Appendix
The Hutchesons' Grammar School Project

Introduced by LEON ROBINSON

These two contributions, 'Foucault, Madness and Museums' by Glen Melville, Scott Adams, and Lucy McCracken, and 'The Identity of Museum Objects' by Jessica Palmer and Claire Richmond, are from Glasgow secondary school pupils. They are the fruit of an innovative and ambitious project undertaken by the pupils themselves, under the guidance of their teacher, Dr Philip Tonner, with help and support from Professor Victoria Harrison and Mr Leon Robinson of the University of Glasgow.

The impetus for this project was to introduce young people, still years away from applying to university in some instances, to the ways in which academics look at the world and work in it. Pupils studying Philosophy and Religious Education at Hutchesons' Grammar School were invited to participate in a research project, exploring museums and museum objects using philosophical perspectives and methods of enquiry. Many embarked on the project, but few went the whole distance. Those who completed the project produced work which was shared in the first instance at the Philosophy and Museums conference in Glasgow 2013. While something akin to Dr Johnson's response to hearing of a woman preaching at a Quaker Meeting might have been anticipated ("It is not done well; but you are surprised to find it done at all"), the indulgence granted by the audience was soon replaced with a genuine respect for the work produced, and the papers were well received. The inclusion of school pupils in the conference was seen from the outset by the organizers as a great opportunity to open doors between the world of academic philosophy and secondary education. The works merit inclusion in this volume not only by virtue of their intrinsic value, but as illustrations of the possibilities of engaging unusually young people in serious and disciplined scholarship, perhaps offering

fresh insights, or at the very least allowing seasoned researchers in the field a glimpse of familiar topics through fresh pairs of eyes.

University of Glasgow
Leon.Robinson@glasgow.ac.uk

Foucault, Madness and Museums

GLEN MELVILLE, SCOTT ADAMS AND LUCY MᴄCRACKEN

1. Foucault

In order to establish a clear link between madness, the perception of madness, and museums, it is of great use to look to one of the most renowned philosophers on the subject: Michel Foucault. In an interview in 1982, Foucault declared: 'After having studied philosophy, I wanted to see what madness was: I had been mad enough to study reason; I was reasonable enough to study madness.'[1] Foucault has offered some of the most valuable insights into the nature of museums, and their representation of madness.

Thinking of madness not as an unchanging constant, but as something strongly dependant on historical circumstances, such as, cultural, economic, intellectual and societal forces, Foucault examined it predominantly through its correlation to 'unreason'; a term he used to mean pathologically confused reason, or 'reason dazzled'. He studied the evolution of these two concepts through time, separating them into three main types, each belonging to a different historical period; thus allowing comparison of the differing perceptions of madness and its construction through the Renaissance, Classical[2] and Modern periods. The rationale behind this differentiation is that Foucault saw each of these eras as possessing a fundamentally

---

[1] Rux Martin, 'Truth Power Self: an Interview with Michel Foucault', in L. H. Martin, et al (eds), *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (London: Tavistock, 1988), 11.
[2] The 'Classical period', referred to by Foucault in his examination of the history of madness, falls between the Renaissance and the twentieth century.

342

different '*episteme*'. This concept is of vital importance to Foucault's methodology. Using the term '*episteme*' to mean '[t]he historical a priori that grounds knowledge and its discourses and thus represents the condition of their possibility within a particular epoch,'[3] he makes clear the conceptual difference between, and thereby the necessity to individually categorize, the three main time periods. To demonstrate how this is achieved, further examination of Foucault's definition is required.

Labelling an *episteme* as a 'condition of possibility' for knowledge, he is arguing that *epistemes* must be present for certain areas of knowledge to exist, in the same sense that oxygen is required for life on our planet to exist. Moreover, by using the term 'historical a priori' with reference to each 'particular epoch', he expresses his view that these *epistemes* are not only different in each time period, but that their difference is conceptually vast; altering in accordance with the course of time and the changes that this temporal shift brings. To clarify their position as conditions of possibility, it is helpful to imagine a game of chess. A set of rules exist, allowing for the movement of each piece on the board, and so each piece can only be moved in accordance with these rules. In a similar way, *epistemes* function as fundamental rules, allowing for the existence of knowledge, and so knowledge can only be possessed in areas allowed by the *epistemes* of the period. Following this analogy, the notion of different *epistemes* applying to each epoch leads to each period of time possessing a different set of rules outlining what knowledge may reasonably be possessed, or indeed what may be claimed as knowledge.

