through a process of exchange between parties. As stated by McGuire:

If it's a really contentious argument, then the level of discussion of what that argument is increases. And so more people get to have a say on how it's presented. And that means that at a curator's forum, the Access and Diversity Manager is there, and is saying 'I have a problem with that argument – are we sure that that's balanced, are we sure that that's something that Tate wants to say?' Or not even that Tate wants to say, but that Tate wants to privilege that argument over another argument or should we be more balanced? I think there's a level at which we're a bit 'BBC' (S. McGuire, personal communication, 18 March 2015).

This description reflects an approach that was the norm at Tate Britain – but had changed during the production of the *Walk through British Art*. Both McSwein, Tate Interpretation Curator, and McGuire talked about a past display which exhibition curators and interpretation curators shared in the decision-making, then contrasted this past experience with the changes that had occurred at the time of data collection:

What was very interesting about that display was there was a conversation – I mean, interpretation didn't win the battle – but there was a conversation

about it. But what's been enforced in Tate Britain displays is that there's never room for conversation (ibid).

This 'conversation' represents the exchange of power in decision-making around interpretation, and the use of the word 'battle' suggests that it was often a struggle for control between parties. However, in this past example, the interpretation curators conceded – whereas the statement that followed suggests that control had been taken away from both exhibition curators and interpretation curators. No longer was interpretation a space of negotiation, compromise and debate. Power shifted into the hands of the gallery's director.

Interpretation could perhaps be viewed as the 'voice' of the institution. As a result, the struggle for control of how much is said, what is said, and what narrative will run through exhibitions and displays can become a major preoccupation for staff. At PEM, where decision making power was shared more equally, and where divisions between departments was less fixed and territories less defined, conflict and contention was not as evident. In institutions where departments were more divided and boundaries further apart, these tensions and conflicts seemed more apparent.

The dynamics of production of exhibitions undoubtedly influenced their presentation. We have seen how interpretive practice and the processes of production can connect and bring together actors and knowledges, and we have seen how they can be a diverging agent that filters, blocks and changes the messages communicated through display. In the next section, the results of these knowledge interactions and social processes will be understood through a closer examination of the knowledges manifested through the display of objects and interpretation in each institution.

7.4 Knowledges Manifested in Displays, Exhibitions, and in Interpretation

This chapter proceeds based on the view that any museum exhibition or display is a form of embodied theory, a "suggested way of seeing the world" (Macdonald 1996:14). Museums are a space for consecration of objects (Bourdieu 1993) and are institutions that "present to us what is perceived to be worthy of attention in relation to areas of knowledge associated with concepts of art, science, history and

natural history” (Whitehead 2009:25). Museums do not merely reflect and represent existing theories, but actively participate in the development of new theories. Through display and the act of exhibiting, museums generate and construct new theories and new knowledges of art.

How then, do the processes of production of displays and the structures of the organisations which produce them affect the embodied theories represented? How do convergent, divergent and contentious approaches to the production of interpretation impact upon the narratives, stories and arguments inherent in displays? As described in section 7.2, multiple aspects and products of interpretive practice can connect or bridge boundaries. These could be seen as convergent approaches to exhibition production – approaches that bring together knowledges, encourage knowledge interactions between diverse actors and facilitate collaboration. However, divergent approaches – when organisational structures and processes exclude particular staff or place limitations on knowledge interactions – can also affect the narratives, stories and theories presented by closing off interpretations, providing limited perspectives, exaggerating some accounts while silencing others or presenting what appears to be a single, authoritative truth.

Another consideration in analysis of interpretation is whether or not it takes a product-based approach or a process-based approach. Whitehead (2012) sets out the parameters of each of these, arguing that product-based approaches to interpreting works of art have been predominant in museums. In viewing a work of art primarily as the outcome of a creative act (product-based interpretation), the questions asked centre on the object’s importance and value in the art world, perhaps asking who the artist was, what techniques were used and what style it belongs to. It could be argued that this focus of museums historically served to elevate the status and value of art, maintaining its elite status and exclusivity. On the other hand, a process-based approach to interpretation goes deeper, asking more of the ‘why’ and ‘how’ – why the object was created, for whom, how was it paid for and how it relates to what was occurring in society at the time of production. In asking and answering these types of questions and going against historic interpretive strategies, it could be argued that the value and status of art decreases. However, in using a more process-based approach, art museums might become more accessible

to more diverse audiences - particularly those without significant prior art knowledge.

The sections that follow will examine the knowledges embedded within exhibitions at each case study institution. Taking an emblematic example of interpretation in each institution, sections 7.4.1, 7.4.2 and 7.4.3 will identify the interpretive framings and approaches used in each institution. In teasing out the ways in which institutions frame the understanding of art and art history, we can begin to see the 'statements of position' embodied within each. How an institution emphasises, or de-emphasises particular knowledges of art contributes to the ways in which it suggests we see and know art. In examining these framings and interpretive strategies, the sections that follow aim to reveal some of the dynamics of production that contribute to a broader understanding of each institution's working practices.

7.4.1 Inzoomers at the Rijksmuseum and the convergence of histories

The Inzoomers at the Rijksmuseum, discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, illustrated the results of a collaborative process of production involving history curators, fine and decorative art curators and interpretation specialists. Text on each Inzoomer card was required to correspond to something visible. For example, on the Inzoomer card for the painting *Fishing Pinks in the Breakers* by Mesdag (c.1875 – 1885), highlighted sections of the painting included parts of boats, groups of people and animals, parts of the sea and sky, and functional objects. The interpretive selections included on each Inzoomer used a variety of interpretive frames, with the most emphasis on formal, technical, narrative and sociohistorical framings.

Looking closer at the *Fishing Pinks in the Breakers* Inzoomer, the card's two sides each took a different approach to analysis of the painting. On the 'See More' side, most of the information related to technical analysis, focusing on how the artist achieved some of the effects seen on the canvas. For example:

With strokes of greyish-brown, blue and white paint, Mesdag skilfully suggested the reflection of the sky in the pools of water in the foreground.

The seagulls are wispy streaks in the sky.

(Fishing Pinks in the Breakers Inzoomer, Rijksmuseum 2015).

These pictorial and formalist framings relate to methods of art historical analysis that focus on technique as a means of understanding an artwork. The emphasis on what can be seen and how the painting was made suggests an institutional belief based on Formalist art history principles. While 'art historical rimram' (the term for art historical terminology, coined by Rijksmuseum director Wim Pjibes) is minimised in this text, the focus is still on conveying the importance of technique and composition and the artist's skill at producing the artwork. Other interpretive frames briefly utilised on the 'See More' side of the cards included biographical, stylistic and iconographical frames, but the focus was primarily on understanding how the painting was composed and constructed. The text selections on the 'See More' side, ultimately, suggested that what is visible is of prime importance.

On the 'Learn More' side, the approach was far more sociohistorical. This approach to seeing an artwork as an historical document was typical of history curators prior to the redevelopment of the museum. The text selections on this side provided more contextual information about the subject matter represented in the painting. For example:

The basket under this woman's arm may be empty now, but she will shortly be carrying fish in it. Other women have a kind of basket that can be worn on their back.

It was not unusual for an entire family to be involved in fishing.

(Fishing Pinks in the Breakers Inzoomer, Rijksmuseum 2015).

These text selections encourage the visitor to look at the painting not just as a beautiful object, but as a record of life in the Netherlands. The painting moves beyond being a 'work of art' by an artist, towards serving as a means for understanding history. The socio-historical approach taken on the 'Learn More' side provided more context, revealing the hidden histories of fishermen and their families and the hardships they endured. The mention of women's roles in the fishing industry, for example, very lightly touched upon an alternative version of history that has been documented through the painting.

This coming together of disciplinary knowledge could perhaps be called 'expansive boundary work': the organising of knowledge that enlarges disciplinary territories.

Each Inzoomer is a 'boundary object' serving as a central point of communication among different communities of practice and acting as a bridge between disciplines. The knowledge interactions that took place between staff within departments of fine art, decorative art, history and education are documented in the Inzoomers; through them, new knowledge has been constructed – bringing 'diverse parts' into "particular knowledge relations with each other" (Messer-Davidow et al 1993:3).

While evidence of interaction between disciplines can be observed throughout the permanent collections displays at the Rijksmuseum, the Inzoomers are unique in that they capture a concentrated form of interdisciplinary knowledge creation. The interweaving of interpretive frames and of disciplinary knowledges and perspectives can be seen in each Inzoomer, and their prominent placement throughout the galleries is a statement of position that suggests art and history are interwoven: the cards show that the institution has attempted to link the formerly distinct departments of art and history, taking a step towards blurring of disciplinary boundaries.

While multiple perspectives on objects have come together on each card, these perspectives are still primarily rooted in technical and sociohistorical art historical approaches. The strong focus on technical analysis on the one hand and on socio-historical context on the other distances the viewer from deeper engagement with objects – more critical examinations of the nature of colonialism and of gender (for example) are left out. There is very little room for personal interpretation, for connecting the subject of the painting with contemporary life or for critically examining historical events. The knowledges embodied in the cards have largely come out of interactions between fine art curators, history curators and interpretation specialists who pieced together their respective interpretations into a single resource. Missing from each card are more critical examinations of the objects and of the history of the Netherlands; alternative histories are left out. The museum retains its traditional position of authority, with a focus on 'educating' visitors rather than provoking questions.

The resulting knowledges communicated through the Inzoomers demonstrate a convergence of some knowledges and the divergence of others, illustrating tentative

steps away from a product-based approach towards a more documentary framing. This is most clearly evidenced in the Inzoomer cards which offer a range of interpretive frames in a single gallery-based resource. There is, however, room for more critical discussion of the processes involved in creating each object. Next, we will examine interpretation at PEM in more detail, seeking to reveal some of the hidden dynamics of production and relate this more fully to the knowledges presented through display.

