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Entering the Mystery – *Helsinki Noir*, a fictional detective story created in a museum space

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Abstract

Helsinki Noir – A Crime to Solve (17.9.2015–9.1.2017) at the Amos Anderson Art Museum in Helsinki was an example of a contemporary museum exhibition where fictional storytelling took a novel and emphasised approach. The exhibition, scripted by the curator, was built around a fictional murder mystery set in 1930s Helsinki. Coupled with lots of textual material and an open ending, the story called upon reader-visitors to assume the role of detective. The nature of the detective genre itself invited visitors to participate, fill in the gaps and thus co-author the exhibition narrative. This chapter analyses how textual elements and a multimodal museum exhibition design were used to provide visitors with the sense of a sequential storyline that could be read as an embodied version of detective fiction. This illuminates some of the special narrative features of museum exhibitions: their storytelling potential combines multiple sensory and semiotic channels, genuine artefacts, spatiality, temporality, full-bodied experience, interactivity and social experience.

Helsinki Noir included elements promoting immersion, interactivity and co-creation, one manifestation of this being a writing contest for upper-secondary school students to produce optional endings, incorporating the winning text into the exhibition booklet as an epilogue. I argue that *Helsinki Noir* aids our understanding of how fictionality, open subjectivity and changing the narrative role of the visitor can be used as a tool for audience engagement, and how certain textual strategies reflect contemporary ideology to discuss and share some of museums' institutional authority with their visitors.

Keywords: exhibition narrative, fiction, embodiment, spatial storytelling, audience engagement

Introduction

As a storytelling environment, museum exhibitions differentiate themselves from many other art forms, such as literature and cinema. Museums let their visitors encounter authentic objects in a multi-sensory manner and in a physical environment that is simultaneously intimate and social. The museum architecture and multimedia elements can be invested with meaning, and the whole exhibition narrative typically unravels through the movements and actions of

1. This chapter has been peer reviewed.

visitors, appealing to their many senses (on multisensoriality, see Levent & Pascual-Leone 2014). Museums have an institutional role in mediating accurate and research-based information around their collections. Therefore, subjectivity and fictionality might not strike us as typical expectations linked with museum narratives. However, storytelling is seen as an increasingly important tool for creating engaging and resonating museum experiences (Bedford 2014). What happens when a fictional detective story becomes the main theme of an art museum exhibition and visitors are invited to co-author the narrative? How does crime fiction engage the reader-visitor?

In this chapter, I analyse the exhibition *Helsinki Noir – A Crime to Solve of the Amos Anderson Art Museum*² as a multimedia text and a spatialised application of crime fiction. In addition to a theoretical background of museum studies and detective fiction criticism, my analysis is supported by a theme interview I conducted in 2018 with Susanna Luojus (interview 1), the museum curator and creator of *Helsinki Noir*. In this semi-structured interview, my questions concerned issues such as the exhibition process from the curator's perspective, and especially the ideas behind choosing the detective fiction genre as a mediating strategy for art. Through personal visiting and documentation, I have taken into account the various elements of the exhibition, such as displayed artworks, lighting, audio material, as well as architectural and spatial elements linked with the narrative. I also apply an artefact review (Thomas & Koskinen-Koivisto 2016, pp. 65–66), a combination of exhibition texts, leaflets, online information and other associated material.³

My main objectives are twofold. Firstly, to explore the strategies by which fictional storytelling contributes to the exhibition experience and audience engagement in meaningful ways. Secondly, to show that spatial and embodied qualities of the museum exhibition as a medium add layers to textual narrative as well. I find that the physicality of reading museum narratives is particularly interesting in the case of *Helsinki Noir*, a murder mystery, as detective fiction often emphasises the corporeality of both its victims and detectives (Plain 2001, p. 9). On a textual level, *Helsinki Noir* is a classic and arguably quite conservative example of a detective story. Yet, I argue that by providing a fully embodied experience, and thereby combining the elements and strengths of both the detective fiction genre and the museum exhibition narrative as a medium, *Helsinki Noir* established new kinds of relationships with its reader-visitors, inviting them to co-author the mystery narrative.

2. Amos Anderson (1878–1961) was a Swedish-speaking Finnish businessperson, newspaper publisher and patron of the arts. The Amos Anderson Art Museum functioned in Helsinki during the years 1965–2017. In 2018, the association founded by Anderson, *Föreningen Konstsamfundet*, opened a new museum, *Amos Rex*, in Helsinki.

3. I am grateful to Susanna Luojus and the museum *Amos Rex* for allowing me to consult archival material of this exhibition, including the curator's documentation of the exhibition-making processes, working stage exhibition texts and floor plans.

Detective fiction is a genre known to address hermeneutic activity, narrativity and intertextuality (Pyrhönen 1994, pp. 36–41). Typical of detective fiction, the Helsinki Noir exhibition script is a clear example of Barthes' hermeneutic code, which consists of various terms suggesting an enigma and aiming to hold reader-visitors in suspense throughout the narrative (Barthes 1990, pp. 18–20). Part of the hermeneutic code, a desire to find out, has been suggested to create a driving force for reading crime fiction. Therefore, I argue that Helsinki Noir gives us an insight into the possibilities of using fictional storytelling in museums as a method for audience engagement. To explore how a fictional detective story took physical space in the exhibition, I look at how the plot was divided into chapters along a circulation route, through textual elements and multimodal exhibition design. To address the question of audience engagement, I look at how the exhibition concept called for active visitor participation on several levels, both textual and other. Here, I apply a view of interactivity as a dialogic and reflective exchange between reader-visitors and exhibition elements, instead of physical or mechanical interaction (Roppola 2012, pp. 44–45). Firstly, the application of the crime fiction genre implies co-authoring from the reader's part in following the clues and solving the mystery. In Helsinki Noir, visitors were placed in the role of detective and thus invited to make a co-authoring reading of the museum narrative. Secondly, as the enigma only had partial closure and was left open-ended, visitors' output and imagination were needed for full disclosure. By organising a writing contest for young people and publishing the winning text as an appendix to the exhibition booklet distributed to all visitors, the museum showed an interest in and an appreciation of the visitor perspective. Thirdly, both texts and other exhibition design elements were used to add immersion and excitement throughout the circulation route. Furthermore, intertextuality, classical detective story topoi and detailed Helsinki-centredness added possible points of reference to make the exhibition experience more engaging and personal.