To exemplify this, Foucault looks at the evolution of the perception of madness throughout the aforementioned three eras.[4] In the Renaissance, madness was seen as a connection to disturbing, occult and supernatural forces, and those viewed as mad were considered to be so because of 'terrifying natural powers of the night'. Then, in the Classical Age, madness became viewed as the unreason Foucault writes about: the deviation from rationality. This change in perception also led to a harsher stigmatisation, building up to the almost absolute disapprobation of madness. But this changed yet again, moving into the 'Modern' era. In a drastic departure

---

[3]   K. Stuckrad, *Locations of Knowledge in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Esoteric Discourse and Western Identities* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2010), 17, footnote 36.

[4]   Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (USA: Pantheon Books, 1965), this is the abridged version of *Folie et déraison: Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* (France: Librairie Plon, 1961).

from previous conceptions, madness came to be seen as, what it is now perceived as, mental illness: something to be treated medically. This reduced the stigma surrounding madness; the mad came to be perceived as victims of their condition, as opposed to being guilty of some moral wrongdoing that had led to their condition.

This may seem quite removed from the topic of museums, but without this *episteme*-based historical classification, the interweaving of Foucault's different works would not be so intuitive. He described museums as '*heterotopias*', a concept that requires unpacking.[5] Utopias, according to Foucault, are sites with no real space, and as such are fundamentally unreal places, often described as 'direct or inverted analogies' of reality. The metaphor of a mirror is a useful one in this regard, the space you see when you look in a mirror being a 'placeless place'. This is because the place you see 'beyond' the surface of the mirror is fundamentally unreal, it allows you to see yourself and your surroundings in a place other than where you are in reality; indeed you see yourself where you are not: in this virtual world you see in the mirror. This virtual world, and others like it, serves as examples of utopias as they provide direct analogies of reality. With the existence of such utopias in mind, Foucault writes of '[a] place outside of all places, yet possessing a location that can be indicated in reality.'[6] In contrast to utopias, he named them '*heterotopias*', and then explained that the mirror is not only a *utopia*, but also a *heterotopia*. This is because, he argues, at the time of looking at oneself in the mirror, the place one occupies is simultaneously absolutely real, correlating with the entire surrounding environment, and absolutely unreal, existing only in this virtual utopian realm beyond the surface of the mirror. Furthermore, he lists one of the traits of a *heterotopia* as being that it is: 'Capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible.'[7]

Taking this notion of *heterotopia* into consideration and now looking to museums, we find an easily visible compatibility. Museums take a variety of different and seemingly incompatible objects that serve as representations of completely independent spaces and times, and bring them together to form an extraordinary juxtaposition. Through the representation found within such a place, we are granted a very real indication of the space from which each object originates and which it

[5]   Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', *Diacritics* 16 (1986), 26; based on a lecture given in March 1967 and first published in the French journal *Architecture/Mouvement/Continuité* (October 1984).
[6]   Ibid, 24.
[7]   Ibid, 6.

344

represents; yet the space itself, the represented origin, is fundamentally unreal. Much like with the mirror, we observe a representation of a real space, but we observe it where it is not, in a museum. In this way, museums are a prominent form of *heterotopia*, but more than this, they can be seen as '*heterotopias* of time' – or '*heterochronies*' as Foucault calls them[8] – spaces that enclose objects from widely ranging time periods and styles, bringing them together to form a contrasting and clashing collection that would, in any other circumstance, seem incompatible. Even taking the example of the Burrell Collection in Glasgow, where we presented an earlier version of this paper, we saw artefacts dating back to ancient Egypt, juxtaposed to sacred Islamic prayer rugs – objects of completely different styles, evidently from completely different eras. This excellently exemplifies the juxtaposition that makes museums *heterochronies* as well as *heterotopias*. Places such as these evidently exist in time, as we can interact with them and observe their continued existence, but simultaneously they can be said to exist outside of time because they behave in such a way as to preserve objects from the natural deterioration that time would ordinarily bring.

This ties in closely with Foucault's understanding of madness. If our conception of madness is something which can be seen as changing with respect to the *episteme* of each time period, and if museums serve the purpose of bringing aspects of different time periods together to form a *heterotopia* and a *heterochrony*, then surely it is evident that museums, by their very nature, provide an invaluable insight into the perception of madness throughout history. Their displays of art and objects relating to madness are a witness to the *epistemes* of different eras. What may not be so instantly evident, however, is the extent to which they do this. More than simply giving an insight into the *episteme* at work, they help to make clear the standards by which reason and unreason were judged that prevailed in each period.

Foucault can be seen to fervently adopt such a stance, most prominently through his examination of art. He strongly believed that in the process of creating art born from madness an intrinsically complex process operates, and, through looking at the creations of the mad, we can reveal the presence of their madness and unreason.[9] Through the display in museums of objects and artworks with ties to madness, we can see the part played by madness in the society and the

---

[8]   Ibid.
[9]   In *Madness and Civilisation* (op. cit.), Foucault argues that madness lies beneath the surface of society, only emerging through the art and literature of those deemed mad.

era from which the artefacts originate. The *heterotopian* nature of museums thereby allows for the charting of madness' perception throughout the ages.