7.4.2 An 18th century cabinetmaker's workshop at PEM and Deweyan aesthetic experiences

Looking now at PEM's approach to the production of interpretation and the knowledges constructed through display, we again see a more convergent approach that unifies collections and disciplines. Through a 'highly collaborative' working process, staff members with a diverse portfolio of experience and knowledge worked together to produce exhibitions and displays. The inclusion of interpretation specialists, educators and designers in the ideation phases of exhibition production enabled knowledge interactions to include more individuals with a broader range of expertise. This collaborative and convergent process was a form of boundary work in which disciplinary territories were expanded – and within the process, interpretation played a key role.

We can see evidence of the social interactions that occurred during exhibition production within the *Nathaniel Gould: In Plain Sight* exhibition, along with evidence of the Deweyan philosophy that PEM's mission statement embodies. Chapter 7 described PEM's focus on art as a 'transformative medium' and its experiential approach to exhibitions and displays. *In Plain Sight* took a multi-sensory approach to interpretation, including sound, touch and interactive media to bring the subject matter to life. The various sensory elements of display involved the participation of many different members of staff who collaborated in order to produce a cohesive, multi-layered narrative within the exhibition.

The interactive workshop space and replica workbench constructed for *In Plain Sight* is evidence of the convergence of ideas and knowledges that occurred during

the exhibition production process. The workbench and workshop area brought together the technical knowledge of digital media specialists, knowledge of experiential learning by education and interpretation specialists, and curatorial expertise and research. It also involved the participation of an expert craftsman, Phil Lowe, who demonstrated the methods utilised by Gould in constructing furniture. The involvement of digital media specialists allowed the workshop area to become interactive and contemporary, bringing the past into the present by allowing visitors to participate in the scene through movement and touch. The design of the workshop space and the interactive video mediated an aesthetic experience, allowing visitors to 'step in' to a workshop setting and 'interact' with a traditional furniture maker as he worked. The sounds of the workshop, the feeling of the carved wood and the semi-enclosed space enabled visitors to become more immersed in the act of making, something seen by Dewey as an essential aspect of the aesthetic experience:

In English we separate artistic and esthetic and the act of production and that of perception and enjoyment but they are integrated... The esthetic experience – in its limited sense – is thus seen to be inherently connected with the experience of making (Dewey 1934:47).

The definition of what constitutes an aesthetic experience has been debated by philosophers over time. An aesthetic experience arises in the presence of an art or aesthetic object, when an emotional response occurs and a heightened state of appreciation is reached. Some argue that an aesthetic experience arises from focusing only on the immediately perceivable properties of an object, such as form, colour or composition. Others argue that understanding more about an object elicits an aesthetic experience – Dewey, for example, argued that an aesthetic experience arises in part from connecting the object to its mode of production. PEM's interactive workshop used a multisensory approach to create an immersive experience, permitting visitors to vicariously connect with cabinetmakers of the past.

The theatricality of the workshop space, where visitors enter, choose and place an object on the bench, then watch its production unfold, "welcomes visitors into the

narrative” (Bedford 2014:122). The use of digital media creates a “feeling of presence, of being in a new reality” (ibid: 123). Visitors to the workshop space could step into another world, imagining themselves watching the production of the furniture displayed in the exhibition. Instead of simply absorbing historical facts about Nathaniel Gould’s life and work, they were able to imagine what it was like to handle tools, carve the wood and assemble an elaborately designed chair for a wealthy client. As discussed in Chapter 7, the immersive experience of hearing sounds, handling objects and viewing the processes of making connected visitors to the human elements of production, giving them insight into the amount of effort each piece took to construct. This, in turn, brought the craftsman out of the shadows of anonymity and invisibility, raising his status to that of a fine artist.

The inclusion of multifaceted interpretation in the workshop space was the result of a convergence of knowledges from across the organisation, documented in the interpretive brief described in both Chapter 6 and earlier in this chapter (section 7.2.2). The knowledge brought to the project by education and interpretation specialists is evident through the use of tactile, hands on activities and the inclusion of sound; these staff members sought to put principles of experiential learning into practice within the gallery space. Their understanding of the preferences of audiences was evident in the wide range of interpretation throughout the exhibition, which varied in scope and content.

Within the interactive workshop space itself, the influence of education and interpretation specialists could be seen in the participatory nature of the workbench. Each of the unfinished furniture elements had to be picked up and handled, then placed on a target in order to activate the video demonstration where they were shown being carved. This was an activity that was identified through processes of audience research and prototyping as a means for children, non-experts and hobbyist makers (three of the exhibition’s target audiences) to best understand the process of production – through a hands-on activity that enabled visitors to feel the wood, understand its tactile qualities and connect what they saw being made with the finished pieces in the exhibition.

Curatorial expertise was also evident in the workshop space, despite the lack of authentic period objects on display here. The accurate historical representation of Gould's production techniques and the setting in which Lowe carves each piece was based on curatorial research and analysis. The tools Lowe uses are similar to those that Gould would have used, and as Lowe carves each piece of wood he is attempting to re-enact Gould's methods. Despite the lack of original objects here, the connection between the objects on display in the rest of the gallery and the techniques being demonstrated in the video was clear. Curatorial expertise was a vital contributor to the accurate portrayal of 18th century New England cabinetmaking methods.

The authenticity and attention to historical accuracy combined with a range of multisensory and participatory experiences stemmed from the knowledge interactions that took place during the processes of production. These interactions are outlined in the interpretive plans and design briefs for both the exhibition and the workbench, documents which served as organisational boundary objects by bringing together diverse disciplinary knowledge. In the design brief for the workshop and workbench, for example, an interpretation specialist, educator and digital media specialist worked together to develop both the design of the interactive and its intended learning objectives. When combined with curatorial expertise, the result was a space which embodied PEM's ethos – that art and culture should “increase knowledge, enrich the spirit, engage the mind and stimulate the senses” (PEM 2016b).

The design brief for the workshop, along with the interpretive plan for the exhibition as a whole, indicates the range of information and knowledge that was brought together from across the institution. The work of curators, educators, interpretation specialists and designers were joined together in each document. These organisational boundary objects facilitated the convergence of knowledges, and ultimately led to the realization of new, combined knowledges that could be seen throughout *In Plain Sight*. These knowledge interactions and boundary objects brought together 'diverse parts' (i.e. knowledges) into relation with each other, echoing the sentiments of Messer-Davidow et al (1993) in section 7.4.1: Just as the Rijksmuseum's Inzoomers gathered together the combined knowledge of staff from

departments across the institution and presented it to visitors, PEM's design brief served as a central gathering point for information that would facilitate exhibition planning.

Ultimately the convergence of diverse knowledges during the process of exhibition production at PEM led to the portrayal of a past that is not so distant from today. Knowledge interactions between staff focused on visitor experience and staff with curatorial expertise created a new dynamic that could be traced both within *In Plain Sight* and throughout the museum. Time was compressed in displays, with contemporary and historic juxtaposed throughout the galleries. An understanding of ways in which audiences learn and engage meaningfully in museums was combined with collections knowledge and design expertise to create displays that made the past more relevant and less distant. The knowledge interactions between diverse staff enabled new narratives to be created, history to be understood through new lenses and the collections to be experienced in new ways. Overall, PEM's approach could be considered highly process-based, possibly leading to the widening of intellectual access by a wider audience.

7.4.3 The chronological circuit at Tate Britain

While knowledges can converge during exhibition production, leading to the construction of new perspectives, the processes of producing interpretation can also lead to a divergent approach in which new perspectives are closed down or limited. The structures of institutions, organisation of staff and selection of members for project teams all affect the knowledge outcomes of an exhibition. The inclusion or exclusion of staff members in production processes can silence some voices while amplifying others, causing a dominant narrative to emerge that shuts down alternative perspectives. The powerful position of certain actors within the process of exhibition production can also profoundly affect and alter knowledge interactions, resulting in the suppression of particular viewpoints and the promotion of others.

In section 7.4.2, PEM's highly collaborative model was discussed, examining the ways in which non-curatorial staff interacted and subsequently contributed to knowledge production. In contrast to this collaborative model, Tate Britain's

approach to production of the chronological display in the *Walk through British Art* involved far less interdisciplinary work and collaboration with non-curatorial staff. Decision-making authority lay with the director of the gallery, whose professional background as a curator and powerful position in the organisation impelled her to take a very hands-on approach to planning and installation.

Although curatorial staff were reorganised into period teams and disciplinary boundaries challenged, interpretation curators were largely excluded from the planning process. One of the results was a permanent collection display with minimal textual interpretation and a strong focus on the 'experience of looking' – demonstrating the institutional bias towards defining 'interpretation' as being text-based. Whereas at PEM, 'interpretation' had a much broader definition and interpretation specialists had greater agency in the planning process, at Tate, the role of interpretation curators was weighted more towards producing textual materials. Therefore, when the new director decided discursive captions and textual interpretation were to be removed, the agency of interpretation staff was restricted.

The absence of interpretation curators from the planning process was evident throughout the permanent display: while the Spotlight galleries and temporary exhibitions contained varying degrees of textual interpretation, communicating to visitors a range of possible viewpoints and perspectives, the chronological circuit remained almost silent. Just as interpretation curators were essentially silenced during the process of its production, the finished display was mute at the verbal level, communicating primarily through the architectural and physical manipulation of space and the organisation of objects. The lack of interpretation limited possibilities, alternative perspectives and multiple viewpoints, expecting the visitor to come to her own conclusions simply by looking at the displays – in other words, to 'come to love art by looking'. This goes against Dewey's vision of an aesthetic experience as discussed earlier in this chapter, in which the viewer gains more from understanding context and modes of production.