This chapter is part of an on-going discussion about new narratives and multiple voices in museums. As someone with a background in comparative literature and museum studies, I have taken an interest in fictionalisation and playfully innovative museum narratives. Authors and artists from Henry James to Marcel Duchamp, Thomas Bernhard and beyond have used the museum as a setting or metaphor over the centuries. In recent decades, museums themselves have become more active in experimenting with texts and the museum exhibition medium, as my examples in this chapter illustrate (see also Roberts 1997, pp. 76–77). Often, this is done in co-operation with artist-curators or artists-in-residence, but as Helsinki Noir showcases, curators themselves can lean towards a more creative style as well. One of the interesting aspects about openly fictional museum narratives is connected to the inherent discrepancy between fictional storytelling and the institutional role of museums in promoting balanced and research-based information about their collections. The Museums Act and ICOM's *Code of Ethics for Museums* highlight the mission of museums in con-

veying reliable, well-founded and accurate information in their exhibitions.⁴ It is relevant to ask how fiction fits with this mission. This is an on-going discussion, as many contemporary museums use fictional storytelling as part of their exhibition approaches. There are even museums built around a fictional concept. Well-known international cases include Orhan Pamuk's Museum of Innocence⁵ (Turkish Masumiyet Müzesi) in Istanbul, and Dennis Severs' House⁶ in Spitalfields, London. Both Pamuk and Severs have created a physical museum and a relating book explaining the fictional contexts of their collections. These places have become popular attractions that open up explorations to the chiasmic relations between history, memory, imagination and personal and collective experience.

Already in 1995, Blais (1995, p. 314) raised the question of the possible poetic function of an exhibition text. Hourston Hanks (2012, p. 21) also asks what happens as a text goes beyond basic visitor information and collection interpretation and becomes "the very content, method or meaning" of a museum exhibition. Here, I ask a similar question around fictional museum texts. What is to be expected or gained by adopting a popular fictional genre instead of a so-called typical museum text? I maintain that introducing a high level of subjectivity and fictionality into museum exhibition narratives is not just about enter- or edutainment, but that it participates in a larger discussion about museums as knowledge-producers and mediators of collections and research. It is part of a trend that places visitors and personal experience in the focus of museum exhibitions. Multiplicity of textual styles highlight the importance of narratives and resonance in the context of both the museum experience and museum learning (MacLeod, Hourston Hanks & Hale 2012; Falk & Dierking 2000, pp. 177–189). This is a logical continuation for development in fields such as museum pedagogy, curation and the study of museum texts, as well as in redefining the mission of museums. The study of narrative has been introduced to new disciplines, such as architecture, cultural studies and museum studies, giving way to new understandings of how museums function as narrative spaces. Before entering the crime scene of Helsinki Noir, I look at some of these developments.

Theoretical Background Behind Creative Museum Texts

The museum environment is a powerful medium for storytelling purposes, because it provides an embodied, multi-sensorial spatial experience among authentic artworks and artefacts. MacLeod, Hourston Hanks and Hale (2012) see narrative as a promising mediating strategy in museums, a way to create museum environments that encourage engagement, memory and imagination.

4. ICOM *Code of Ethics for Museums*, available online at <https://icom.museum/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ICOM-code-En-web.pdf> [Last accessed 4 March 2021]

5. Curiously enough, the Museum of Innocence received the European Museum of the Year award in 2014. I find that this reflects the recognition of the power of storytelling in museums of today.

6. According to *Dennis Severs' House's* website, Severs (1948–1999) referred to the time capsule creation as a still-life drama: <http://www.denisseversonhouse.co.uk/the-tour> [Last accessed 4 March 2021]

They accurately point out that narratives enable us to bridge some of the many gaps that museums deal with: temporal, geographical, cultural and physical (MacLeod, Hourston Hanks & Hale 2012, p. xxiii). The example of Helsinki Noir shows us that museum narratives do not have to be limited to bridging gaps in information, but can also have goals such as promoting interactivity, the aesthetic pleasure of language or intermedial relations between text and artworks. Especially with new digital technology, there can be many types of stories for various audiences in an exhibition space, and some of these can be fictional, be it a dramatized interpretation or re-enactment of history, an artistic intervention or a piece of literature. Hein (2002, pp. 168–169) suggests that drama and theatrical techniques can provide a way of engaging visitors emotionally, intellectually and sometimes even physically, thus bringing them closer to the contents of museums. I argue that the same applies to creative museum texts.

Especially since the 1980s, several significant shifts have affected our understanding of museum narratives. Both theoretical and practical, they have influenced, for instance, museum architecture, exhibition design and the study of museum texts. The so-called narrative and spatial turns have brought novel theoretical and interdisciplinary approaches to museum exhibitions and how artefacts and space interact, in fields such as architecture, art history and comparative literature (Ryan, Foote & Azaryahu 2016). In approaching museum communication and reading the museum exhibition as a text, I continue the discussion of, e.g., cultural theorist and critic Mieke Bal (1996) and linguist Louise Ravelli (2006). Another important approach is to look at the museum exhibition as narrative space. Researchers such as Tzortzi (2015), Roppola (2012), Ryan, Foote and Azaryahu (2016) and Bünz (2015) have all explored how museum architecture and spatial design can support, add and convey museum meanings in exhibitions. They have shown that through mindful planning, visual axes, corridors and transitions can become meaningful and affect the pace of a walking tour. It is also interesting to see how circulation routes and bodily movement are connected to plot development. There is a lot to discover from the viewpoint of literature as well. By looking at museum narratives, we gain new perspectives on story-space-relations and interactive storytelling. My research continues with this line of research, combining museum studies with the study of narrative. Yet so far, most of the research has been concentrated on the most typical museum exhibition narratives, such as chronological narratives in history museums. Although chronology and periodisation are still characteristic ways of organising museum exhibitions, other ways have started to gain importance as well, including the thematic exhibition. My contribution is to look at cases where textual narrative takes new roles, namely when a fictional text becomes the focus of an exhibition.