2. R.D. Laing

Following on from Foucault's account of the perception of madness, we next consider the works of R. D. Laing. Throughout his work and studies, Laing was influenced by Foucault. After reading Foucault's *Madness and Civilisation*, Laing commented: 'This is quite an exceptional book of very high calibre – brilliantly written, intellectually rigorous, and with a thesis that thoroughly shakes the assumptions of traditional psychiatry.'[10]

Laing was a pupil at Hutchesons' Grammar School, where he established his interest in western philosophy.[11] He went on to study medicine at the University of Glasgow. During his time as a student at Glasgow, Laing began to develop his ideas on the topic of psychiatric treatment. Laing's passion for intellectual conflict thrived through his co-creation of the 'Socratic Club' at the University, which hosted many philosophical and theological debates. It was at the club that he was introduced to Joe Schorstein, a renowned neurological surgeon who was particularly against 'the mechanisation of medicine' and was a strong advocate against the growing use of leucotomies and electric shock therapy.[12]

Throughout his lifetime Laing challenged the practice of psychiatric diagnosis, arguing that current methods of diagnosing mental disorder contradicted accepted medical procedure. This was because diagnosis was made on the basis of behaviour or conduct, and examination and ancillary tests that traditionally precede the diagnosis of viable pathologies (like broken bones or pneumonia) occurred only after the diagnosis of a mental disorder (if at all). Hence, according to Laing, psychiatry was founded on a false epistemology: illness diagnosed by conduct, but treated biologically.[13]

Arguing about the treatment of schizophrenia, Laing maintained that the models of genetically inherited schizophrenia being

---

[10] R. D. Laing, 'Preface' in Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation* (Oxfordshire: Routledge Classics, 2001).

[11] See A. Laing, *R.D. Laing: A Life* (HarperCollins Publishers, 1997).

[12] Ibid., 38.

[13] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/R._D._Laing

promoted by biologically-based psychiatry were not acceptable and came to reject the whole medical model of mental illness.[14] This led him to question the use of medications such as antipsychotics by psychiatrists.[15] 'There is no such condition as "schizophrenia", but the label is a social fact and the social fact a political event'.[16] Here Laing is touching on the idea of Foucault's *episteme* – that schizophrenia only exists due to the episteme of the time, it is an illness that is socially constructed.

Laing was a pioneer of the anti-psychiatry movement. The principal anti-psychiatry message is that psychiatric treatments are ultimately more damaging than helpful. Psychiatry is often thought to be a benign medical practice, but it can also be seen as a coercive instrument of oppression. Furthermore, as Laing was aware, psychiatry involves an unequal power relationship between doctor and patient, as well as a highly subjective diagnostic process that can leave too much room for opinions and interpretations.[17] Every society, including liberal western society, permits compulsory treatment of mental patients. In 1965 Laing and his acquaintances at the Philadelphia Association (a UK charity concerned with the understanding and relief of mental suffering, founded by Laing) obtained the use of Kingsley Hall – a community centre in the East End of London – in order to conduct radical treatment of persons diagnosed with schizophrenia. There they pioneered a model of treatment without the use of physical restraint or drugs.

Laing's work and principles have made an impact upon today's society. Although the use of neuroleptic drugs is still common in the treatment of the mentally ill, other strategies such as 'Talking Treatments'[18] are becoming increasingly prevalent. Moreover, society's representation of mental illness is changing – once a heavily stigmatised issue veiled behind fear and a lack of proper

---

[14] B. Mullian, *Mad to be Normal: Conversations with R. D. Laing* (Free Association Books, 1995).

[15] See Joseph Berke, 'Obituary of R. D. Laing', *Daily Telegraph*, 25th August 1989.

[16] http://psychneuro.wordpress.com/2010/03/15/there-is-no-such-condition-as-schizophrenia-but-the-label-is-a-social-fact-and-the-social-fact-a-political-event-r-d-laing/.

[17] See Tom Burns, *Psychiatry: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Henry A. Nasrallah, *The Antipsychiatry Movement: Who and Why* (Current Psychiatry, 2011); and Allen Frances, *The New Crisis in Confidence in Psychiatric Diagnosis* (Annals of Internal Medicine, 2013).

[18] http://mind.org.uk/mental_health_a-z/8032_schizophrenia

understanding, now a more open subject – this is evidenced by an exhibit in Glasgow's Kelvingrove museum: 'Glasgow Stories – Glasgow in Mind'. The exhibition includes artwork by Mary Barnes, a schizophrenic who was treated at Kingsley Hall during the sixties. The fact that her art is openly displayed in the museum, and discussion about mental illness is encouraged, shows that a clear shift in society's perception of mental illness has taken place. While the change in society has allowed for the exhibit to exist, now that it does exist it will surely continue to create more change itself. The museum is both an affecting and affected force.

