PERFORMANCE, LEARNING & HERITAGE

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REPORT

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PERFORMANCE, LEARNING AND HERITAGE

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Performance as a Medium of Learning in Museums and at Heritage Sites – an investigation

REPORT

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PERFORMANCE, LEARNING AND HERITAGE

REPORT

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[Further details in Sect. 1.4]

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Partner museums & organisations
The National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London
The Manchester Museum
Llancaiach Fawr Manor, Nelson, Caerphilly, South Wales
The Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Coventry
Triangle Theatre Company, Coventry
[Further details in Sect. 1.4 and Sect. 3]

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Introduction to the Report

This report brings together the findings of a major, nationally-funded research project, entitled *Performance, Learning and Heritage.*

The project (which in turn builds on the outcomes of several earlier, small-scale projects) was **to undertake research into the increasing and varied use being made of performance as both an interpretive tool and a medium of learning for visitors to museums and historic sites**. The field may be expanding but until recently has been relatively under-researched. The project, which ran over three-and-a-quarter years, was based at the Centre for Applied Theatre Research at The University of Manchester.

Aims and outcomes

The project set out to observe, document and analyse a variety of performance styles, in a variety of settings, and to encompass the study of a wide range of audiences – earlier research had focused only on school groups. We planned to conduct research over a long term (three years) to gauge the lasting effectiveness and impact of museum theatre, and along the way to develop new methods of assessing practice. As part of the research, we also aimed to map the extent and style of performance activity across historic sites and museums (internationally), and to facilitate the wider exchange of ideas and practices through the project's website and an international conference.

Research outcomes from the project include:

- **publications** (journal articles and an edited book, *Performing Heritage: research and practice*, to be published by Manchester University Press in 2009)
- an **international conference** in Manchester in Spring 2008, together with various conference presentations in the UK and abroad
- a **searchable database** of global practice (ongoing), accessed through the website
- this **report**, together with a **DVD** containing edited highlights both of the four case study performances and keynotes from the conference.

The approach

While based in a university drama department which has a strong profile in the field of 'applied theatre', the research approach has been fundamentally interdisciplinary, crossing the disciplines of drama and performance studies and museum and heritage studies. It drew its inspiration from, and was enriched by, the closest collaboration between research team, partner museums and heritage organisations, theatre companies and individual performers. The team is immensely grateful to all those who assisted in the completion of what has been a complex, challenging and rewarding task.

The terms that, unsurprisingly, loom large through the report – performance, learning, heritage – each provided further challenges. We offer definitions of the terms (and some caveats) later in the report, but their complexity and contested status is reflected in our own relationship with them. We began with inverted commas around 'heritage' – perhaps rather defensively wishing to acknowledge its various and often contradictory meanings – but quickly discovered that each of those terms warranted just as much qualification and clarification; rather than add more inverted commas we dropped them altogether. But of

course the terms remain problematic and our definitions simply attempt to clarify our own usage, not resolve all the issues that lie behind them.

An ongoing endeavour

The project is now complete in the sense that the grant and the official commitments of research team members have now ended. The data amassed and the questions raised, however, have inevitably been larger and more complex than any three year project could possibly hope to resolve fully. Readers will see that some substantial findings have been gathered and conclusions drawn, and implications for good practice in the field explored, but the conclusions are necessarily provisional.

One legacy of the report is that the volume of data remains available for further scrutiny and analysis by other scholars and professionals in the field (subject to certain confidentiality protocols); and the ongoing 'mapping' exercise provides – through the web-based database – a user-friendly, fully searchable means of accessing information about performance practice across the globe. The intention is that the database will remain live and active for at least two years after the project end, and that the many gaps will gradually be filled with the help of those who continue to contact us about their own work or the work of others.

The form of the report

The report is detailed, but we have organised it so that it is as accessible and navigable as possible for the variety of readerships whom we expect will find it of interest. For those interested in the detail, we have set out 'data trawls' in the appendix – these are a very extensive and only lightly edited version of the data from the wealth of interviews conducted for the four case studies.