Looking closer at the curatorial strategies used in the 1840 gallery, for example, the primary means of communicating was via arrangement of objects. The room was described on Tate's website as having "the feel of a Victorian exhibition gallery"

(Tate 2017), and the tightly packed exhibits of the Great Exhibition of 1851 are said to be the inspiration for the style of this room. The room only contained two text panels, which used two paintings as a point of departure to talk about the contents of the gallery. These texts used evolutionary, formal, intentional-explanatory and sociohistorical framings. The first (fig. 31) used *The Golden Stairs* by Edward Burne-Jones (1880) as a means of discussing views on beauty in Victorian society and by artists:

Beauty was a powerful concern in the nineteenth century. The 'beauty industry' was launched and fortunes were made from soap and cosmetics. Celebrity and fashion images circulated widely.

Artists asked serious questions about beauty in modern art. Some looked for it in the real world; others, such as Edward Burne-Jones, saw it in a world of the imagination, in 'a beautiful, romantic dream of something that never was, never will be.' A graceful procession of young women weaves from top to bottom of *The Golden Stairs*. The rhythm of their heads, hands, feet and folds of the robes, and the harmony of creamy hues creates a kind of visual music.

Figure 31 Text panel for Burne-Jones's *The Golden Stairs* (1880), Tate Britain 2015 (Source: Author)

The second (fig. 32) used *Girl at a Gate* by Sir George Clausen (1889) as a springboard for briefly discussing Victorian idealisation of the countryside and how this influenced artists:



Figure 32 Text panel for Clausen's *Girl at a Gate* (1889), Tate Britain 2015 (Source: Author)

Both texts emphasise the intentions of the artist and the influence of society on their work, aspects which contribute to the chronological narrative that emphasises a linear progression of British art. In each text, the first paragraph provides brief contextual information relating to society at that time; the second paragraph in each panel describes how artists responded to the world around them. Restricted to a total of 200 words on two text panels (in a gallery with nearly 100 paintings), the interpretation does little to enhance the viewing experience. Left out of these texts are information pertaining to how the artist worked, biographical details of artists, specific subject matter in paintings, how they relate to the viewer and many other possible interpretations.

The power and agency of the director of Tate Britain at the time was also evident throughout the display. Her narrative of British Art dominated the chronological circuit, and her decisions were embodied in the choice of objects and arrangement of space. This again calls upon the concept of 'museums as embodied theory' (Macdonald 1996, Whitehead 2009), whereby the museum is an important institutional space for consecration of art objects and serves as a 'visualizing technology' for idea formation (ibid). Curators "produce meaning (at least for themselves) through the orchestration of various interrelated media... through the poetics of exhibiting" (Whitehead 2009:26). It is through this orchestration of space,

of selection and placement of objects, through the absence of textual interpretation and the overall design of the new display that Curtis's dominant narrative of British art was manifested. The theory that "people come to love art by looking" (P. Curtis, personal communication, 17 March 2015) is clearly evident: the focus in the display was indeed on looking rather than reading.

The use of chronology as a display mechanism is one which privileges certain events and seeks to establish truths. The *Walk through British Art* intended to 'free' the visitor of the constraints of disciplinary boundaries and to allow for a 'simpler' and more 'neutral' approach to presenting art history – yet, the minimal participation of interpretation specialists in the process of producing the main circuit (and subsequent minimising of textual interpretation) coupled with the power and agency of the director led to the closing down of perspectives. By excluding some staff from the production process and exerting her decision-making power in the choice of objects, the dominant narrative that emerges becomes subjective rather than the more "simplistic" and "accurate" narrative that was intended (Stephens 2013). The embodied theories within the display were created as a result of certain 'diverse parts' being brought into relation with each other while others were left out of the conversation. The selection of objects for the *Walk through British Art*, and subsequent interpretation of them, was highly subjective. In discussing the subjectivity of selection, ordering and placing of objects in museums, Whitehead (2009) states:

It is a cultural practice of inclusion and exclusion which responds to, and in turn constructs, contemporary knowledge, organising representations of the past which articulate hierarchical structures such as the artistic canon (p.29).

In summary, by largely excluding interpretation curators' input in the chronological circuit of the *Walk through British Art*, the institution effectively reproduced an object-focused version of the history of British art based on the views of the director. The limited textual interpretation available to audiences placed an emphasis on process over product, providing brief contextual information that allowed visitors to better understand the world in which objects were made. However, the emphasis of the displays was so heavily dependent on visual connections while assuming that no prior knowledge would be necessary to comprehend the connections between

artworks, artists, styles and so forth. The result was a display that effectively excluded some knowledges and presumed that other knowledges would be detected by audiences naturally. The lack of participation by interpretation specialists led to a divergent approach that focused on art as product rather than process.

7.5 Summary: Convergence, Divergence and Contention

This chapter has explored the ways in which interpretation specialists and products of interpretation can be seen as agents of convergence and divergence, and how they can contribute to contention in institutions. Section 7.2 examined the ideas of convergence and boundaries. This section brought the concepts of boundary brokers (Wenger 1998), boundary objects (Star & Griesemer 1989; Carlile 1997, 2002), and boundary projects and practices (Wenger 2000) into relation with the processes of production examined in this study and discussed how interpretation can bring actors together in a variety of ways, crossing boundaries and promoting the flow of information and knowledge through the organisation. Interpretation specialists in an organisation act as boundary brokers – helping to facilitate information flows across organisational boundaries, contributing to the production of knowledge and facilitating the convergence of departmental aims and objectives. Section 7.2 also demonstrated how products of interpretation, such as text labels or information cards, can draw together staff members to unite disciplinary knowledges.

Section 7.3 focused on divergence, and the ways in which interpretation can be seen as something that stands in the way of understanding or experiencing a work of art. Many staff, curators especially, felt that interpretation had the potential to interfere, disrupt or detract from viewing art objects. Rather than bridging boundaries, interpretation was seen as a barrier. This section also explored the themes of power and agency, looking at how a powerful actor could alter the messages communicated through display. Power struggles and difficulties of collaboratively producing text labels (and other interpretation) were examined. This section argued that, while most often viewed as a converging agent, interpretation (as a role, a process and a product) can also be seen to separate, divide and cause friction in an organisation.

Interpretive practice and the construction of knowledge in art museums do not easily fit into categories of ‘convergence’ and ‘divergence’. In reality, interpretive

practice in any institution can have characteristics that both connect and separate, bring together knowledges and push them apart.

Within the same exhibition project, interpretation curators can act as boundary brokers who bring together diverse areas of expertise while at the same time acting as a filter. Therefore, while every attempt has been made in this chapter to identify points of convergence, divergence and contention, the complex nature of organisational culture resulted in findings that were often unclear. The 'mess' (Law 2004) uncovered during this research revealed a reality that was difficult to capture, one that was intricately textured and ephemeral. The ever-changing nature of organisational life and the fleeting nature of exhibition production meant that the research could only capture a passing moment in time, a brief snapshot of the process. However, this snapshot revealed that interpretation specialists play a vital role in the production of new knowledges of art, leading institutions to interpret objects in their care in a way that delves deeper into the contexts, processes and role of art objects in society. Interpretation specialists are a vital component in moving institutions away from portraying art as merely an outcome – instead, they contribute to increasing understanding of the role art plays in society, of its conditions of production, of the complex nature of the art world. Interpretation specialists help move institutions away from representing art as merely a point on an art historical timeline, instead mediating a deeper understanding of art's complex role in society. We now turn to the final chapter, which brings together the preceding discussions and arguments in order to draw some conclusions and define further avenues for research.

Chapter Eight

Organising People, Constructing Meanings: Conclusions and Implications

This thesis posed two main questions: What are the historical, political and institutional factors influencing changes to modes of production of interpretation in museums of art, and what new knowledges of art have been produced through these changing processes? To answer these questions, four main aims were identified and addressed:

- To investigate current theories and understandings of the concept of interpretation in art museums;
- To understand the current practices involved in the production of interpretation in case study institutions;
- To understand what changes have occurred in working practices at case study institutions and why;
- To determine what new knowledges of art have been produced as a result of a change in working practices.

Three case study institutions were identified that have undergone or were undergoing a period of significant organisational change and restructuring. Through semi-structured interviews with staff members, document analysis and display analysis, the research sought to gather data from 'behind the scenes' in order to meet the aims of the study. This chapter draws together the arguments from the body of the thesis and presents the conclusions from the research.

8.1 Summary of Main Arguments

The first main argument of the thesis relates to the difficult nature of the concept of interpretation. I argued that the definition of 'interpretation' is fluid and difficult to define in the existing literature, a phenomenon echoed in the theoretical stance of the individuals and institutions in each case study. Among the institutions studied, interpretation had different connotations and was used interchangeably to describe processes, products and job roles. Definitions and philosophies of interpretation were not singular: the concept of 'interpretation' was one made up of many

meanings that developed through the varied processes, institutional structures and prior experiences of staff members. Overall, the thesis argued that the often-enigmatic concept of interpretation and its many variations within institutional cultures affected both the agency and roles of staff and the content of interpretive materials. The thesis also argued that the theoretical standpoint of those in power within an institution can significantly influence and alter what is defined as interpretation and what is included, excluded, highlighted or de-emphasised within exhibitions and displays.