3. Madness, *Epistemes* and *Heterochronies*

In the concluding section of this paper, we'd like to draw things together whilst also taking a closer look at Foucault's ideas on madness, with specific regard to his notion of the *heterochrony*. As we've seen, Foucault argues that the perception of madness prevalent in any particular time period is influenced by whatever *episteme* is dominant in that period.[19] This entails, in his view, that the current understanding of madness is not an entirely rational one. It is not a scientific understanding, but is, rather, shaped by an underlying *episteme*.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the prevailing *episteme* by which madness was understood led to the absence of any real social discussion of mental illness and the hiding away of the mad in clinics. However, despite these efforts to ignore madness, following Foucault, we can argue that the presence of unreason can still be felt – under the radar, so to speak –through the art works of the 'mad'.[20]

Consider 'Starry Night' by Vincent Van Gogh,[21] an artist who is generally believed to have suffered from some kind of mental illness. Van Gogh's work was first displayed in early exhibitions of the late-nineteenth century,[22] and it seems likely that 'Starry

---

[19]   See G. Gutting, *Foucault: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
[20]   The relationship between madness and art is considered by Foucault in *Madness and Civilisation*, op. cit.
[21]   Painted in June 1889, 'Starry Night' depicts the view from Van Gogh's window in a sanatorium in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, Southern France.
[22]   There were exhibitions of Van Gogh's paintings in Belgian and Dutch towns during the 1890s.

348

Night' would be a prime example of what Foucault described as 'mad art' – art containing, reflecting unreason. During these early displays of Van Gogh's art, talk of madness is still very much confined to the asylum, to clinical medicine.[23] It is not the subject of conversation; it is not the subject of museum exhibits. The unreason in museums during this time is unconscious, unintentional – according to Foucault, it screams out from some of the paintings, but no one actually talks about it.

So, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there still seems to be a presence of madness and unreason within the museum, despite a reluctance to actually discuss it. In the museum of this time, madness is evident if you look in the right places – at, for example, Van Gogh's work – but there is no effort to consciously represent it.

And it is this decision to represent or not to represent mental illness which is of particular interest. It is this decision which can be influenced by the underlying *episteme*, and that can reveal that *episteme*. In this regard, the philosophical importance of the museum lies in documenting how we represent the subject of madness to ourselves, why we might choose to represent it, or why we might not, and how that choice might be influenced by factors beyond our control.

As we see it, the museum is involved in two different kinds of representation. Firstly, most obviously, the museum represents the origins of the objects it displays and, according to Foucault, the underlying *epistemes* of those origins. Let's take an example. Recently at the Burrell Collection in Glasgow there was a display of early-seventeenth century costume.[24] One of the main pieces on display was a woman's jacket,[25] which would have taken months to complete. This piece is important in representing the cultural and social factors which led to that particular fashion of jacket, that particular kind of material and thread – it represents the underlying *episteme* which helped lead to its creation. This is a conscious kind of representation, a kind that those who work in the museum are actively involved in; it's the aim of the curator in displaying something of historical or cultural significance. The object is displayed as a fragment

[23]   See *Madness and Civilisation*, op. cit., 1965, chapters 8 and 9.
[24]   'Gilt and Silk: Early Seventeeth Century Costume' was on display from 23rd March - 23rd December 2013 in the Burrell Collection, Glasgow.
[25]   The waistcoat dates from around 1615–18. It is made from linen and embroidered with polychrome silk, silver and silver-gilt threads in a pattern of flowers and foliage with coiling stems.

349

of a time period, a place – it represents the reasons for its existence, the social climate of its origins.

However, the real philosophical interest comes as a result of a second kind of representation. The museum doesn't just represent the time period, the temporal roots of the objects it displays: it also represents the human beings that choose them. It has humanity at its core; each artefact or piece of artwork is chosen, and each choice is influenced by societal and cultural factors. Where those who curate and run museums seem to be representing the origins of the artefacts they display, they are actually doing something more. They are representing the social, political and moral climate they inhabit: the *episteme* which led to the choice of the objects displayed. Therefore, while an object in a museum represents an earlier *episteme* which allowed for its creation, it also represents the present *episteme* which allows for its display. This dual representation is especially relevant as we now turn our attention back to mental illness.

Through their depiction of historical perspectives on and treatments of madness, mental health museums, such as the Glenside Hospital Museum in Bristolare,[26] represent and bring together in one place the different *epistemes* which have shaped changing understandings of madness and its treatments. In this way, the mental health museum acts as Foucault's *heterochrony*, bringing together 'slices of time'[27] – slices of our historically constructed and contingent representation of madness.