From Being an Authority Towards Co-authoring – Textual strategies for discussing the institutional voice

From the perspective of museum studies, we can point out that both pedagogical and museological shifts have affected contemporary museum narratives. The so-called new museology, starting in the 1980s, has brought in a critical reassessment of power relations, knowledge and representation in museums, leading to closer scrutiny of display techniques and labelling (Stam 2005, pp. 54–69, pp. 63–65). Instead of top-down master narratives, more attention is given to microhistories, groups that have previously been marginalised in official history, and more communal exhibition processes (MacLeod, Hourston Hanks & Hale 2012; Svanberg 2010). A large cultural trend, story-centredness, can be linked with museums moving their emphasis from objects to visitors and experiences (Henning 2006, pp. 90–91). As part of this process, instead of focusing on their authenticity, artefacts may be used even as reproductions and virtual models. In an experience-oriented or story-centred exhibition, the coherence of the story is emphasised over any specific artefact (Henning 2006, pp. 91–92). This applies to Helsinki Noir, which can be described as an experience-oriented or story-centred museum exhibition. In Helsinki Noir, artworks were largely used as supporting a fictional story, providing scenes and characters, corresponding to descriptions in literature.⁷

From the perspective of museum texts, Roberts (1997, pp. 1–6) traces a significant shift in museum narratives back to the 1970s and 1980s, reflected by visitor studies becoming more common and museum educators being introduced to exhibition teams. Introducing more visitor perspective alongside traditional curatorial practices led the way towards co-existing interpretations and epistemologies, taking steps towards shared authority over museum meanings and acknowledging that the very act of presentation is fundamentally interpretive (Roberts 1997, p. 2, pp. 72–75). As contemporary museums are striving for more inclusive and interactive practices, adopting multiple voices and styles in museum texts makes museums' communication more transparent, both from the viewpoint of museums and the exhibition medium. Openly fictional museum texts can be one way of emphasising the constructed nature of museum exhibitions, by drawing attention to their literary and institutional origins. Such self-reflexivity can encourage visitors to construct their own narratives about what they see (Roberts 1997, p. 143; Roppola 2012, p. 27).

One recent trend having influenced a rising level of creative museum texts and fictionality (such as in Helsinki Noir) is the popularity of the artist-as-curator (Tzortzi 2015, pp. 60–64; see also Paunu, this volume). Although museums

7. Although paintings and sculptures had an exhibit label, the story did not explicitly encourage visitors to read them. In fact, reading the labels could have caused an unnecessary pause to the plot, similar to long descriptions in a realist novel. Labels drew attention to the museum environment and thereby to the structures and practices underlying the exhibition medium itself, causing breaks in the visitor's immersion in the storyline.

have presented various storytelling elements before, we are witnessing a growth in creative museum texts done in co-operation, both in the form of audience interaction (visitor labels, Twitter hashtags, etc.) and artist/author/poet interventions, and in general, introducing a higher level of subjectivity in the museum exhibition. Often, these exhibitions show self-awareness of museum exhibition processes, playing with the ideas of how museal display and the museum institution influence artefacts. Recent examples of playful use of popular genres in Finland include the Tampere Art Museum's counter-fictional art exhibition *Is This for Real?* (20.5.2011–28.8.2011), which was curated and imaginatively scripted by science fiction novelist Johanna Sinisalo (2011). In Serlachius Museum Gösta's exhibition *The Model and the Mad Painter* (14.6.2014–7.5.2017), novelist Riikka Ala-Harja's fictional texts were focalised through models in the artworks, thus giving an active role and voice to those usually in a passive position of being looked at. In Turku Castle, the exhibition *A Few Words about Women* (8.3.2019–8.3.2020) popularised recent scholarship about women of 17th century Turku by using women's magazine styled texts. To complete the exhibition experience, on sale at the museum shop was a whole glossy-paged pastiche issue with articles such as interviews, love stories and career or fashion tips.

In Helsinki Noir, the museum curator took on the role of author (or became the curator-as-artist), by inventing a creative fictional story around both pre-existing and custom-made artworks. However, not only was the exhibition built around artworks, it was also partly generated by them. As the curator set out to make a fictional crime story, they commissioned the crime, or in this case, the victim, from contemporary artist Jarno Vesala. Vesala had a free hand to come up with a mysterious crime scene, and after the work was created, curator Luojus decided on the type of crime that would become the starting point of Helsinki Noir. There is interaction, or dialogue, as Bal (1996) might put it, between curator, artist, artworks and eventually visitors, as I shall discuss further.⁸ Openness to such interaction has become an increasingly important part of current museum work. In what follows, I look at Helsinki Noir as a case study of a fictional museum exhibition text that encourages dialogic interaction.

Entering the Mystery of Helsinki Noir – Introducing the concept

The exhibition Helsinki Noir – A Crime to Solve was scripted and curated by Susanna Luojus and built around a fictional murder mystery set in 1930s Helsinki. Upon entering the Amos Anderson Art Museum and purchasing their ticket, visitors were given an exhibition guide called *Helsinki Noir – A Deadly Proposal* (Luojus 2015) that mimics pocket-book detective stories (figure 1). This booklet, as well as the whole exhibition, was complete with art deco style

8. According to Bal (1996, p. 3), museum exhibition can be regarded as discourse, and the gestures of showing and display can be understood as speech acts. Bal sees the museal display as a form of conversation where a first person, the narrator, tells a second person, the visitor, something about a third person, the object on display (ibid, pp. 3–4). All these parties bring something to the conversation.

graphic design by Minna Luoma. The dark blueish tones emphasised a sense of mystery and the visuality drew links to film noir imagery. The booklet included the exhibition story in three languages (Finnish, Swedish, English), a total of 64 pages, which is a considerable length for a museum exhibition leaflet. The story was divided into 13 chapters that each had a corresponding wall number and thus reading place in the exhibition. The narrative was sequential, a combination of literary text and spatial elements. The reader-visitor walked along a route where suggested points for stopping and reading had been marked.

In detective stories, the labyrinth is a recurrent motif, and the act of detection is often epitomised by finding the “red thread”. Etymologically, the word *clue* refers to a ball of thread, such as the one helping Theseus out of the mythological maze, leading to the detection staple, the clue, something leading you out of a maze or helping you solve a problem (Irwin 1994, pp. 176–177). To find the solution of *Helsinki Noir*, visitors had to orient themselves through partially maze-like architecture. Some of this was undoubtedly due to the museum building’s physical layout, but some was the effect of scenography (such as the use of added walls, roughly resembling residential blocks of the Töölö district, with colours matching a painting by Marcus Collin). The exhibition started on the 4th floor of the Amos Anderson Art Museum, then continued half a floor downstairs, and finally led to floor 4½, where it ended. The wall texts and floor stickers helped orient visitors. Nevertheless, there was a possibility for visitors to start from different floors and disregard the suggested route. Museum guides helped visitors to minimise the risk of confusion.