Second, the thesis argued that changing practices involved in the production of interpretation are a significant factor in the construction of new knowledges of art. The research found that the team-based approach taken to the production of exhibitions and displays in many institutions has enabled the contribution of knowledge from a range of departments, leading to the formation of new understandings of art historical knowledge. Within these institutions, often the interpretation specialists within a team took on the role of liaison, bringing together curatorial and educational aims; the thesis argued that these specialists act as boundary brokers in institutions, leading to the transfer of ideas and knowledge across departments and groups in the organisation. As boundary brokers, interpretation specialists played an important role in the convergence of knowledges, facilitating knowledge exchange and the construction of new understandings of art.

The third main argument of the thesis responds to the aim of understanding what changes have occurred in case study institutions and why. The thesis argued that the changing role of the museum – from collecting, preserving and sharing collections towards having a more social focus – has encouraged many institutions to rethink the way in which they interpret. The research concludes that audience research and evaluation have become central to the work of many museums, and many institutions are responding to a change in audience needs, wants and expectations. The thesis also concludes that economic factors have played a significant role in changes to interpretive practice, with the need for financial survival among the reasons for changes to the way exhibitions are designed and interpreted. In particular, at PEM, where self-sustenance is paramount due to a reliance on self-

generated income (via philanthropic sources and visitor fees, for example), a repositioning of the visitor as central is clearly evident. It is also argued that changes in leadership can significantly alter the approach an institution takes to interpretation by altering its power dynamics.

The fourth and perhaps most significant argument made in the thesis concludes that the inclusion of interpretation specialists in exhibition teams results in significant changes to knowledges of art. The research found that new structures and staff groupings that included interpretation specialists resulted in a move away from 'product-based' interpretation. In some cases, this resulted in a documentary framing within interpretation, whereas in other cases we saw a move towards a 'process-based' approach. While this move has been incremental in each case study, all were moving in this direction. The research also found that team-based approaches allowed institutions to widen intellectual access to their collections by incorporating a wider range of perspectives in displays. Finally, in the institutions studied, traditional formalist art historical approaches to interpretation no longer dominated. Instead, artworks were framed in many ways, allowing more visitors to connect with and understand art from multiple perspectives.

8.2 Key Findings: Research Aims and Objectives

The overarching aims and objectives of the research (set out in Chapter One) sought to create a connection between the products of interpretation and the processes used in their production. The research set out to analyse the knowledges present in museum displays and relate these to the complex conditions of their production within each case study institution. Methods of display analysis critically examined the contents of exhibitions, while qualitative research methods examined institutional policies, processes and procedures. This combination of methods sought to connect what happens 'behind the scenes' with what is on public display. This section summarises the findings in relation to the four main aims of the thesis.

Aim One: Critically examine current theory and practice of the production of interpretation in art museums

The thesis began with a critical examination of literature relating to the concepts of interpretation and organisation, drawing from the fields of museum studies,

philosophy, communication, education, cultural sociology and organisation studies in order to define and map out current theories and debates. Chapter Two sought to map out current theories of interpretation and examine some of its theoretical foundations, in order to more fully grasp existing arguments that inform contemporary museum practice. Across the range of literature surveyed, it became clear that art interpretation is a complex concept, one that reflects the complexity and difficulty associated with defining art itself. Just as the concept of art is contested, so is the concept of interpretation.

Chapters Four, Five and Six examined the interpretive philosophies within the three case study museums, looking both at the institutions as a whole and at individual staff members' beliefs. While the literature identified particular theories and philosophies of interpretation, interviews with staff at each case study institution revealed complex and entrenched beliefs based on practice, experience and educational and cultural backgrounds. In addition, each museum exhibited an institutional vision of what interpretation is and how it functions within the setting, a vision often dictated by a museum director. This combination of individual beliefs and theories of interpretation combined with institutional philosophies and the philosophies of directors had an impact upon the knowledges constructed in displays. For instance, at the Rijksmuseum, most education and interpretation specialists lobbied for making interpretation more accessible, and the director's aim was to 'open up' the collections. As a result, much of the textual interpretation simplified art-historical terminology and re-framed understandings of the collections.

Through the literature review in Chapter Two and subsequent analysis of data in Chapters Four, Five and Six, theories of organisation were examined and related to the practices in each case study. In particular, it was found that the concept of the 'boundary broker' related most closely to the work of interpretation specialists, revealing the importance of their role in transferring knowledge and liaising among departments. In addition, literature on organisational change, institutional theory and organisational culture reviewed in Chapter Two helped frame some of the analysis in subsequent data chapters.

Aim Two: To understand the current practices involved in the production of interpretation in case study institutions

Aim Two looked more closely at the practices employed by case study institutions. First, a selection of art museums in the UK and abroad were identified which were undergoing (or had recently undergone) significant expansion or redevelopment in which restructuring of staff was a component. The methods for choosing each case study were explained in more depth in Chapter Three. The three case studies identified were found to have undergone organisational change in varying degrees, and those responsible for interpretation all had quite different levels of agency and responsibility. In each institution, however, there was a clear department or team responsible for producing interpretation.

The processes of production were assessed in Chapters Four, Five and Six and consolidated through the discussion in Chapter Seven. Each case study institution's models of production varied greatly, and this had an impact upon the outcomes presented to visitors; for example, the highly collaborative model used by PEM resulted in quite different outcomes than those produced through less collaborative models (i.e. Tate). Finally, through a semi-ethnographic approach where I was able to interview and spend time with staff (and in some cases, attend planning meetings), an examination of each institution's culture and ethos was undertaken in order to better understand organisational contexts, institutional visions and missions, external factors that have played a part in institutional approaches and how audience research and evaluation is integrated into planning processes. This approach opened up the opportunity to become more of an 'insider' and to step behind the scenes to more fully investigate the factors at play in the production process. It also provided a foundation for deeper understanding of the challenges, obstacles, economics, politics and other factors that have had an effect on the way institutions construct knowledge. In attempting to better understand organisational cultures, a clearer picture of the institutional dynamics that influence interpretation emerged.

Aim Three: To understand what changes have occurred in working practices at case study institutions and why

Building on Aim Two, Aim Three sought to investigate the changes that had an impact on how each museum currently works. Painting a picture of the factors that led to organisational change provided more detailed contextual knowledge of how and why each institution currently operates as it does. In Chapter One, an introductory overview provided the starting point for the detailed analysis of each institution found in Chapters Four, Five and Six. Throughout these chapters, we saw that the history of each organisation had some bearing on its operation today. At Tate Britain for example, we saw that the history of collecting in the institution has influenced the layout of the current permanent display, with a 'timeline of collecting' providing the introduction to the chronological circuit. Political and economic factors were also identified that contributed to change. Among other factors, the 2008 economic crisis and a reduction in government funding led to a drive towards more self-sufficiency in all three case studies.

Throughout Chapters Four, Five and Six the aim of understanding the complexity of organisational change framed the analysis in order to situate the discussion in Chapter Seven. While the changes in each case study institution were influenced by different historical, political and institutional factors, many common themes emerged. First, the changing role of the museum in society and the increasing influence of technology has impacted greatly upon how museums of art choose to construct exhibitions – the demands of audiences and competing leisure activities have meant art museums must change in order to remain relevant. Politically, museums are increasingly being recognised as dynamic institutions that do not simply reflect the world, but actively help shape it. Economically, all three museums faced pressures to succeed, a common concern for all museums and galleries despite their size or geographical location. While each museum studied had a different means of funding, all three faced the responsibility of reaching large and diverse audiences. Chapters Four, Five and Six also detailed some of the internal institutional factors that have affected changes to structures and processes. In particular, changes to leadership were found to have a definite impact on the construction of knowledge – this was most clearly demonstrated at Tate Britain in

Chapter Five but elements of this were evident across case studies. As mentioned in Chapter Seven, interpretation is often seen as the voice of an institution, leading to power struggles between departments and groups to be heard.

Aim Four: To determine what new knowledges of art have been produced as a result of a change in working practices

This final aim was the most ambitious goal of the thesis and was by far the most challenging. Through a synthesis of data gathered from studying each organisation's structures and processes with that gathered from analysing displays, connections between processes and outcomes were identified. Chapter Seven answers this aim with an in-depth discussion of how knowledges converge, diverge and are contested through interpretive practices. Chapters Four, Five and Six contain the results of the display analysis undertaken, analysing in depth the knowledges present within current displays. Tied together with interview data from staff, these chapters identify changes throughout time and in accordance with organisational change in order to determine how interpretive strategies and approaches have shifted over time.

Overall the findings suggest that collaborative models and the inclusion of interpretation specialists in exhibition planning teams has resulted in a more process-based approach to interpretation, increasing intellectual access and widening participation. For instance, the Rijksmuseum's goal of opening up the collections to the public was a result of collaboration between curators, educators, exhibition designers, digital media specialists and other staff, and the resulting approach to interpretation has begun to answer wider and more complex questions about collections. PEM's interpretive planning processes enabled the museum to consider audiences in the development of the Nathaniel Gould exhibition, answering a broader range of questions about the collection's conditions of production. On the other hand, at Tate Britain, we saw how the removal of interpretation specialists resulted in a significant change of approach in the institution. Whereas in the production of temporary exhibitions, the inclusion of interpretation specialists allowed for more process-based discussion within interpretive resources, their exclusion from the process of developing the WTBA resulted in a product-focused

permanent display that emphasized the importance and significance of art and artists.

The examples of exhibitions analysed for the thesis show that, when either interpretive planning or team working models are utilised, institutions tend to move away from the traditional, formal art historical approaches that have long been used in art museums. These institutions interpret their collections from multiple perspectives, framing artworks in many ways and allowing for more 'ways in' to connecting with and understanding a work of art. Whether through wall texts, information cards, multimedia resources or via other means, the resulting in-gallery interpretation provides visitors with far more diverse and multifaceted stories and seeks to enable visitors to make more connections with what they see.