More readily accessible, however, is the comparative interrogation of the data provided in Section 4, examined under five broad, thematic headings. The uniqueness of this research project lies largely in its comparative approach. It is not, and does not pretend to be, a set of separate evaluations of the programmes offered by each of the sites; the interest lies in the extent to which it has been possible to draw general conclusions from the diversity of experience offered, at a diversity of sites and for a diversity of audiences. The extensive use of quotations from our respondents (in text boxes) is designed to suggest the variety and texture of the individual narratives that provide the evidence base for our conclusions.

The conclusions reached and summarised in Section 5 may not always be surprising, but they are confidently offered in the knowledge that they arise from a process of careful, detailed and systematic observation, interview, conversation and analysis. They are entirely evidence-based – although of course interpreted by the project team.

Subjectivity is impossible to avoid altogether, but we hope to have made the process by which the data has been gathered and analysed reasonably transparent. Likewise, the evidence, while substantial and wide-ranging, is drawn partly from our mapping of practice and earlier research but primarily, here, from just four case studies that we do not claim to be fully representative of the whole spectrum of the field. But the *range* of work investigated is clear, as is the variety of types of audience researched. This, together with the longitudinal nature of the study, offers some unique and productive insights into the practice, its impact and its potential. We hope the field as a whole – museum educators, directors, curators, performance practitioners, public historians and academics in both

performance and museum and heritage studies – will find our conclusions useful and thought-provoking. We hope too that the conclusions provide a basis for further development and enhancement - and perhaps expansion – of the repertoire of interpretive and educative strategies available to museums and heritage sites.

Your feedback

We welcome feedback, so that both the practice and research *into* practice may benefit from the widest dialogue and debate. To this end, you are invited to contact:

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or via email at: a.r.jackson@manchester.ac.uk .

Dr Jenny Kidd (Research Associate 2005-8)
From Oct. 2008:
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Glossary of key 'live interpretation' terms and acronyms

What kinds of performance?

The terms in use are many and can be confusing. While 'museum theatre' and 'live interpretation' appear frequently through this report - these are the terms most often used in the profession – one single term cannot adequately capture the qualities or characteristics of the medium. We reproduce here, in adapted form, the glossary of terms created by IMTAL-Europe (the International Museum and Theatre Alliance), which in turn was influenced by the definitions created by IMTAL-Americas.

Modes of performance

The terminology used in museum theatre and live interpretation listed here is based on a survey of IMTAL conference delegates in September 2001 undertaken by Verity Walker (verity@interpretaction.com)), and on the longer-term research work of Chris Ford, formerly of the National Railway Museum in York.

Interpretation: a communication process designed to reveal to a specific audience the significance of a historic/cultural/natural site or museum (and the audience's relationship to it) through a first-hand experience involving interaction with another person, a place, an object or an artefact. Live interpretation and museum theatre are just one form of interpretive technique.

Living history: a broad term used to describe historically authentic activities in an appropriate context, often an open air museum. Interpreters engaged in living history may be in role (see First Person, below) or simply in costume (see Third Person, below).

Live interpretation: a broad term used to cover many aspects of living history-type activities, ranging from non-costumed demonstrations of historical craft to storytelling and costumed first- and third-person interpretation.

First person interpretation: where an interpreter assumes a particular role, often (but not always) in appropriate costume, either from the premise that he/she has moved forward through time to the present, or that his/her audience has moved backwards through time to his/her past.

Third person interpretation: where an interpreter dresses in appropriate costume and has a full knowledge of the life of a particular character or a specific era, but does not assume that role (i.e. can speak authoritatively of the character's life and times, but remains a 21st century person discussing the past).

Museum theatre: a specific kind of interpretation that employs fictional activity to communicate ideas, facts and concepts. A museum-theatre performer assumes the role of a character (as a solo gallery character, an interpreter or as part of a play or scenario) in order to entertain and educate visitors. They take on the role of a particular character in a particular circumstance in order to help visitors appreciate and understand the story in hand and, through that, some aspect of the host museum or site.