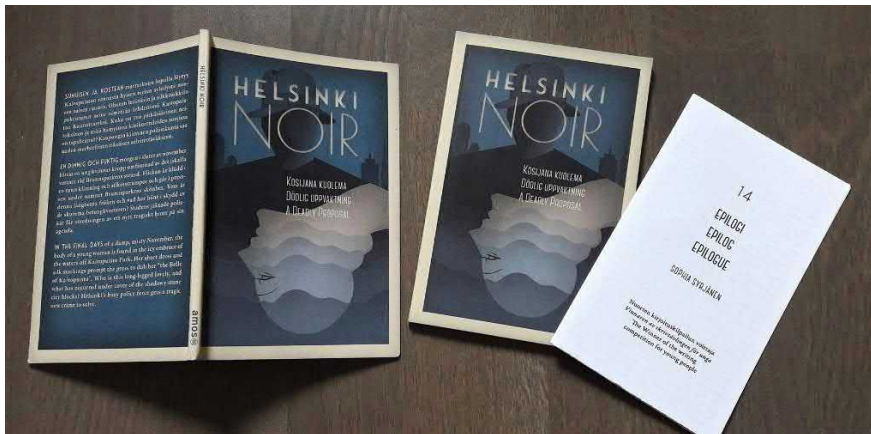


Figure 1. The booklet *Helsinki Noir – A Deadly Proposal* (Luojus 2015). The winning entry for the museum’s writing contest for young people was added to the booklet as an epilogue. Photo: Sanna-Mari Niemi.

At the entrance, an introductory wall text explained that the exhibition concept “makes the viewer part of a crime drama”, and is a “fictitious dramaturgic composition, partly based on a series of historical crimes”. The historical crime series in question was revealed at the end of the exhibition and is discussed later in this

chapter. As the suite of the introduction text and the subtitle of the exhibition suggested, reader-visitors were encouraged to participate in solving the mystery.

In a theatrical manner, the story began as the curtain was lifted (this time, by visitors entering the exhibition). In the first exhibition room, there was another curtain, and visitors would find themselves at the scene of a sinister mystery. Shall we step into the darkness?

At the Crime Scene – The reader-visitor as detective

Floating in the murky water was a long-legged young woman in a short dress and silk stockings, her hair spread out like a fan. Her face had that serene, coolly peaceful expression so typical of many of the recently drowned. (Luojuus 2015, p. 44)



Figure 2. Jarno Vesala: *Behind the Curtain* (2015). Mixed media, including a video projection, audio and selected objects. In the back of the installation, the projection reveals the victim's corpse floating on the waves. Amos Rex Archives/ Photo: Stella Ojala

The story begins on a damp and misty November night in 1930s Helsinki with a sinister discovery. In the first exhibition room, a custom-made multimedia installation by Jarno Vesala called *Behind the Curtain* (figure 2) became visible and played with darkness and sweeping light illuminating the elements in sequence. On the front right was a dressing table with a mirror and some small items, including a set of letters. In the back of the installation emerged the body of a young woman, seemingly washed ashore by the undulating waves. The installation itself was ambiguous, but texts directed reader-visitors by raising the key questions: who is this “Belle of Kaivopuisto”⁹, as the press dubs her, and – most importantly – whodunit?

9. Kaivopuisto (Swedish: Brunnsparken) is one of the city's oldest parks, located in the Southern tip of the Helsinki peninsula.

The beginning follows a long tradition of detective fiction by showing the discovery of a young and highly aestheticized female body and describing how it creates a sense of disorder in the community that needs to be amended (Plain 2001; Bronfen 1992). The victim is aestheticized both stylistically in the text (with terms such as “long-legged lovely” or “quite innocent and attractive in demeanour”, Luoju 2015, p. 44), and through the installation. It is an artwork, meant to be looked at. “Reading” this body opens an interesting duality. Like an artwork that becomes readable for viewers and connoisseurs of art, in detective fiction the victim’s corpse is textualized for the clever detective to read, becoming a corpse-as-text (Plain 2001, pp. 12–13; Bronfen 1992, pp. 6–7). And just like museum visitors, the fictional public swarms around the crime scene, camera shutters click and the press is “greedy for headlines that would sell papers” (Luoju 2015, p. 44). This echoes how the detective story genre has been accused of voyeurism; it pivots on people’s appetite for crime, murder and the macabre, and the solving of the crime means going through all clues, including private lives and intimate documents (Pyrhönen 1999, p. 156). The museum utilizes the same curiosity to motivate the reader-visitors of Helsinki Noir.

The discovery of the body launches a puzzle of solving the crime, or a game between the reader-visitor detecting and the curator-narrator trying to keep the suspense going until the final revelation at the end. Part of the reading pact around classical detective fiction (unlike thrillers) is the fair-play method, which implies that the reader must be given every clue, so that there is a fair chance for them to solve the case (Sayers 1988, p. 73; Pyrhönen 1994, pp. 17–18). This aspect may have encouraged museum visitors to follow the given exhibition itinerary in its entirety. According to Luoju (interview 1), many visitors wanted to follow the storyline in its intended itinerary to see how the story unfolds.