To illustrate this function, it is useful to consider a specific example. Within the Glore Psychiatric Museum in Missouri there are full-size replicas of sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth century psychiatric treatment devices.[28] Each replica represents the different social and political factors which led to the creation of the device it is a replica of; in short, it represents the *episteme* that informed the creation and use of the original object. As a result, there are several historical *epistemes* represented under one roof; the mental health museum brings them together as a *heterochrony*. However, the mental health museum's role as a *heterochrony* does not stop there. This is because where there are the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth century exhibits and the *epistemes* they

---

[26] Glenside Hospital Museum opened in 1994, after the closure of Glenside Hospital. It displays exhibits related to the history of psychiatric and learning disability hospitals in Bristol.

[27] This phrase is used by Foucault in 'Of Other Spaces', op. cit.

[28] Glore Psychiatric Museum opened in 1994 on the site of the former 'State Lunatic Asylum No.2'.

350

represent, there is also the museum itself, which brings with it its own *episteme*. The very existence of the mental health museum represents the current *episteme* and the social conditions which allow for its existence.

As we have seen, open discussion of madness within the museums of previous centuries was simply not possible. Today it is. This indicates a shift in *episteme* – a new *episteme* now exists and is represented especially well by mental health museums. Like other types of museum, mental health museums simultaneously represent both past and present *epistemes*.

In this paper, we have explored Foucault's concepts of *episteme, heterotopy*, and *heterocrony*, as well as the influence of his philosophy on the related ideas of R.D. Laing. By exploring the work of these two figures, we have revealed an important link between philosophy, madness and museums; a link that is especially evident in the phenomenon of mental health museums.[29]

Hutchesons' Grammar School, Glasgow

The Identity of Museum Objects

JESSICA PALMER AND CLAIRE RICHMOND

1. Loss of Original Purpose

The identity of a museum object can change through loss of its original purpose. By 'loss of original purpose' we mean what happens when an object is put in a museum and can no longer function as what it was intended to be. Immediately when artefacts are placed in museums restrictions are put on them as to how they are to be handled, such as gloves must be worn when moving them, which is understandable especially with older pieces since many would crumble away if handled regularly. However, these restrictions can leave the object unable to serve the purpose for which it was originally intended and this effectively changes the identity of the object. It becomes a museum object in a glass cabinet for people to look at,

---

[29]   Section 1 was written by Glen Melville; section 2 by Scott Adams; and section 3 by Lucy McCracken.

and that is not what the object would have been viewed as when it was first used.

Take for example a chair created by Niki de Saint Phalle,[30] called Fauteuil Serpent's chair and displayed in a temporary exhibition from November 2012-October 2013 at the Gallery of Modern Art in Glasgow (GoMA). It is a chair that was designed to be used, and yet you are not allowed to sit on it. It has become entirely a sculpture, something to be viewed but not used. We contend that this transition from being a functional chair to being an art piece that is no longer used to sit on has changed the identity of the object itself. Objects that have not been used over a long period of time might be particularly susceptible to having their identities changed in this way, especially if knowledge of their original purpose has disappeared. This has happened to certain pieces of ancient Roman furniture. Now it is unclear what their original purpose was, so our grasp of what these objects were – their earlier identity – is tenuous.

Religious artefacts could cause especial problems in this regard. For example, there are Islamic prayer rugs in the Burrell Collection in Glasgow.[31] Putting religious objects in museums raises the question of what they should now be used for. In the eyes of museum curators and directors, the object becomes part of the museum's collection and should therefore be treated like all other objects in the museum; it should be put on display for others to see. However, a lot of people question why they aren't allowed to use such objects for their original purpose. There have been many incidents of rows between museums curators and members of the public over why religious objects in museums cannot be used for worship. It is, of course, what they were intended for. However, allowing the objects to be used for worship might undermine the neutral stance towards objects that many museums try to maintain. They display objects, not use them. Deviating from this could cause the museum to, in essence, stop being a museum. A further issue is that use might cause damage to the objects themselves. The prayer rugs, for example, are kept behind a barrier to stop people touching them because they are old, and so obviously allowing

---

[30] Niki de Saint Phalle (born Catherine-Marie-Agnès Fal de Saint Phalle) was a French painter, sculptor and film-maker who lived from 30th October 1930 to 21st May 2002.

[31] The Burrell Collection is a museum in Glasgow which displays the collection of Sir William Burrell (1861–1958). In 1944 he gave his impressive collection to the city of Glasgow and the Burrell Museum in Pollock Park was built to house the collection.