Re-enactment: a detailed recreation (often by a large number of people) of a single short-term historical event (such as a battle, designed to attract a large number of spectators), where action, costume and combat often take precedence over the spoken word.

Role-play: where the audience as well as the interpreter takes on a role or roles within a particular scenario or performance which supports the plot, which may or may not involve advance preparation and the wearing of appropriate costume.

Story-telling: where the interpreter focuses on relating a particular story rather than on wearing an authentic costume or playing a particular character.

Acronyms

PLH: The *Performance, Learning and Heritage* research project

LFM: Llancaiach Fawr Manor, South Wales. Case Study 2.

MM: The Manchester Museum. Location for *This Accursed Thing*. Case Study 4.

NMM: The National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London. Case Study 1.

TTC: Triangle Theatre Company in collaboration with the Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, Coventry. Case Study 3.

CS1: Case Study 1 (NMM)

CS2: Case Study 2 (LFM)

CS3: Case Study 3 (TTC)

CS4: Case Study 4 (MM)

CFL: Campaign for Learning

DCMS: Department for Culture, Media & Sport (HM Government)

GEM: Group for Education in Museums (UK)

ILFA: 'Inspiring Learning for All'

IMTAL: International Museum Theatre Alliance (References primarily to IMTAL-Europe unless indicated otherwise. Sister organisations are: IMTAL-Americas (the founding organisation) and IMTAL-Australasia.)

MLA: Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (UK)

UNESCO: The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Section 1: Background to the project

1.1 Research rationale

The field known generically as museum theatre has grown considerably during the past two decades, its use is sometimes contentious and its practice worldwide almost as diverse as the sites in which it takes place – but it has been notably under-researched. Museum theatre is broadly defined as: '*the use of theatre and theatrical techniques as a means of mediating knowledge and understanding in the context of museum education'* (Jackson & Rees Leahy 2005: 304). It is generally presented by professional actors and/or interpreters in museums or at historic sites and may range from performances of short plays/monologues based on historical events or on-site exhibitions, to interactive events using 'first person' interpretation or role-play; it may be designed for the curriculum needs of visiting schoolchildren or for family groups and/or the independent visitor.

Theories of learning have recently advanced our understanding of how, and in what forms, learning in museums takes place, but, despite evaluation of individual programmes now being standard practice among museum educators, there has been relatively little published on how theatre/performance contributes to that learning. In this context, there has been a pressing need for sustained, independent and practical research into the benefits (or otherwise) of on-site, theatre-based, informal learning activities at museums and heritage sites. This need was amply confirmed by our earlier, Phase 2 research, and by the considerable interest the research outcomes generated in the UK, USA, Finland, Italy and Australia. (See section 1.5 for a summary of the earlier phases of the research.)

This project therefore aimed to build on, and expand from, the limited but significant findings that emerged from the earlier research – for example, the demonstrable ways in which performance enhanced children's recall and grasp of the personal stories connected to the historical material they were studying, or how performance could promote 'focused looking' at the exhibits.

Applying and testing theories of learning based on constructivist and social/participatory models (Gardner, Hein, Hooper-Greenhill, Kolb, Vygotsky; the Museums, Libraries & Archives Council's 'Inspiring Learning for All' initiative), the present research has sought to deepen understanding of the diverse ways in which performance may contribute to, and go beyond, sought-for learning outcomes. The research has, at the same time, worked to expand the knowledge base on which many of the current debates and developments in Theatre and Performance Studies are predicated: especially the growing interest in site-specificity (Kershaw 1999, Kaye 2000), the validity of 'cultural performance' as a term applicable to museum theatre (Schechner 2002, Snow 1993), and the place of practice in research (*Practice as Research in Performance*, 2006).