The plot includes multiple elements of a classic detective story. The linguistic level emphasises this, although the old-fashioned style of the narration can best be seen in the original, Finnish version of the text. As visitors walked around the three exhibition floors, they found marked places for reading the next chapter in the booklet and could look at artworks providing milieus for the events and features for the main characters. The victim is quickly recognised as Kaarina Vehmakoski, a young bank cashier (in old-fashioned Finnish *pankkineiti*). During police investigations, Vehmakoski’s flatmate Elsa Rikman sheds light on her character and background, as well as the events of the weeks leading to her disappearance. The letters which were seen in the first installation become a key to the mystery. After answering a newspaper advertisement and starting a passionate correspondence, Kaarina Vehmakoski has fallen in love with a stylish and continental businessman called Karl Eugen Kramer. A recurrent theme and clue in the chapters is money: possessions of Kramer, Vehmakoski’s inheritance, gifts exchanged between the lovers, financial planning, not without troubles, for their future home and investing in a lot in the developing Kulosaari area. Eventually, the man turns out to be a confidence trickster named Karl Oskar Pettersson. Several crimes intertwine in the end: the trickster swindling Vehmakoski’s inherited money, an embezzlement of almost a hundred thousand

marks from the bank where Vehmakoski worked before her untimely death and finally, the death of Vehmakoski. The trickster is caught and his seduction plan revealed, providing a partial dénouement to the narrative. Kramer-Petersson is found in possession of a large sum of money, and evidence suggest that Vehmakoski is likely to be the person behind the embezzlement. But was her death a suicide or murder? As this is left unknown to the police at the end of the booklet text, visitors could come up with their own theories. I analyse this aspect more in a subsequent section about participation.

In addition to the classic whodunit, Helsinki Noir includes elements of the hard-boiled detective novel and film noir. Already the *Noir* in the title suggests a close link, and the open-endedness accentuates the connection. In the hard-boiled tradition, the quest for solving the crime often becomes more central than the actual completion of the plot; emphasis is on the detective's character, vulnerability and inner struggle to find reason in a crime-ridden society (Grella 1988, p. 115). Whereas the classic detective story typically happens in a bucolic setting, hard-boiled novels focus on cities of stone (Grella 1988, p. 116). Helsinki Noir contrasts an urban locale epitomised by “shadowy stone city blocks” with the countryside: Vehmakoski has moved from central Finland to Helsinki's Kallio, with “old wooden-house areas now riven by great canyon-like streets with their massive residential blocks” (Luojus 2018, p. 45). This symbolises the mixing of the two detective fiction types in Helsinki Noir, while describing the city's development in the 1930s.

Intertextuality and Intermediality in Helsinki Noir

Detective fiction is a genre known for intertextuality (Pyrhönen 1994, pp. 36–48), and this level was evident in Helsinki Noir. The script includes elements from the historic 1930s Helsinki, but also applies popular crime fiction elements found in literature and film. Among other sources of inspiration, the curator Luojus (interview 1) named the classical series of *Inspector Palmu* (*Komisario Palmu*), a character created by Finnish author Mika Waltari and also known from films by the Finnish director Matti Kassila in the 1960s. The city of Helsinki plays an important part in the Palmu stories, and this is something Helsinki Noir shares. The curator also browsed through the *Nordic Crime Chronicles* (*Pohjolan poliisi kertoo*), including police cases and investigation processes in the Nordic countries. Old radio programmes and video clips from 1930s provided inspiration regarding period language (interview 1).

There are several types of text in Helsinki Noir. First there is a paratextual introduction in a neutral style, explaining the exhibition concept. Second is the booklet by Luojus, written in classic detective fiction style, filled with adjectives and descriptive nouns that render the style visual and helped reader-visitors in making connections with the artworks on display: “The country people's market barrows bathed in red by the morning sun and bearing their root vegetables, round heads of cabbage and crispy globes of lettuce, reminded her of childhood summers” (Luojus 2015, p. 47). The exhibition provided a multisensory experi-

ence; in addition to texts, paintings and statues, locations were made more vivid through the use of custom-made audio material by sound designer Johanna Storm. Among the soundscapes included were central sites of downtown Helsinki: the market square near the seaside, the Swedish Theatre and the department store Stockmann with its brand-new lifts. Third is the intimate correspondence between Kaarina Vehmakoski and the trickster Karl Eugen Kramer (or small-time criminal Karl Oskar Pettersson), given for visitors to read as evidence. It was displayed in a strikingly red room, almost like a darkroom, allowing a picture of their relationship to develop from the letter papers (chapter 5).¹⁰ This correspondence was based on historical letters, as the character of Kramer-Pettersson has a real-life counterpart from Finnish criminal history. In the final exhibition room of Helsinki Noir (after the last scene of the story), a documentary film, newspapers and books were on display, telling about the dubious career of Finland's most famous con artist, Ruben Oskar Auervaara (1906–1964). This confidence trickster fooled several women with fake newspaper ads and lured them to fund his lifestyle. Even the name Auervaara has become a commonplace term in the Finnish language, symbolising a serial seducer.

In addition to intertextuality, there were interesting intermedial connections between the text and artworks. The artworks displayed in the exhibition were given multiple roles, as they were presented as a setting to the fictional story. Visitors could look at them both from an art historical perspective as part of 1910s to 1930s Finnish art (there were discreet object labels with artists' names, dates and techniques) but also as part of the story, providing it with locations, characters and ambiances. The exhibition included several portraits of anonymous models, lending their features to the fictional characters. The examples include Georges von Swetlik's *Portrait of a Woman* (1932) representing the victim Kaarina Vehmakoski, and Anton Lindfors's *Portrait of a Woman* (1926) that gave a face to Vehmakoski's flatmate and friend Elsa Rikman. Yrjö Ollila's *The Clocksmith* (1921) represents Vehmakoski's fiancé Karl-Eugen Kramer as a well-dressed, polished and respectable-looking gentleman, and the display with clocks surrounding the painting supported his story about owning a fine-mechanics company. The final scene shows the man with an ill-fitting suit, disorderly hair and suspiciously lurking eyes (Vesala's installation, see figure 3), suggesting the earlier portraiture was conceivably a red herring or a reflection of Vehmakoski's wishful thinking. In the same scene, Tuomas von Boehm's painting *Marionette* (1948) symbolises the trickster's role as a puppeteer manipulating his victim, accentuating the nightmarish atmosphere.

10. The red room in the context of murder mystery could also be a nod to the wordplay redrum-murder, made famous by Stephen King's novel *The Shining* (1977) and Stanley Kubrick's horror movie with the same title (1980). The room had portraits of the two lovers on opposing walls, and the suitor's portrait, Yrjö Ollila's *The Clocksmith*, was surrounded by loudly ticking clocks. The clocks were associated with Kramer's supposed profession as a fine mechanic, but their sounds also made the atmosphere of the red room pressuring. It reminded one that time was running out: For the lovers that were so keen to start a family, but also for Vehmakoski, because reader-visitors were all too aware of the fact that she was near the end of her life.