352

people to actually use them would be very damaging. And as one of the main purposes of a museum is conservation, this would go against what museums are for. So, to do their job, museums often have to prevent the objects in their collections from being used for their original purpose and hence they cannot avoid altering the identity of the objects in their care. This change in identity is controversial and people have different views on how it should be tackled. Perhaps the way to get around it is to acknowledge in the displays what objects were once used for and to make it clear to the public why it would be impractical to use them for their original purpose.

2. Theft

The history of objects is of great significance when it comes to defining their identity, even how the piece is acquired by a museum or country is of relevance. However, throughout history objects have been stolen, such as many of Van Gogh's pieces, or taken from their country of origin and, we contend, such changes can impact the identity of the objects. The Elgin marbles,[32] for example, are a collection of classical Greek marble sculptures and inscriptions that were part of the Parthenon and other buildings on the Acropolis of Athens, but between 1801 and 1812 Thomas Bruce, the 7th earl of Elgin, transported them to Britain after obtaining a controversial permit from the Ottoman authorities. Since then there has been public debate about whether these marbles should remain in Britain or be returned to Athens. Taking the marbles out of their original historical context means that people are already seeing them differently from the way they were initially meant to be perceived. They can no longer be viewed alongside a magnificent ancient building but instead inside a modern museum which undoubtedly takes away some of the original charisma of the marbles. The perception of the marbles will now be completely different from the way the sculptor intended. The sculptor would have worked to maximise the marbles' presence in the building thus making them extremely impressive to the eye. The removal of the marbles not only will have made it impossible to perceive them in the way the artist intended but will also have diminished their ability to enchant us.

---

[32] See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elgin_Marbles and http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/articles/w/what_are_the_elgin_marbles.aspx.

The debate surrounding the marbles will have influenced opinions of them and this will potentially have shaped the way that they are now perceived. It could even mean that when we think of the Elgin marbles we do not think of the pieces themselves but rather of the controversy surrounding them. So it could be said that this debate has stripped the marbles of their original identity and replaced it with a new one. In other words, their removal from the Parthenon has given them a dramatically new identity. It has been argued that the marbles should be returned to Greece and restored to their former glory. But is this even possible? While the return trip could further damage the marbles, it may in the end make no substantial difference to the way they are perceived. They would continue to be seen as separate from the building and, while they would have been returned to their country of origin, the enchanting quality of seeing the marbles as they were meant to be seen would still be out of reach. As Walter Benjamin put it, the object's 'aura' would still be damaged.[33]

Another issue is theft of the products of creative thought. Just as scripts for plays and films have many collaborators so do some pieces of art in museums, and while it is generally clear in most cases to whom the creative credit belongs, in others it is quite hard to determine. Take, for example, the Hand Print Posters by Hans-Peter Feldmann.[34] Feldmann enlarged 10 hand prints of early 20th century artistic and literary figures, such as Marcel Duchamp. The original set of hand prints were taken by Charlotte Wolff in the 1930s. This is a very interesting example as many could claim creative responsibility for the artwork. While the obvious choice is Feldmann, as he thought to display the hand prints together and make them into an exhibit for a museum, one could argue that credit should be accorded to Charlotte Wolff. She had the original idea to collect all the hand prints along with the signatures, and while she did not think to display them herself, Feldmann's display would not have been possible without her earlier creative work. Some could even argue that the people to whom the hand prints belonged to are to be credited as the creators, as without them the piece could never have been made. They can be seen as the fundamental creators of the exhibit.

---

[33] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (London: Pimlico, 1999). The term 'aura' refers to the quality that surrounds and is generated by the artwork.
[34] Feldmann was born in 1941 and is a German visual artist. The Hand Print Posters are on display in GoMA.

354

3. Can Location in a Museum Collection Change Identity?

Another factor that could affect the identity of a museum object is the simple fact of its inclusion in a museum collection. This may seem irrelevant, but it can be an extremely important part of what makes a museum object what it is. The object becomes part of the museum. For example, the objects of the Burrell Collection are not only viewed as historical artefacts in their own right, but as part of the collection of objects obtained by William Burrell. And so, when we think of them, we think of the Burrell Collection. While it is important for the museum to have objects recognised as part of its collection and part of its display, this may come at a high cost to the object's 'aura'. Take, for example, the Mona Lisa. It is described as being 'the best known, the most visited, the most written about, the most sung about, the most parodied work of art in the world',[35] and it is the pride of The Louvre, the most famous museum in Paris. If you asked most people to tell you what they knew about the Mona Lisa, they would undoubtedly mention its location in the Louvre at some point. The Mona Lisa and the Louvre are so closely linked that it is almost impossible to think of one without thinking of the other. And why is this? Well, for one thing the Mona Lisa is so famous that any museum displaying it would instantaneously become very highly regarded, but it is also to do with the Louvre itself. The Mona Lisa is its main attraction, and this is made very clear before you even set foot in the museum. Posters, leaflets, souvenirs and whatever other advertising the Louvre uses usually display the Mona Lisa, and so make it impossible to overlook the fact that the Mona Lisa is housed inside the museum. This intense advertising has made the Louvre a key part in the Mona Lisa's history, and this has had an impact on the painting's identity.