In summary, the organisation of people within the structure of an art museum directly relates to the construction of art museum knowledges. Interpretation, often viewed as the 'voice' of an institution, is made up of a conglomeration of meanings made by a variety of individuals and groups within the organisational structure. When these component parts are altered – for example, when interpretation specialists are excluded, or when power dynamics shift as new leadership roles are introduced – the result is a change to the knowledges constructed. This pattern is not unique to art museums, but the political, discursive and subjective nature of art means that these shifts in meaning bring with them a unique set of dynamics. Interpreting art involves judgements of value and assertions of authority. The inclusion or exclusion of a particular artist in a chronological display makes a statement of their value and worth in the history of art. The decision by members of an organisation to include an object designated as 'craft' in a display of 'fine art' can increase the economic and political value of the object and the status of its creator. The interpretation of art is unique in that it affects an object's meaning, its elite status and its economic value, while also playing a role in the wider artworld and in discourses of art. Art interpretation interacts with the "entire set of agents engaged in the field" (Bourdieu 1993:261), from artists to collectors and beyond; it has the power to define an object as 'art', to elevate its status, or even in some cases to lower it – thus altering the construction of art and art histories.

This study has shown the ways in which museum representations can be both expanded upon or limited when the distribution of decision-making power changes in an organisation. It linked the production process with the messages communicated to visitors through exhibitions and displays. However, it did not examine the effects of these representations on visitors' understandings, as the scope of the research did not extend to this level of inquiry. I was not able to follow the process from 'behind the scenes' to 'centre stage' to 'in the audience' due to the limitations of the study. Tracing the knowledge production process through to the point of knowledge 'consumption' and 'processing' would most likely reveal another layer of knowledges that are produced when audiences combine previous knowledge with that presented by the institution. For example, what happens when visitors question and debate what is presented to them? If art is highly subjective, how do we account for the views of visitors? How do visitors' views and opinions blend, merge or clash with the knowledges constructed by the institution? And do museum knowledges matter if audiences disregard them? These questions are, by nature, unanswerable within the boundaries of this thesis. Yet, I believe it is important to consider and question what might be brought to light if the meanings made by visitors themselves could be combined with what I have presented here. A deeper understanding of the construction of meaning would result from also considering how visitors' personal experiences colour their understanding, how the context of a museum visit influences the meaning-making process, or to what extent environmental factors alter museum knowledges. Returning to the thesis introduction in Chapter One, imagine how different museum exhibitions could be (and are, in some institutions) when visitor evaluation and research becomes a core component of the development process. Connecting organisational research, display analysis and audience research has been identified as an area for further study (see section 8.5); for now, the limitations to the research will be explained.

8.3 Limitations to the Research

Several limitations to the research were identified prior to commencing the project, while others emerged as the research progressed. One of the first limitations to come to light was the lack of prior research on the topic. As discussed in Chapter Two, much research in museum studies looks at exhibitions and the knowledges

present within them while some research exists that has studied organisational culture in museums and galleries. However, no prior research could be identified that brought these two together, examining the links between organisational structures and cultures and the knowledges present in displays. This meant that the research proceeded from the ground up and required the development of new methods.

Because very little prior research existed, the development of a method of connecting the two required trial and error. Over the course of data collection at the three case study institutions, I learned how to be more efficient and how to better capture the contents of exhibitions and displays. While interview questions remained fairly standard over the course of the research, the data collected at the last of the three case studies was richer and more detailed due to the lessons learned at the first and second case studies. A more comprehensive range of information was gathered as the project moved forward.

Another issue that arose during the course of the research was the 'time lapse' aspect of the research design. Due to the time frame of the research, it was impossible to interview staff about a particular exhibition at the time of its development then return to analyse its contents. I was reliant on the memory of each interviewee. In discussing past processes of production, naturally participants showed a type of selective memory in which they could clearly discuss some elements of the production process but not all. Organisational documents assisted in the process of making sense of the production process, helping to trigger memories of how in situ exhibitions were developed. Undoubtedly, the reconstruction of past events will have been altered due to the passing of time. This issue affected the choice of which exhibitions were chosen for analysis during the research. For example, the permanent collection galleries at PEM had been in place for a decade when data collection took place; a large proportion of staff who had developed them had either moved on or could not remember the details of the production process. Instead, I chose to focus on a small temporary exhibition (*In Plain Sight*) that had only recently been produced and installed. The variation in scale of the displays

analysed in Chapters Four, Five and Six will certainly have affected the knowledges constructed within them.

As well as a variation in scale of displays, there was a variation in the amount of access that was offered at each case study. For example, some institutions allowed the observation of planning meetings and some offered interview appointments with the director, while others had limitations on what and who could be studied or interviewed. This was to be expected but did affect the amount and scope of data collected and quite possibly influenced some of the findings. Every effort has been made to examine aspects of practice equally, however – such as using consistent interview questions across case studies and examining displays using a framework used in each setting.

This study aimed to understand both the processes and products of interpretation in institutions. Due to the time scale and scope of the research, interaction with and observation of visitors was not included in its aims and objectives. This therefore served as a limitation, concentrating the research on what was produced and how – not how it was received or experienced by audiences.

A final limitation to the research stemmed from the timeframe and geography of the study as well as access issues. The duration of the study meant that case studies had to be chosen which were currently undergoing or that had recently undergone significant organisational change. The research base in the United Kingdom coupled with financial constraints further restricted the choice of case study institutions. Finally, access was a factor in the choice of case study institutions. There was initial difficulty gaining permission to conduct the research at two of the institutions (which were luckily overcome), and access considerations did limit the initial shortlist of possible case studies.

8.4 Theoretical and Practical Implications

This research offers several original contributions to knowledge through its emphasis on the relationship between organisational structure in museums and the

construction of art and art histories. First, it widens discourse on the relatively under-researched area of art museum and gallery interpretation, providing a deeper understanding of its constructed nature, its political implications, and its role in contributing to the understanding of art history. It opens up a dialogue on the significant connection between staffing structures and the way in which exhibitions communicate to visitors, moving forward debates within both academic literature and the museum sector by revealing the ways in which the configuration of staff alters museum representations. It also contributes to understanding how the notions of 'art' and 'art history' are constructed and understood through art museum and gallery practices and how they are changing over time.

The research also provides a deeper understanding of how museum interpretation relates to the social organisation of knowledge. I have examined the connections between how staff are organised and how this affects museum representations, with a view towards understanding the ways in which a more holistic model of exhibition production functions within institutions. The institutions I have examined have, to varying degrees, moved away from the curator-centric models of production that have dominated museum practice since their inception. The power struggles and tensions mentioned by McClellan (2008) in Chapter One are still very much alive and are still "built into the structure and staffing of museums" (p.155). However, the advent of interpretation departments and the employment of interpretation specialists within art museums have contributed to altering and often reducing these tensions by bridging the boundaries between groups with conflicting priorities.

As this research has demonstrated, the inclusion of interpretation specialists in the process of exhibition production can facilitate communication between departments and promote the convergence of knowledges. Interpretation specialists in the three institutions studied all described themselves as types of liaisons, bringing together different forms of knowledge in order to produce more effective, engaging exhibitions. They occupied an almost neutral position where they helped collect, organise, liaise, facilitate and coordinate many types of disciplinary expertise – from knowledge of audiences to collections-related knowledge, interpretation specialists

were often the central point of connection. On the other hand, in some situations, their central position allowed them to actually do the opposite, filtering knowledge and creating divergence within the processes of production. The research has highlighted the ways in which departments of interpretation can affect the flow of knowledge across the organisation – and how it can affect the outcomes of exhibitions and displays.

Understanding the dynamics of this role and of the ways in which knowledge is constructed is essential if museums wish to reinvent themselves as democratic institutions. Interpretation has an important role to play in transforming museums, by helping shift the emphasis from collecting and acting as an authority towards becoming a dialogic space. Coombes and Phillips (2015) state:

The desire to find new ways to recreate the relationship between museums and their publics can lead to a shift in emphasis from the museum as a repository and a place where the authoritative knowledge of academically trained curators is disseminated to the public, to the museum as a site of dialogue, debate, healing, and advocacy for social justice. Stimulated by desires to further democratization and decolonization, museums have sought to introduce new voices and perspectives into their displays and narratives, and they have also looked for new modes of outreach that can deliver museum collections, exhibitions, and programs to larger, more diverse, and often distant publics (p. iiv)

All of the actions described in this excerpt can be achieved more effectively through the involvement of interpretation specialists in the production of exhibitions. The introduction of new voices and perspectives can be done by curators and educators working together, yet the tensions that still exist between these two groups often gets in the way. Interpretation specialists take on the role of facilitator, providing a vital link across boundaries. This research has demonstrated the key connective function of interpretation specialists, bringing to light the ways in which their job involves more than just producing interpretive resources.

For institutions who are struggling to reach new audiences, understanding how interpretation functions and how the production process affects the outcomes of

exhibitions could encourage new ways of thinking about organisational structures. As we have seen in this research, the reorganisation of traditional, hierarchical structures in art museums and the introduction of more team-based approaches can dramatically alter the content of exhibitions and displays. Including staff with expertise in communication, audience research and learning – in other words, staff whose focus is on visitors rather than collections – can radically transform an institution's approach to exhibitions. The knowledges constructed when these individuals are part of the planning process are more diverse, include more perspectives and enable wider audiences to more fully engage with content.