The landscapes and statues that were mainly parts or smaller-scale versions of Helsinki's public monuments, along with Vesala's installations, played an important part in facilitating spatio-temporal immersion, transporting reader-visitors onto the scene of the fictional events and minimising the distance between the narrator, addressee and the narrated events. Ryan (2001, pp. 121–130) explains that through spatial immersion, the reader's experience combines their intimate relation with the places depicted and the scene of the events in the story. With the help of museum architecture and spatial design, visibility of the artworks, and bodily movement of the visitor, a sense of place and Helsinki's geography was conveyed through many channels, compared to a text-only representation. Particularly through the combination of texts and Vesala's installations, reader-visitors were taken into the narrative scenes, and the distance between them and the narrated events was minimized. This is a significant asset of museum narratives.

Even though the plot of *Helsinki Noir* is fictional, the curator Luojus wanted to convey historically accurate elements so that visitors had the possibility to either learn or recognise both milieus and phenomena of late 1930s Helsinki, "a lively, rapidly growing capital city" (wall text). During our interview, Luojus (interview 1) explained that locality was an important part of the whole; the artworks, the series of crimes inspiring the fictional story and the whole concept were all rooted in the real history of Helsinki. Luojus mentioned that if they were to produce a similar exhibition in another city or country, they would like to localise the events to make the experience equally engaging. The *Helsinki Noir* booklet includes descriptive passages painting a picture of the city; the development of the workers' district of Kallio, the market square and the tram routes all came from the archives. Details such as "the local tax on Kulosaari was only three pence per Mark" (Luojus 2015, p. 54) and sipping of the *Green Elevator* cocktail, named after a play the characters see at the Swedish theatre (ibid. 53), seem to be inserted into the story partially for the amusement of Helsinki-based or elite readers, but they also render the historic Helsinki more real in the exhibition. The ending of the booklet *Helsinki Noir. A Deadly Proposal* draws links between fiction and real-life criminal history. Before her death, Vehmakoski encounters her suitor briefly in front of the cinema Joukola at Kapteeninkatu 26. After that, all trails linking the two run out, and a winter storm breaks. The corner of this street is infamous for being the location of police murders by the fugitive Steen Christensen in 1997, leading to an extensive police operation throughout southern Finland.¹¹ The corner of Kapteeninkatu street and Tehtaankatu street was filled with candles and flowers after the tragedy. *Helsinki Noir* reminds us how dark history can leave its invisible imprint on the cityscape and thus affect the sense of place.

11. Rytsä P & Harvala J. Yle Elävä arkisto 22.10.2019. Available at <https://yle.fi/aihe/artikkelit/2019/10/21/tehtaankadun-poliisimurhat-jarkyttivat-kansaa-1997> [Last accessed 4 March 2021]

Whodunit? Openness to Visitor Participation

As museum curators plan exhibitions with visitor engagement and interaction in mind, museums' limited control over the museum experience remains as a starting point. Henning (2006, p. 101) reminds us that the "exhibition narrative that visitors enact and embody through their movement may not always be an explicit one, that is, neither explicitly intended by the curators nor explicitly read by visitors". Guided by their horizons of expectation, visitors make individual choices while experiencing the exhibition. They may start the tour from different floors, choose not to read the texts or only read parts of them based on their level of interest, alertness and knowledge.

At the core of Helsinki Noir was the concept of enabling a playful museum exhibition experience for all visitors, even adults. The Amos Anderson Art Museum and curator Luojus had done something similar earlier in the exhibition *Forest Outing* (Finnish: *Metsäretki* 1.3.2013–24.2.2014). The target audience in Forest Outing was families with children, and in addition to nature-themed artworks, the exhibition included hands-on elements, stuffed animal mascots for the tour and a children's book intended to accompany the museum experience and to continue it at home (Luojus 2013). With Helsinki Noir, the main target group was older (interview 1), but the role given to visitors was one that called for imagination and was based on fictional storytelling.

As we look at how museum texts can inspire personal involvement and interactivity with exhibition contents, it is relevant to consider how the text addresses reader-visitors and what kind of roles or positions are implied (Ravelli 2006, p. 71). Are visitors, for instance, supposed to digest predetermined information, or take a more reciprocal or creative role? Positioning reader-visitors is inherently linked with questions of control and authority, even (or especially) when aiming for an active visitor role. The concept of Helsinki Noir was clearly framed, and visitors were expected to follow the story in a certain order, yet the genre expectations and the hermeneutic code linked with detective fiction, as well as the final open-endedness, gave way to varying responses. Visitors were explicitly called upon to participate using the second-person tense ("Come and enter into (sic) the mystery!" as stated in a wall text), starting from the exhibition's subtitle inviting visitors to solve the mystery. The exhibition texts and the accompanying booklet aimed at filling in the blanks. Many of the chapter endings or beginnings provided a hook for continuing, such as at the beginning of chapter 4: "So, who was the man who had been so courteous to Kaarina Vehmakoski in the square?" (Luojus 2015, p. 48), and the ending of chapter 5: "Was life bringing her an unexpected stroke of luck, after all ... ?" (ibid. 50) or ominous statements of the narrator: "It did indeed appear that Kaarina had now found success" (ibid. 52).

As explained earlier, the exhibition gave no right or wrong answers about the whodunit, which emphasised the importance of reader-visitors' imagination. The museum organised a writing competition for young people to produce optional

endings for the story. The competition was marketed to students in comprehensive school and secondary education, especially in their studies of Finnish language and literature. Student groups also came to the museum as part of their literature courses. Even though actual entries in the competition were few (five potential epilogues were sent to the museum), some teachers told the museum staff they used the task in schools as an additional activity after their exhibition visit. The winning text was printed and distributed as part of the booklet (figure 1). The epilogue offers one possible explanation to the mystery.¹² By giving a young visitor's interpretation this kind of recognition, the museum showed a good level of participatory effort and responsiveness in their museum pedagogy.¹³ Perhaps if the competition had been open to all, and the possibility to participate promoted in the exhibition itself, they might have received more texts, which would have given us valuable information about how the story was received and interpreted.