1.2 The context for the research: museums & heritage sites

[Helen Rees Leahy]

The questions addressed and issues raised by the Performance Learning Heritage project are both timely and illuminating within wider debates about the purpose and function of museums, in the UK and also internationally. In their different ways, each of the case studies demonstrates desire of institutions and their funders to engage with more diverse

audiences and to communicate with their visitors in less authoritarian and more dialogic modes. Inevitably, the research itself reflected these debates as well as the specific policy objectives of each institution. For example, the development of the new piece *This Accursed Thing* at the Manchester Museum (Case Study 4) was grounded within the practice of 'revealing histories' that were previously excluded from the museum's account, as (in part) a strategy for reaching out to previously excluded audiences. In the context of the 2007 bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act, the Manchester Museum as part of a consortium of local museums had secured funding[1] to undertake this work as part of a government-sponsored programme of events designed to ameliorate past omissions and biases in museum histories.

Since 1997, government policy for UK museums and galleries has been predicated on their potential to fulfil successive social policy objectives, including: the amelioration of social exclusion; the promotion and management of cultural diversity; increasing access; the delivery of the national curriculum for schools; the encouragement of lifelong learning; the growth of sustainable communities; and the promotion of active citizenship. New funding streams for museums (including the Renaissance in the Regions programme) have been tied to targets for attracting increased and increasingly diverse audiences (including children), as well as to improving access to collections and developing educational activities. In an attempt to 'measure' the effectiveness of these initiatives, government-sponsored tools for assessing learning (and now social) outcomes have been promulgated and, in turn, adopted by many museums.

(See http://www.mla.gov.uk/policy/)

While such measures have had the effect of instrumentalising museum practice to meet social policy targets, they have also boosted funding for audience-focused practice and enabled many museums to develop their existing educational and interpretative activities. Although the policies and programmes of each of the case study sites (although less so in the case of Llancaiach Fawr Manor) have been affected by these wider UK funding and policy contexts, their commitment to engaging with visitors via a range of interpretative and educational practices (including museum theatre) also resonates with a much broader shift towards critique and collaboration within museums.

In 1971, Duncan Cameron diagnosed museums as being in 'desperate need of psychotherapy (Cameron, 1971: 61-73).The most serious cases were, he argued, already gripped by 'an advanced stage of schizophrenia' as they struggled to reconcile their traditional role as 'temple' or treasure house with their potential to function as a 'forum' for dialogue and debate. Arguably, this remains the fundamental tension within and between museums, although museums have changed significantly since Cameron's influential article. The publication of an anthology entitled 'The New Museology'(1989, edited by Peter Vergo) captured a set of interrelated preoccupations within and about museums and, by reviving the interwar phrase 'the new museology', coined a neat shorthand for this agenda. Specifically, 'The New Museology' identified aspects of a 'reflexive turn' in museums in which reorientation towards visitors was combined with an institutional consciousness of the museum's role in the construction of knowledge. The new museology also drew attention to the exclusions, prejudices and outmoded social and political values embodied in many historical collections. During the past two decades, the new museology has gained in traction within museums as well as in the expanding field of

[1] From the Heritage Lottery Fund and Renaissance North West.

academic museology, partly due to the critical and ethical commitment of museum staff to the development of less authoritarian and elitist modes of practice, and also to the opportunities offered by new technologies to create new experiences of interaction, communication and personalisation.

As a result of all of the above, many museums today are more relaxed, permissive and inclusive than ever before. The use of museum theatre or live interpretation can therefore be understood as an option on a spectrum of interpretative practices which also increasingly embrace consultation and even co-production with audiences. If these developments do indeed constitute an 'audience turn' within museums, then the PLH project should help to identify how that 'turn' is constituted by the institution and how it is experienced by the visitor. As the research will show, against the backdrop of the new museology, museum theatre has the potential both to be a corrective and disruptive presence, rewriting and unsettling the established institutional narratives. It can also challenge visitors' expectations of what visiting a museum involves in terms of the range of voices that are licensed to speak, including the voice of the visitor herself.

However, the practice of museum theatre has also been widely contested and still encounters resistance within the museum profession. For example, the kind of presentation often described as 'living history' has often been associated with the critique of Robert Hewison whose book 'The Heritage Industry' (1987) dissected the growing commoditisation of the past and its representation as a sanitised and simplified 'experience' or day out. The purpose of this research is not to defend museum theatre against its critics, but rather to explore its effectiveness as a medium of interpretation across the case study sites. In addition, the ongoing mapping exercise is intended to show the range of practice in the UK and internationally.