8.5 Avenues for Further Research

My findings have uncovered some initial connections between the way in which museums of art are structured and the knowledges that result from particular working practices. However, this research only examined three institutions, each with a very different way of working and with a different remit. Further research could look at a more diverse range of institutions, perhaps contrasting those in which an interpretation department plays a key role with those that take a more conventional approach to compare the different knowledges constructed through display.

Another avenue for future research would be to develop the methods used in this study to better understand the connections between structures and products of interpretation. The research involved the linking together of methods of display analysis with qualitative methods used for researching organisations: combining data collected from analysis of museum displays with interview data, ethnographic data and document analysis resulted in a quasi-experimental approach, one which could be developed further. The aim of the research was to trace the knowledges found in displays with the means of their production, a challenging task involving a great deal of experimentation and improvisation. The nature of researching in organisations is somewhat unpredictable, and each of the case study institutions examined involved a unique set of challenges. As suggested by the limitations in section 8.3, one challenge involved the time lapse between production and display.

Future studies might plan for this gap by conducting research during the production phase and returning when exhibitions are in situ, rather than attempting to draw upon staff recall and memory.

A further suggestion for future study would be to extend the aims and objectives to include researching visitors. While this study focused primarily on the production and finished products of interpretation, further research needs to be done with visitors to determine whether the messages intended for them correspond with how they understand the knowledges produced. In addition, extending the study by taking a more ethnographic approach would further deepen understanding of organisational cultures and how these impact upon museum practice. All of these avenues for further research would be of value to art museums wishing to become more responsive to the needs of audiences, whose personnel wish to incorporate more diverse narratives into their displays and who are aiming to increase audience engagement.

8.6 Final Reflections

This research has given me access to three unique and interesting institutions, each with a distinct set of priorities. What each institution had in common was a desire to reach wider audiences and to communicate more effectively – from Tate’s mission of “championing art and its value to society” (Tate 2017), to the Rijksmuseum’s goal of “linking individuals with art and history” (Rijksmuseum 2017b) to PEM’s vision of “celebrating outstanding artistic and cultural creativity” and of creating “experiences that transform people’s lives” (PEM 2017), all have visitors at the core of their missions and visions.

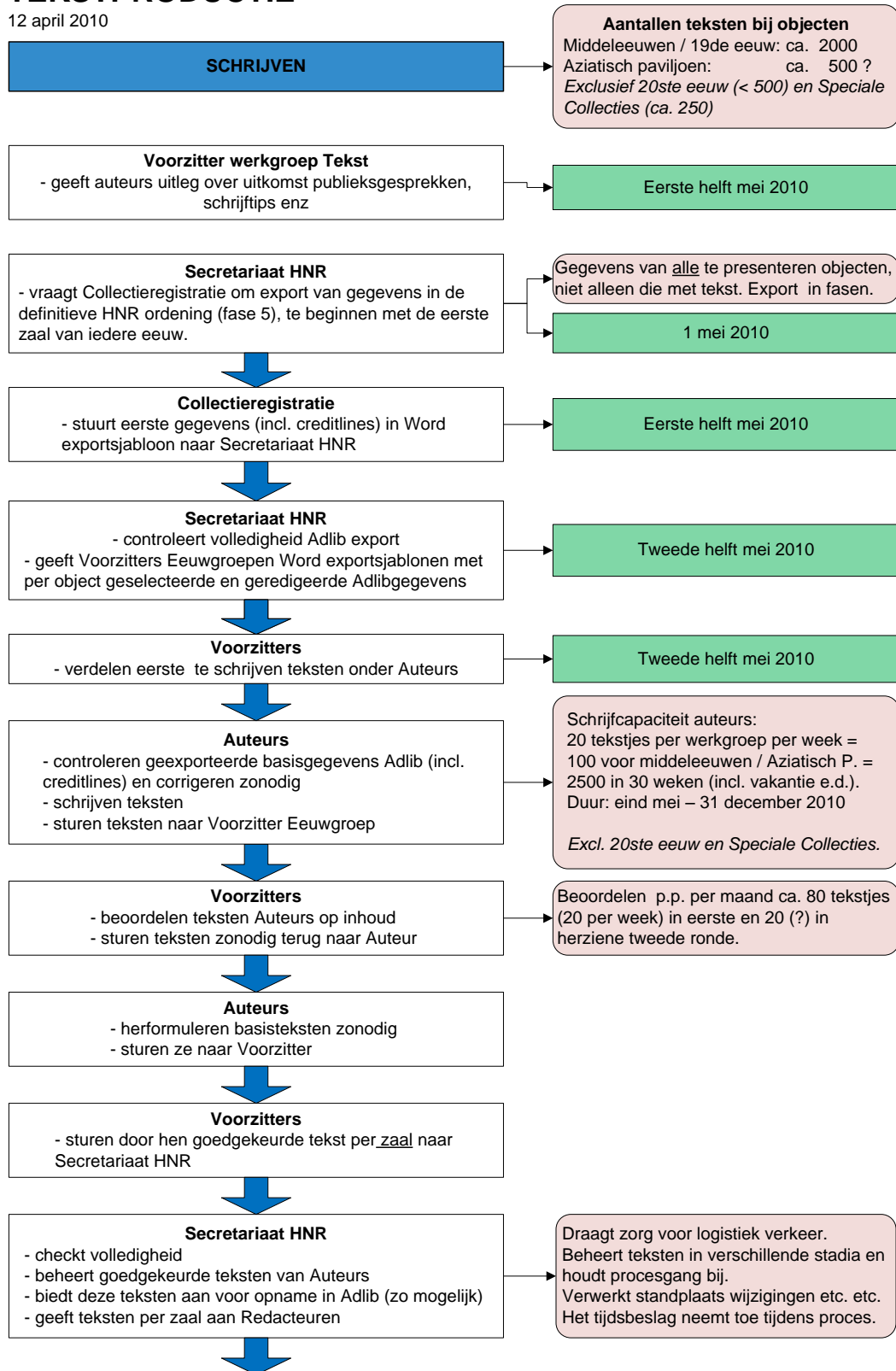
This research argues that in order to reach new and diverse audiences, connect with existing visitors, and to remain relevant in the 21st century, art museums must re-evaluate how they interpret their collections. No longer can art museums rely solely on traditional, formalist art historical approaches in which the emphasis is only on art historical periods and the significance of artists. While these approaches are still useful for some, in order to reach new generations of visitors, museums must realise

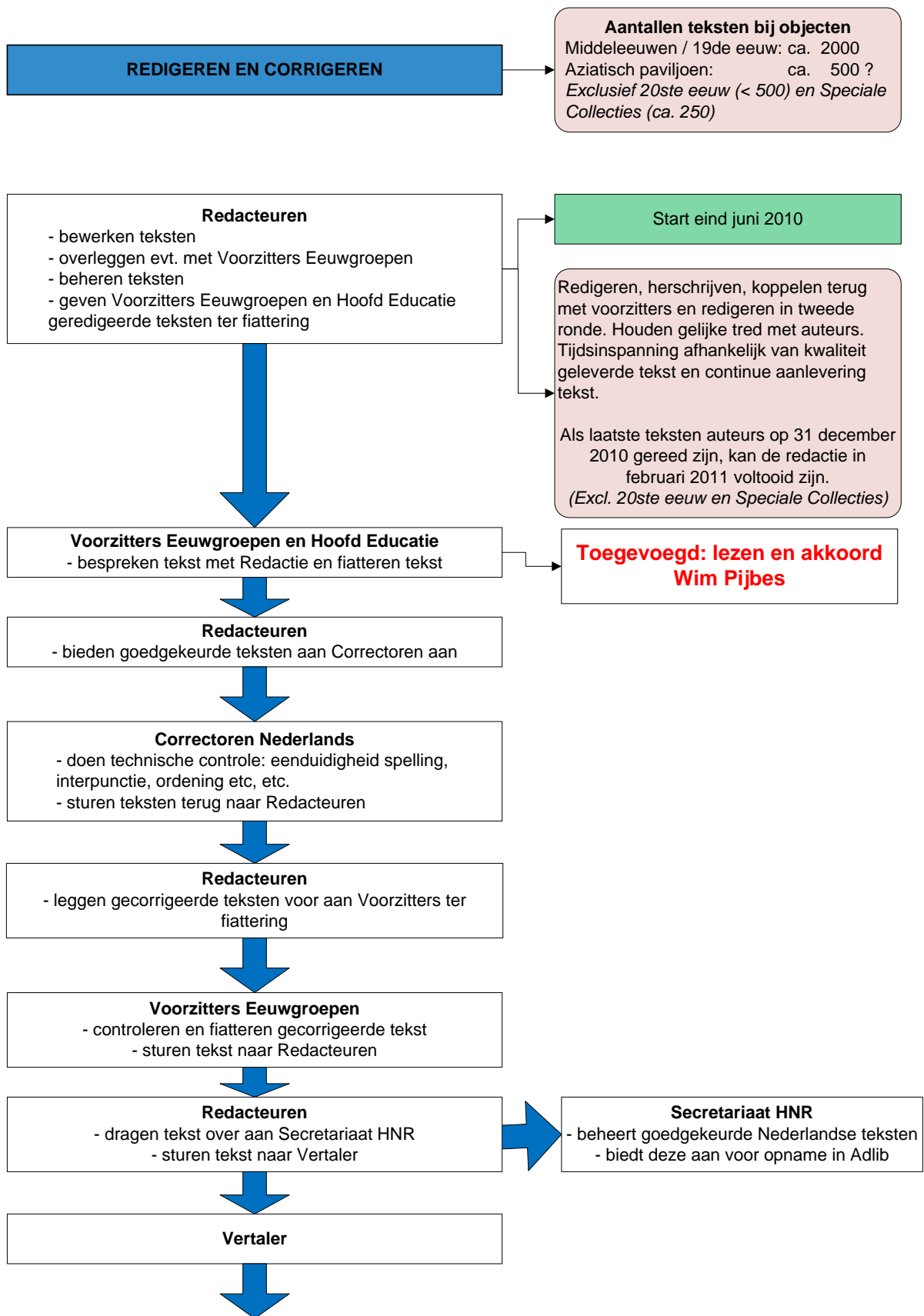
the complex stories that can be told about their collections and discover new ways to communicate these stories to a broad public. This task starts with a critical look at the organisation of staff in institutions, as the way in which institutions are structured clearly affects the construction of art knowledges in displays. A considered approach to interpretive planning and the employment and recognition of the role of interpretation specialists will contribute to the reinvention of contemporary museums of art as relevant and exciting places to visit.