Another way in which competition and locality were related to engagement in Helsinki Noir is that visitors were encouraged to recognise various depictions of early 20th century Helsinki and its surroundings. The exhibition included a questionnaire box for finding missing addresses for the landscape paintings on display. This competition named *Find Helsinki* was both a challenge for visitors and a way for the museum to get new metadata of artworks in their collections. Visitors were also encouraged to choose their favourite artwork in the exhibition, resulting in additional feedback about visitors' responses to the displayed works.

Bodies in the Museum – Reanimating objects through immersive displays

To investigate further the connections between crime fiction and the embodied museum exhibition experience, it is worthwhile to explore Helsinki Noir as part of a longer tradition of immersive and exciting exhibition strategies. At various points in history, museums have been accused of being cemeteries of dead objects. Especially for the early 20th-century modernist and avant-garde movements, museums characterised a reactionary Victorian attachment to the past (Henning 2006, pp. 37–44). Museums preserve and display artefacts from times and lives long gone, and, especially in the case of archaeological and natural historical collections, they literally contain stuffed specimens and human remains (on the latter, see also Wessman, this volume). Therefore, it is not surprising that many developments in the area of exhibition display have originated as an attempt to bring inanimate objects and history to life. This also

12. In Sophia Syrjänen's text, Kaarina Vehmakoski was murdered in cold blood by Kramer-Petterson's wife, due to fear of losing her husband.

13. In *The Participatory Museum* (2010) Nina Simon makes a distinction among contributory, collaborative, co-creative and hosted forms of participation, depending on how much visitors are involved and to what extent museums dictate the outcomes of participation (pp. 190–191). In Helsinki Noir the role of visitors was contributory, as they were solicited to participate in an institutionally-controlled process of completing the exhibition storyline. (See also Viita-aho and Salo, this volume.)

goes for display types such as dioramas or habitat displays, as well as the use of mannequins, tableaux and museum guides in period costumes, to name but a few (Henning 2006; Sandberg 2003). All this puts the choice of crime fiction and the mysterious corpse in an art exhibition in a rather quirky light.

Simulation-based museum displays and crime fiction share a common feature in that they allow access to exciting experiences and events without being subject to physical harm. In an analysis of late 19th and early 20th century wax museum displays, Sandberg explains that the appeal of tableau techniques was that they offered visual access to scenes, without subjecting spectators to any physically harmful effects. “Actually being there could conceivably entail danger, embarrassment, discomfort or other risk to one’s body, depending on the nature of the scene or person depicted” (Sandberg 2003, p. 95). A similar position applies to Helsinki Noir.

The beginning and ending of Helsinki Noir relied on contemporary artist Jarno Vesala’s installations. In the first scene, the body of the victim is behind a curtain, visually available as a reminder of our own bodily vulnerability, yet inaccessible. Particularly the last scene (figure 3) brings to mind a 19th-century wax museum display with mannequins. These displays were often presented in the form of tableaux and even depicted fictional stories, often supported by textual guides.¹⁴ In a pitch-dark room, visitors would unexpectedly meet Kramer, whom they had just learned to be a confidence trickster. The criminal appeared in the same space with visitors, implying that his real-life counterparts have been – and still are – among us. Vesala’s artwork simultaneously showed the character of the story, yet left a safe distance for visitors. An uncanny character with animated expressions and a mumbling voice, the mannequin managed to frighten some visitors, according to the museum staff. The curator explained that excitement was also a hoped-for effect when creating an exciting story (interview 1). Experiencing this kind of excitement can give a cathartic sense of relief, as can reading crime fiction.

14. Display techniques such as life or habitat groups, dioramas and *tableaux* were particularly popular between the 1880s and the First World War. They developed in the context of a more widespread fascination with living pictures, such as early cinema and photography, and could be found in natural history museums, folk-ethnographic museums and open-air museums. For instance, wax museums produced living painting scenes with accurate mannequins. The tableaux would often be linked with a printed guide narrating the displayed events. In Scandinavia, tableaux even depicted fictional characters, such as *Snow White*, *Aladdin*, or H. C. Andersen’s *The Little Match Girl*. Interestingly, wax museums also utilized techniques imitating a cinematic point-of-view shot, or internal focalization, such as lantern slide projections (Sandberg 2003, pp. 4–8, pp. 80–82, pp. 92–95).



Figure 3. Jarno Vesala's artwork, *Photograph Not Taken* (2013), represented the villain of *Helsinki Noir*. It consists of a figure of a man in mixed media, approximately 180 cm high, with moving expressions, background projection and audio elements. Amos Rex Archives/ Photo: Stella Ojala

The ending of the booklet and the physical exhibition led literally to a dead end, calling reader-visitors to reread the initial scene with information gained during the exhibition (Pyrhönen 1999, pp.13–14). This circular narrative structure was highlighted by the two installations with similar aesthetics, representing the victim and villain, and the text both beginning and ending with the icy winds of a winter storm. In the context of detective fiction, the mirror in the first installation becomes a significant motif. Firstly, it symbolises the imaginative identification of the detective, in this case the reader-visitors, with the criminal (or victim), to better understand their motives and solve the crime (Pyrhönen 1999, pp. 31–32). On the dressing table of Kaarina Vehmakoski, it also echoes how the trickster's manipulation was made possible: the con artist recognised and mirrored the hopes and needs of his victim. Vehmakoski could not see past the charming lies to the real man behind the mirror – or, as the title of the piece suggests, *Behind the Curtain*. Finally, as the image reflected in a mirror is an opposite (left being reversed to right), the mirror reminds us of the splitting of the two antithetic sides of Vehmakoski (Pyrhönen 1999, pp. 31–32). During the story, the previously so “calm, meticulous, reliable and diligent” (Luojus 2015, p. 46) person turns into an actor in a bank embezzlement. The *Helsinki Noir* plot plays with contrasting light and shadow, which is also seen in the exhibition architecture. This aspect was emphasised by the beginning and ending, their darkness reminiscent of black-and-white noir films.

More Museum Mysteries

The mystery format relates to museums' continuous challenges in getting their visitors' attention. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, people's expectations were influenced by novelties such as early cinema, department stores and railway

travel. Now there are things such as digitalism, video games, social media, AR and VR, as well as an endless flood of pictures and videos. As a response, museum designers of the 19th century started producing more immersive, mimetic and illusionistic exhibitions (Henning 2006, p. 53). As museums keep competing with other pastime activities in the so-called experience economy, the same qualities are still an important side of a memorable museum experience.