1.3 Research questions, aims and objectives

Before the research began, we identified a number of key research questions and problems that helped shape the overall research design:

1. How effective is the deployment of various styles of dramatic performance at museums and heritage sites in meeting – or challenging – the learning, access, and 'social inclusion' objectives of the host organisations?

2. If (as the earlier research demonstrated) museum theatre is a valuable means of supporting learning through complex cognitive and affective engagement among organised groups of schoolchildren, can it be similarly effective in supporting learning among *independent visitors* (including cross-generational groups)?

3. If museum theatre may best be understood as part of a spectrum of performative learning in museums – including role play, guided tours, etc – what are its distinctive features and strengths? When does it work – and when does it not? By drawing comparisons between different styles of dramatic performance across a range of sites, is it possible to extrapolate general conclusions (e.g. in relation to performance techniques, site-specificity and actor-visitor interaction) for wider application?

4. Are there differences between the effectiveness of theatre used in museums (in relation to collections) and at heritage sites (in relation to historic buildings/environments)? If so, what are they?

5. Can theatre be used to interpret collections more effectively than at present? How might the research be deployed to develop innovative approaches, and how might these be analysed and assessed?

1.3.1 Original aims

1. To investigate and deepen understanding of the contribution that theatre and related performance techniques make to the experience of visitors to museums and heritage sites.
2. To consider the effectiveness and appropriateness of different styles of museum theatre/performance in relation to the contexts of specific sites, institutional learning strategies and wider public policy agenda.
3. To promote and evaluate innovative practice in museum theatre.

1.3.2 Original objectives

Our objectives were, by the end of the research, to have:

i. investigated and compared performance practice at a further two museums and one heritage site [subsequently modified to four case studies]

ii. investigated and compared the experiences of organised school groups (primary and secondary) and the independent visitor or family group (in the context of 'lifelong learning')

iii. observed, documented and analysed a variety of performance styles in relation to their site-specific contexts

iv. initiated, analysed and assessed the value of, one experiment in innovative practice at a museum

v. developed and applied a number of qualitative research methods in relation to museum performance and visitor response

vi. facilitated the wider exchange of ideas and practice in museum theatre between scholars and practitioners through an international conference.

1.4 The research team, advisers and partners

Research Team
Prof. Anthony Jackson, Project Director
Dr Jenny Kidd, Research Associate
Ruth Daniel, Administrator (July 2005-April 2008); Phil Styles (Administrator, May-September 2008; creator of research database, 2007-8)

Research Steering Group
Dr Helen Rees Leahy (Director, Centre for Museology, University of Manchester)
Dr Bernadette Lynch (Deputy Director, Manchester Museum, until 2007; subsequently freelance museum consultant and writer)
Pete Brown (Learning and Access Manager, Manchester Museum)
Joel Chalfen (attached PhD student, from October 2005)

The Advisory Board included all members of the Steering Group, representatives of the partner museums/site organisations and a number of independent members (professional practitioners and academics in the field), invited because of their interest and expertise in one or more aspects of the research. The Board was chaired by the Project Director and met twice a year throughout the duration of the project. Board members included (in addition to the Steering Group):

Andrew Ashmore, Actor/Writer and Director of Andrew Ashmore & Associates, specialist heritage interpretation company

Jane Dewey, live interpretation co-ordinator, National Maritime Museum (until 2006)

Dr Catherine Hughes, Freelance consultant, researcher and writer on museum theatre (Ohio, USA)

Prof Baz Kershaw, University of Warwick: Department of Theatre & Performance Studies [consultant]

Dr Sally Mackey, Deputy Research Dean, University of London: Central School of Speech & Drama

Rowena Riley, Lifelong Learning Officer, Museums and Heritage Caerphilly, Caerphilly County Borough Council

Verity Walker, independent museum-education/interpretation consultant and member of the Phases One/Two research team - a 'special consultant', who has also provided an ongoing practical and professional overview of the project.