There is yet another way in which museums can change the identity of objects. They can do so by the choices they make about where to display objects and where to position them relative to other objects. This can also be shown in the case of the Mona Lisa. The painting has a whole wall to itself, and is protected by a barrier several metres away. It is completely isolated and in plain view, making it impossible not to notice it. The barrier also heightens its feeling of importance and therefore draws attention to it. What would have happened if they had just placed it in a room with lots of other paintings, with maybe a small plaque telling the public what it was? It wouldn't

[35] John Lichfield, 'The Moving of the Mona Lisa', *The Independent*, 2nd April 2005.

have nearly the same effect. The painting is quite small, so it would be quite easy to overlook. And then, maybe it would become just another painting. It would still be part of the Louvre, but, in its current position, the Mona Lisa is shown to be the most important object in the whole museum, and it thereby becomes less of an object in its own right. It is the property of the Louvre, and this is a fact that the museum will not allow to be overlooked. But does this damage the painting's aura? No, in fact it enhances it. The Mona Lisa is a painting that has a long and interesting history, and the air of mystery and great importance that surrounds it gives it the respect it deserves. However, glorifying objects will not always work. Take, for example, the stuffed animals in Kelvingrove Museum.[36] What would happen if you took one of them, gave it its own room, put barriers all around it and started selling mugs and pens showing it as an attraction in its own right? It would give the object a completely different meaning. The exhibition in Kelvingrove is supposed to represent nature as a whole, showing nature in its many different aspects. Isolating an object makes people think that it is rare, that it is special and that it should be looked at on its own, as a separate thing from anything else in the museum. That is how the Mona Lisa is different to a stuffed animal in Kelvingrove. They are displayed differently because the two museums are trying to display different kinds of things. And it works, as display is so important to how we view something. It can change how we think about that thing, and so it effectively changes what that object is.

This is something museums must take into account when thinking about how to display objects, because their display can make a huge difference to how people think of them. In the cases of the Mona Lisa and the animals at Kelvingrove, the museums have more or less got it right. But because it is so easy to influence the identity of objects in this way, constructing displays is a difficult process and one that should be taken very seriously.

4. Restoration

The restoration of objects is a principal task of many museums. Many famous art pieces have been restored, such as Da Vinci's 'The last supper' and Michelangelo's statue of 'David'. Restoration is a

---

[36] Kelvingrove Museum is located in the West End of Glasgow. It is a museum and an art gallery and it contains many stuffed animals which are one of the museum's main attractions.

356

process that aims to return the piece to what the restorer thinks was its original state, and while this can be useful to stabilise the condition of a piece it does sometimes involve irreversible changes to the material and thus changes what the object is – thereby altering its identity. There are quite a few examples of art works being changed and perhaps destroyed, one of the most recent being 'Ecce Homo' by Elias Garcia Martinez.[37] Cecilia Gimenez, a local church goer, became upset by the picture's deteriorating state and so, with the priest's permission decided to restore it herself, thereby changing the piece permanently. Prior to her efforts the object would have been known as Elias Garcia Martinez's painting but now it will be remembered for its disastrous restoration. This is a clear example of how restoration can change the identity of an object. However, not all restoration damage is this obvious. The whiteness of ancient Greek statues is not a sign of antiquity but a reflection of the aesthetic sensibilities of art curators in the nineteenth century.[38] During this period curators found traces of the garish paint that had previously covered the statues so decided to blast them to make the statues more aesthetically pleasing. This even happened to the famous statue of David. It was covered in wax which was then removed with hydrochloric acid. The acid not only removed the wax but also the original patina of the statue. Unlike the Ecce Homo painting these statues still look similar to the way they did in their original state but they have had some of the original artwork washed away. They are clearly not qualitatively the same pieces as they were prior to their restoration.

With any restoration there is the danger of changing the object, but on the whole most are restored fairly well. The alternative to restoration is simply to let the object deteriorate, which will eventually result in it becoming unrecognisable. This would defeat the museums purpose of preserving and promoting the display of these objects. Besides there is no way to know with certainty what these great historical pieces looked like just after they were finished. From the day of completion dirt and grime will have built up on them, changing their appearance.

---

[37] The Ecce Homo (Behold the Man) can be seen at the Mercy church of Borja, Zaragoza.
[38] http://io9.com/5938377/the-worst-art-restoration-mistakes-of-all-time.