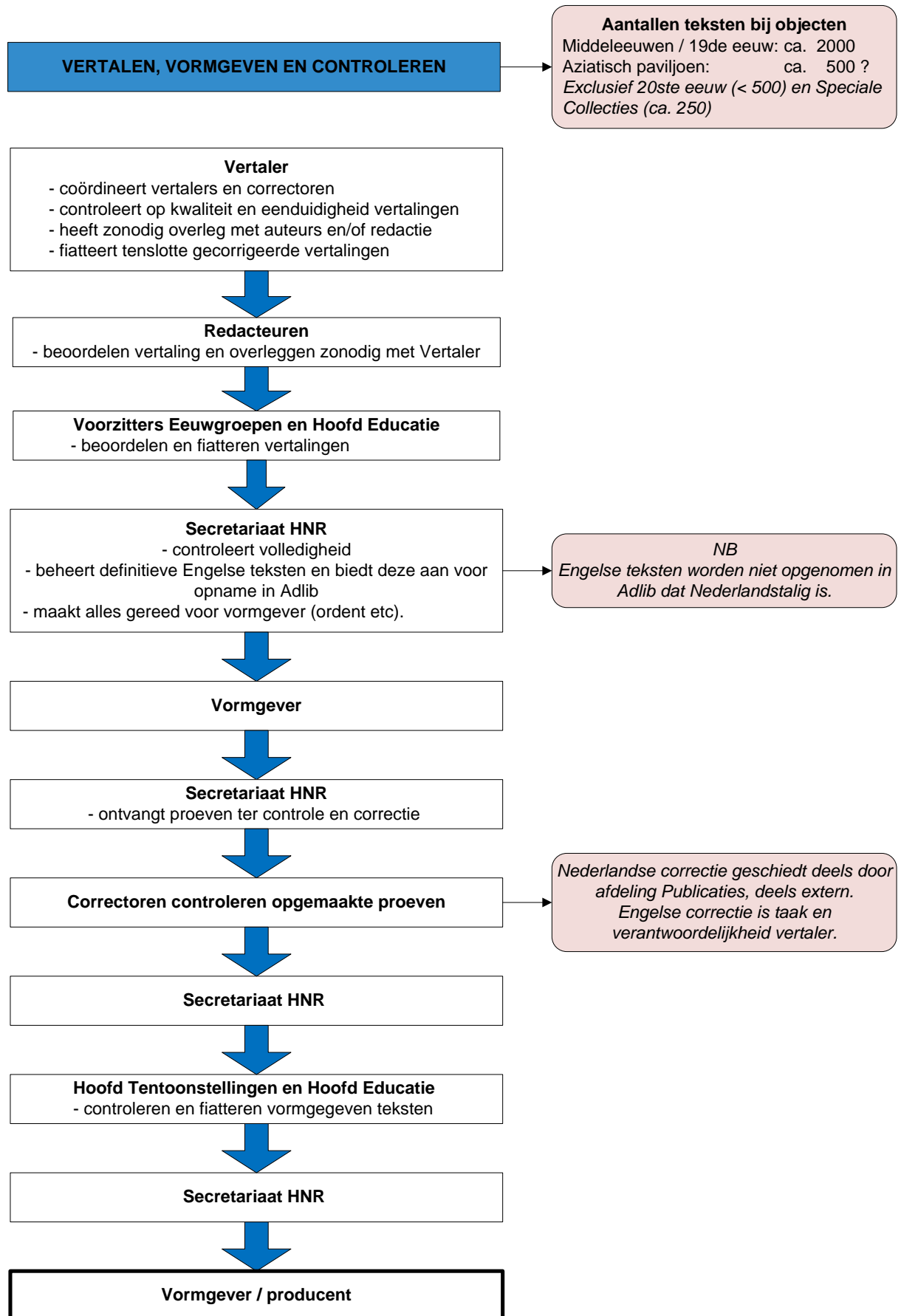
Appendix One: Text Production Flowchart, Rijksmuseum

TEKSTPRODUCTIE

12 april 2010







Appendix Two: Interpretation Brief, PEM

Interpretation Brief:

In Plain Sight: Discovering the Furniture of Nathaniel Gould

November 15, 2014 to March 8, 2015

Created 110813 by MNM
Updated 112213 by MNM
Finalized 011314 by MNM

Key Messages

1. New discoveries can revolutionize the understanding of past artists.
2. As the result of such a discovery, Nathaniel Gould is now recognized as one of America's outstanding 18th century furniture makers.
3. The discoveries reveal the formerly hidden world of an 18th century craftsman: his clients, materials, design approaches, role in elite society, and remarkable artisanship.

Draft Thematic Structure

Section I - The Written Word

Key objects: Gould's account books

Content: Written documentation held the key to reconstructing Gould's career. His ledgers reveal the names of all his clients, which helped document surviving examples of his work. The prices reflect the available choices of wood, hardware, and decorative carving, providing insight into the 18th century economy and the different economic resources of his clients.

Key Messages: This section supports Key Messages 1 and 2.

Section II - The Art of Design

Key objects: A few well documented pieces of furniture; English pattern books and trade catalogues.

Content: Gould used idiosyncratic techniques to fabricate and join pieces of wood and to add decorative carving. He and his clients based design on English pattern books but varied from them in creative ways, giving rise to distinctive flourishes including the shell, the ball-in-claw, and the Bombè form. His selection of materials was enhanced by Salem's mahogany trade.

Interactive Elements:

The Interactive Workbench is associated with this section. Mechanical interactives, active labels perhaps including touchable carvings and/or other strategies should further reveal the details of construction and decoration that make Gould unique.

Key Messages: This section supports Key Message 2.

Section III - Objects of Desire

Key objects: Tea table, silver service, Chest-on-chest

Content: Gould's pieces were functional objects of daily life, but also status symbols. This section will explore how furniture was used in homes, and what that reveals about the desires of their owners and home life in the 18th century.

Interactive Elements:

The Storytelling Desk is associated with this section. Touchable materials (textiles, silver?) may also be appropriate.

Key Messages:

This section supports Key Messages 2 and 3.

Target audiences

1. The community of furniture connoisseurs, both professional and amateur/collector. They will have followed the story, will purchase the publication, and will be keenly interested in the topic. They will already know most of the information and will be coming to indulge their interest, see the account books and see Gould's work assembled together. Their attendance will be small in number but their critical reception is important.
2. Hobbyist makers, especially woodworkers, boatbuilders, model builders, etc. People involved in the DIY/artisanal/handcrafting scene, including knitters, crafters, jewelery makers, tech/design aficionados and makers of all kinds.
3. Middle-school kids, both on field trips and with families, who will be especially interested in concrete touchables, construction details, and interactives.

Visitor Experience

This one-gallery show will be rich in active interpretation, brightly and warmly lit to bring out detail and luster. Visitors should feel enchanted and intrigued, brought along on an exciting journey of discovery into a past world. Audiences will be rewarded for "investigating" furniture pieces, their construction and their use in detail. They should be able to use their hands to feel texture, heft, and how things go together. The pace should be compact but intense, with about 30 minutes spent in the show on an average visit, at least a third of that time in looking at objects or engaging in interactives rather than reading text. Individual discovery and examination is promoted most often, with a few well-placed social moments around interactive experiences. Visitors should describe the experience with words like "fascinating," "surprising," "cool," and be thinking about craftsmanship and creation and its role in making the things around us.

Mystery and discovery is a motif throughout the show. This motif should not be literal or juvenile (science-museum-y) but instead should incorporate images of real evidence with sophisticated design. For instance, an image of the manuscript referring to a piece of furniture can appear on a label, with a transcription of the original words below. These "clues" should be spread abundantly through the show.

Key Content

- The account books - key to everything
- Block front desk and bookcase (Met loan)
-
- Any specific terminology need explaining?
 - Cabinetmaker
 - Joiner/joinery
 - “Bureau, desk, chest, case furniture”-- any terms of art for basic furniture forms should always be clearly defined; we should not assume everyone already understands specific terms
 - Woods/materials - define mahogany, any other materials in terms of origin and qualities
- What contextual framework (historical, social, economic etc), if any, will visitors need to engage with to gain deeper understanding?
 - 18th century Salem - a town with rich people, an international port city
 - Social and gender roles of the time
 - Class structures - elite, merchants, artisans, emerging middle class, workers
 - Historical research - how does it work, what is the process by which new facts are revealed

Design

The show takes a modern perspective on the discovery and reconstruction of a working furniture making practice, so it should veer away from any feel of the historic house setting.

Avoid faux-script lettering and other romantic font styles.