When Helsinki Noir was on display in 2015–2017, it had the asset of novelty and surprise. Now, participatory mystery games and dark history tours have made their way into museums, both in Finland and internationally. In Finland, the murder mystery concept has been used in the Palander House of Hämeenlinna City Museum in 2018–2021, and their theatrical and participatory tours with three different plots so far have shown a high demand for such activities. The Museum of Finnish Book Pukstaavi created an escape-room concept instead of a traditional museum exhibition to acquaint people with detective fiction as part of their literary pedagogy. Pukstaavi's Museum escape: *A Threat Looming over the City* (1.5.2019–31.10.2020) resembled the initial idea of Helsinki Noir in many ways: something strange is happening in the city that puzzles the local inspector, so visitors were to assist in detecting the case. To add some international examples, the Natural History Museum in London has organised criminal investigation mysteries titled *Crime Scene Live* for adults in recent years. In November 2019, the National Gallery in London organised a murder mystery tour *Whodunnit? A Halloween Late* as part of their Young Producers programme. Many museum murder mysteries let visitors meet and interview characters inspired by museums' artworks, thus creating alternative, story-led art experiences. How such experiments with fictionality affect people's connection with actual artworks is an interesting topic for further study.

The above-mentioned cases are different in their approaches, ranging from event-type games within the museum milieu to fully curated exhibitions. What is common to all, nevertheless, is that they have all been either temporary exhibitions or events. As visitors seek novel and fun experiences from museums, ephemeral mystery tours provide a change, something unexpected and exciting. They may draw in both old and new audiences and cater to different tastes and age groups. Luojus (interview 1) explained that Helsinki Noir brought into the museum some new audience groups, such as crime fiction amateurs, specifically to experience the detective story. The popularity of mystery games seems to have a similar attraction and has become a regular thing in many museums. At some point the trend of using detective stories may become saturated, but other popular fiction genres also have the potential to provide surprising and exciting story-led experiences in a museum exhibition space.

Conclusions

As museums seek fresh approaches and have turned more and more towards their audiences, textual styles and storytelling in their exhibitions have become increasingly multifaceted. The use of fictional museum narratives is not an entirely new

approach, but participates in, or rediscovers, a long tradition of storytelling in the exhibition space. It is in line with maintaining visitor attention and providing possibilities for engagement. As our understanding of the museum as narrative space and storytelling medium becomes increasingly nuanced, museums have the possibility to create even more comprehensive narrative experiences for all of the senses. Digital devices and virtual applications may bring about more possibilities, but it may also be refreshing to see creative narratives that rely heavily on classical museum media, and at the same time bring interesting authentic objects within visitors' reach.

As a curated art exhibition where interactivity was intellectual rather than hands-on, Helsinki Noir – A Crime to Solve differentiates itself from the many escape-room or event-type mystery concepts that have since gained popularity in museums. It was built around the story, not just as a story, and was therefore quite unusual. The fictional plot generated the exhibition, and the text became its core meaning. It provided a highly subjective interpretation of the works displayed. Even though the artworks were put in an atypical position, as the art historical context was kept to a minimum, fictional elements did not replace all research-based curatorial knowledge, but instead brought a contrast to it. In a way, presenting the crime story and traditional labels side by side mirrors the change in the centuries-long discussion about whether crime fiction is part of low- or high-brow culture. In recent decades, this separation has become largely irrelevant and has largely faded away. Against this, Helsinki Noir takes a stance for adding more varied and visitor-oriented labels alongside traditional ones, in favour of a higher level of engagement.

Helsinki Noir gives us an example of how museums can apply elements from various literary genres to create narratives that invite visitors to do a reading based on shared cultural competence and a familiarity with genre features. Intertextuality is one of the defining features of detective fiction, and especially for amateurs of the genre, Helsinki Noir enabled the pleasure of recognising familiar elements. Through the mystery format, visitors were invited to do a co-authored reading of the museum exhibition narrative. The hermeneutic code was activated from the beginning, and visitors were given the role of detective as they followed the chapters to unravel a course of events leading to the initial discovery of the victim's cadaver.

Participation, experientiality and co-creation are wider trends in the museum field. As the detective fiction genre calls for the readers' participation, using such a genre in a museum exhibition, as well as the writing contest and the related appendix of the winning text being included in the exhibition booklet, emphasises openness on the part of the museum towards the visitors' perspective and co-authoring. The texts of Helsinki Noir were written in a style that fed upon questions and invitations for the reader-visitor. Giving only partial closure to the detective story had several major implications. On one hand, it suggested that visitors' output as imaginary response was needed to fill the blanks. On the other hand, the process of detection by following clues and documents could

be seen mirroring the museum processes behind looking for archival evidence and bridging gaps in historical events.

Besides detective stories, other popular genres provide one way of increasing engagement in museum exhibitions. Story-led exhibitions based on popular genres can draw upon people's knowledge of the genre's features to create stories that show both objects and history in a new light. When accompanied by research-based information, fiction may increase engagement and curiosity, and thus learning. Stories have been linked with resonance, learning and remembering and theatrical techniques by bringing visitors to the scenes, and bringing events closer to them through shared humanity (Bedford 2014; Hein 2002; Hooper-Greenhill 2006).

From the viewpoint of literature, the spatialisation of narratives brings interesting possibilities. The circulation route, visibility, audio elements, embodiment and physicality of the experience brought a new level of concreteness to the detective story. Detective fiction often plays with embodiment and corporeality (both that of the victim and the detective), so creating a story within a physical environment can be meaningful. In Helsinki Noir, the displays with contemporary, purpose-built art installations were used at the beginning and end of the narrative to provide a strong sense of immersion. Visitors were standing face to face with both the victim and the perpetrator, through utilising the multi-sensory channels available in the museum exhibition medium.

Detective fiction often reflects its own narrativity and plays with the narrative structure (Pyrhönen 1994, pp. 32–36). I argue that something similar happens in a museum exhibition that experiments with the possibilities of fictional narratives. In recent decades, the rise of different types of storytelling and the use of multiple voices is connected to rising self-awareness of authority and meaning-making within the museum medium. To conclude, I suggest self-reflexivity can be seen as a shared element, both in detective fiction and in current trends in museum exhibition narratives.

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