5. Personal Connections

In this section we highlight the different ways in which people think about objects and propose that these differences have an impact on what the objects are – on their identity. We have already established that trying to show an object in its original context is extremely important. However, even if that is achieved, it is still virtually impossible to get everyone to think about the object in the same way and sometimes facts about our own past can shape how we look at things. Take, for example, our experience of visiting the Burrell Collection together.[39] We quickly discovered that we had very different outlooks on the objects here. The reason for this, we discovered, was our own personal connections to the Burrell. It was Jessica's first time at the Burrell, so she had no previous connections to the building itself or the objects inside it. However, I live only ten minutes away, so I visited the museum many times as a child with my parents, grandparents and just about everyone else I know. Consequently, I have a very strong personal connection to the place. And we discovered as we were walking around that having no personal connections gave Jessica a much less personal view of the objects in the museum collection. Here are some examples of what we mean.

There is a Chinese statue displayed in the Burrell which would have originally been placed outside a house to ward off evil spirits. Jessica thought that this was a very interesting object. It shows how different Chinese culture is, as we have never had anything like this in Britain. However, I found this statue terrifying as a child. Whenever I look at the statue now, I am filled with memories of looking at it in terror. The statue has a completely different meaning for me than it does for Jessica.

Another example is the statues of Adam and Eve by Rodin. Rodin was a famous and influential artist, so Jessica found it interesting to see his works. When I see the statues, however, I always think about my school trip here when I was about ten. And, in typical ten year old fashion, we all laughed at their lack of clothes. I know that this makes my view of these statues slightly clouded because I cannot look at these statues that are interesting as both art pieces and historical objects without laughing. This is about as far from the original context as you can get, as in the past they would have been viewed as beautiful works of art sculpted by a highly skilled artist. Experiences such as

---

[39]   This section was spoken at the Philosophy and Museums conference in the Burrell Collection on 25th July 2012 by Claire Richmond. This is a comparison of her views with those of Jessica Palmer.

358

these challenge the idea that anything can really be viewed 'objective-ly'. Memories like these which in other circumstances would be irrele-vant can easily affect our perception of what an object is. The identity of objects seems to be vulnerable to our memories of them.

However, personal connections do not automatically mean that judgement is affected for the worse. Take for example the Egyptian sculpture of the Goddess Sekhmet. I had an obsession with Egyptology when I was younger and this is still my favourite piece in the museum. This positive connection I have with it means that I have to see it every time I come here, and I still love reading the in-formation about it. What is more, I love finding out new information about it, as well as everything else in the Ancient Egypt section, all because of the connection that I feel I have with this object. It makes me more open-minded and eager to learn. Jessica found the object interesting too, but had no personal connection to it, conse-quently her interest in it and desire to learn more about it were not as strong as mine.

And so, what were our general views of the Burrell Collection? Well, my judgement is definitely different to Jessica's. Everything I see in the museum reflects my past experiences. These past experi-ences shape my present experience and my future expectations. But the building reminds me of my childhood. I can think of a memory for just about every object in the Burrell and I wouldn't change those memories. And if anything, the connection I have with the Burrell has, now that I'm older, made me want to learn more about the objects. Jessica on the other hand, found the collection fascinating but had a less personal view due to her lack of memories associated with the objects.

What was interesting about our first trip to the Burrell Collection was just how differently we viewed the objects. In general we have a very similar outlook on things, but the difference in our personal connections to the Burrell changed how we thought about the objects in the Collection. We perceived the objects to have radically different identities and it was almost as if we were looking at different objects. This shows how easy it is for our past experience to affect how we perceive an object and it suggests how hard it would be for a museum to get around this. But should museums seek to do so? We believe that to an extent, yes they should. It is important that museums show objects in such a way that they can be appreciated by people who don't know anything about them, including young children. However the reality is that children will always find certain things scary or amusing, no matter what you do. But that's okay, because if they enjoy themselves that will reflect positively on

359

their view of the museum as they grow up. And that's not exclusive to children; it's important for everyone to think positively about museums. And so, what we believe a museum can do is to try to give the public the best experience possible at the museum. With modern technology, museums can create displays that are both memorable and informative and even if, like mine, the view of objects arrived at by their visitors isn't entirely objective, people will still want to come back and can, in time, become increasingly well informed about the museums and its objects.

6. Conclusion

As we have shown, the identity of objects in museums is something that it is very easy to influence. There are many factors which can affect identity and even small alterations can make the object substantially different to what it was previously. The changeableness of identity makes displaying objects properly a very difficult task for museum curators and directors. However, in our view, doing this well is in essence what makes a museum a good museum.

Hutchesons' Grammar School, Glasgow