Avoid “restrained elegance” being a dominating style or reverting to neoclassical looking layouts and fonts. Draw design inspiration from both the finished work and the workshop context. Consider incorporating rough-hewn elements, “craft” aesthetic.

Incorporate Gould’s own handwriting, taken from the books.

Labels should be graphics-rich Graphic opportunities include manuscript excerpts, pattern books, joinery diagrams, interior photography, detail photography, carving motifs and inlay patters.

The furnishings are “stars” and occupy pride of place. Because of their tonality, coloration and lighting that offsets, highlights, and reveals detail in “brown furniture” is needed. The furniture works should glow.

Include space for mechanical interactives, especially joinery samples.

Some vignettes in which small areas display furniture in a use context - with wallpapering and period detail - may be used in Thematic Section III.

At least twice, display a piece of furniture in an unconventional way - “exploded view” chair, chest with drawers open, out, or placed on their sides to reveal the interior, chair or table inverted to reveal the underside, etc.

Interpretive Devices and Media

1. Workbench

The niche in the Barton gallery will be home to a media-based interactive workbench. This will incorporate video, touchable objects, and RFID as a cueing device. It will provide a small immersive environment focusing on the workshop context for the production of the objects in the gallery, and on the tools and techniques used by Gould and his master craftsmen. See the Interactive Device Brief for detail.

2. Storytelling Desk

Situated in the main gallery, the storytelling desk will give visitors the experience of sitting at a desk similar to ones made by Gould. Visitors will be invited to explore the drawers, cubbyholes, and spaces within the desk and doing so will gradually reveal the story of a wedding order placed with Gould. Deliverable in either analog form (with written text and 3D replica objects) or media-driven form (with RFID elements and screens), or a combination of both, this interactive will use objects as tokens through which discrete but related content is revealed, creating a full story. See the Interactive Device Brief for full detail.

3. Joinery examples

In the main gallery, visitors will be able to touch and assemble examples of two or more types of joinery used by Gould. Since joinery was one of the distinctive elements of Gould’s work, accompanying interpretation should describe the role of the joinery in identifying Gould as a maker, while also giving visitors a tactile experience of a tight-fitting joint to admire and to better understand how it works.

4. Active graphics/labels

The should should incorporate several opportunities for active graphics and labels. These could include

- a. Looking for patterns and motifs - images from pattern books linked to examples in the objects
- b. Mixing/matching pattern elements to create a final piece - could be done with a slider panel, "exquisite-corps" style, and be associated with the relative cost of different components
- c. Maybe a Mad-Libs style exercise or some other way of "translating" the manuscript entries into modern English?
- d. In section with chairs, have an interactive/touchable label showing the parts of a chairback exploded and fixed into place, or even able to be assembled/disassembled by visitors.

Appendix Three: Exhibition Interpretation Schedule, Tate Britain

Barbara Hepworth
24 June – 25 October 2015. Linbury Galleries
Exhibition Interpretation Schedule

Date	Curatorial	Interpretation	Design Studio	Audio Guide
w/c 09 Mar		Interpretation / Studio meet to discuss graphic treatment		Curatorial / Interpretation / Antenna kick off meeting
w/c 16-Mar	Wall texts, labels and captions first draft sent to Interpretation (16 Mar)			
w/c 23-Mar		Wall texts, labels and captions editing	Graphic treatment produced. Signed off by all	
Easter break w/c 30-Mar				
Easter break w/c 06-Apr				
w/c 13-Apr				Draft stop list delivered
w/c 20-Apr	Wall texts, labels, captions, other texts (inc credits, events) signed off by Curatorial and Interpretation. Sent to Studio			Curator interviews recorded
w/c 27-Apr		Exhibition leaflet content produced		Music permissions finalised
w/c 04-May	Exhibition leaflet content signed off by Curatorial and Interpretation. Sent to Studio		Studio produces wall texts, labels and captions, other texts	First draft of script delivered
w/c 11-May		Final edits of wall texts, labels and captions, other texts	Studio sends first draft of exhibition leaflet to Interpretation	Curators and Interpretation discuss first draft
w/c 18-May	Exhibition leaflet signed off, sent to printer		Final layout of wall texts, labels and captions, other texts	Feedback on draft script to Antenna
w/c 25-May	All wall texts signed off		Leaflet sent to print	
w/c 1-Jun			All texts and graphics sent to print	Second draft of script delivered
w/c 8-Jun				Recording narrator
w/c 15-Jun	Texts back from printers, install			Final draft
w/c 22 Jun	Exhibition opens			Walkthrough / Final sign off

Appendix Four: Interview Schedule



Interview Questions

Thank you for agreeing to take part in an interview as part of my PhD research on the production of interpretation in museums of art. The questions below are intended as a guide, so we may not cover them all or you may wish to add your own thoughts and ideas as we go through them. Please feel free to stop me at any time if you are unsure of a question or need clarification.

- 1.) To begin, could you tell me a little bit about your job? What is your job title, how long have you worked here, and what are your main roles?
- 2.) What would you say is the overall mission or vision of the [museum]?
- 3.) Could you tell me your opinion or views on what you believe 'interpretation' to be, in the context of art museums?
- 4.) What would you say is the [museum]'s overarching approach to interpretation? How has this changed in recent years?
- 5.) Can you tell me about the *process* of producing interpretation for exhibitions and displays? For example, who is involved in the process and how do you coordinate? How do you decide what the content or main messages will be?
- 6.) How do you think the organisational structure at the [museum] influences the stories or perspectives on art that are presented through exhibitions and displays?
- 7.) Have there been any recent changes in the organisation, and if so, do you think changes in the organisation have led to a change in the kinds of stories and perspectives on art that are offered?
- 8.) How would you say the [museum]'s approach to interpreting art compares to its organisational peers?
- 9.) Is there anything you feel I've missed or would like to add?

Appendix Five: Participant Information Sheet



Participant Information Sheet

Today's Date: _____

The Production of Interpretation in Museums of Art: PhD Research Project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council

Researcher: Jennifer Locke, Newcastle University

Contact details: email: j.l.locke@newcastle.ac.uk phone: + [REDACTED]

Supervisors: Prof Christopher Whitehead, Dr. Rhiannon Mason and Dr. Areti Galani, School of Arts and Cultures, International Centre for Cultural and Heritage Studies at Newcastle University

Thank you for agreeing to find out more about being a participant in my PhD research.

About the project

I am researching the ways in which interpretation is produced at three major museums of art in the UK, the Netherlands and the United States. I have chosen your museum as one of my case studies, and hope that I can work with you to do in-depth research that will provide insight into how museum staff produce interpretation for displays and exhibitions.

In each museum (The Peabody Essex Museum, Tate Britain and The Rijksmuseum), I hope to do the following:

- 1.) Interview key staff at the museum, in particular education and curatorial staff;
- 2.) Examine key planning documents, such as interpretive plans, exhibition plans and learning/education plans;
- 3.) Spend time in the galleries, collecting data from interpretive resources and displays.

The information I gather from these sources will help in my analysis, which will appear in my final thesis. In its form as a PhD thesis, it will not be published, but it may be in future. I will not be carrying out any visitor studies as part of the research.

What is involved in participating

I would like to interview 3 - 4 people from education, curation and interpretation departments at your institution. If you agree to be interviewed, I will ask you a series of open-ended questions about the way in which you and your team work. I will provide the list of questions beforehand so you can think about them ahead of time. Each interview should take between 45 minutes and one hour.

All answers would be kept completely confidential. I would like to record each interview using an audio recording device. If you do not feel comfortable with this, please let me know. If you prefer me not to use your real name, a pseudonym can be used. If at any time during the interview you wish to withdraw, you may do so.

Afterwards, you will have the opportunity to comment on an audio copy of the interview. You will also receive an Informed Consent document to sign before the start of the interview.

Usage of data

All data collected during interviews would be stored on a password-protected hard drive until my return to Newcastle. At this time all data would be transferred to the University's secure server. At no time would anyone aside from myself access the data. All data collected would be kept until the completion of my PhD, at which time it would be destroyed. Again, where requested, all names will be changed for reasons of confidentiality and anonymity and identifying information removed.

I would be happy to talk to you by telephone, Skype or email if you require further information.

My contact details are:

Jennifer Locke

j.l.locke@ncl.ac.uk, tel [REDACTED]

If you wish to speak to my primary PhD supervisor, you can contact Prof Christopher Whitehead: (chris.whitehead@ncl.ac.uk), tel + [REDACTED]

Appendix Six: Informed Consent Form



Informed Consent

Participation in interviews with researcher Jennifer Locke, Newcastle University, as part of a PhD project on the production of interpretation in museums of art

I, the undersigned, confirm that (please tick box as appropriate):

1.	I have read and understood the information about the project, as provided in the Information Sheet dated _____.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project and my participation.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	I voluntarily agree to participate in the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	I understand I can withdraw at any time without giving reasons and that I will not be penalised for withdrawing nor will I be questioned on why I have withdrawn.	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	The procedures regarding confidentiality have been clearly explained (e.g. use of names, pseudonyms, anonymisation of data, etc.) to me.	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.	If applicable, separate terms of consent for interviews, audio, video or other forms of data collection have been explained and provided to me.	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.	The use of the data in research, publications, sharing and archiving has been explained to me.	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.	I understand that other researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the data and if they agree to the terms I have specified in this form.	<input type="checkbox"/>
9.	Select only one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I would like my name used and understand what I have said or written as part of this study will be used in reports, publications and other research outputs so that anything I have contributed to this project can be recognised. • I do not want my name used in this project. 	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
10.	I, along with the Researcher, agree to sign and date this informed consent form.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Participant:

Name of Participant Signature Date

Researcher:

Name of Researcher Signature Date

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