Carran Waterfield, Co-director of Triangle Theatre, Coventry.

Museum/Heritage site partners
The National Maritime Museum, Greenwich (Case Study 1, October 2005)
Llancaiach Fawr Manor, South Wales (Case Study 2, February/March 2006)
Triangle Theatre, Coventry, resident theatre company based at the Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, Coventry (Case Study 3, April-August 2006)
The Manchester Museum (Case Study 4, March/April 2007)
[Full details of the site partners in Section 3]

1.5 Phases of research

The current research emerged as the direct result of two earlier, linked research projects, beginning in 2001. As the research questions became more complex and demanding, and the experience of the first 'pilot' project served to raise yet more questions, it became clear that there would need to be three phases in the research.

1.5.1 Phase One

The pilot research project, spring 2001. This small-scale research, part-funded by the Group for Education in Museums (GEM), was conceived and undertaken by Verity Walker, an independent museum consultant, in consultation with Tony Jackson. Based on

the experience of schoolchildren at a living history event at the Tower of London early in 2001, Walker's aim was to develop a practical research methodology for museum theatre and live interpretation. The project lasted for two months, not including the analysis stages.

Walker teamed a class from a junior school in Tower Hamlets with the Education Department of the Royal Armouries (Tower of London) and an enactor from the professional live interpretation company Past Pleasures. A single class of Year 3 children, from multi-cultural and multi-lingual backgrounds, was split in two, both halves working to a common set of learning objectives on the subject of the life of Anne Boleyn. The objectives were communicated in different ways: one group's experience involved meeting Anne Boleyn's 'cousin', and the others' a guided tour and a slide show focusing on Boleyn's life. A pre-experience visit established a base-line for the children's existing knowledge and two post-experience visits (immediately afterwards and one month later) established their recall of the experience. It was at the second visit that the styles of answer (and creative responses) from the two groups began to separate out more clearly. The indications were that the children who had had a theatre-based experience had in many respects better recollection of their experience of the Tower than the control group.

However, the pilot project provided too small a sampling to allow definitive conclusions to be drawn. Areas which Phase One suggested for particular emphasis during Phase Two were:

- What further, more robust, kinds of evidence could be evinced to test the claim that theatre-based learning led to improved recollection of a visit to an historic site, and did this apply equally to museum visits?
- What, if any, differences in understanding might be evident between children who followed theatre and non-theatre pathways through historic sites and museums?

A full report on this pilot project, 'Exploring evaluation techniques for live interpretation - towards a research methodology for live interpretation: a pilot project at Tower of London', was published in the *Journal of Education in Museums* 22: 2001, pp 14 – 20.

1.5.2 Phase Two

This was a research project funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Board (subsequently re-constituted as AHRC), in August 2001 to July 2002. Tony Jackson led a research team, including Dr Helen Rees Leahy (co-investigator) and Paul Johnson (researcher), with Walker as consultant. It investigated the effectiveness of theatre and theatre techniques in museums.

This larger-scale project was designed to improve and build on the techniques used in the initial pilot. It focused on the experiences of eight classes of schoolchildren from four different primary schools, who visited between them two museums with contrasting locations, collections and approaches to theatre techniques: the Imperial War Museum in London and the People's History Museum in Manchester. The schools involved included inner-city schools in London and Manchester, several with high levels of 'statemented' and non-English First Language pupils, and a private girls' school in Oxford. 50% of the children encountered, and engaged with, an actor in role (a character from the past) during their visits, while the other 50% followed a programme of educational activities, such as a

guided tour, handling of artefacts and a set of investigative tasks. The two contrasting experiences were compared, not to show that one learning method was superior to another, but to compare the strengths, weaknesses and nature of each.

The title of the report, '*Seeing it for real*', was taken from the response of one of the schoolchildren who had taken part in the 'theatre pathway' through the People's History Museum. Asked two months later what had most impressed her about the visit, she said it was the chance to see the '*real thing'*, which was much better than '*just being told*' or looking at photographs which were '*not the same as going to see it for real life*'. Her comment reflected a view common to many of the children interviewed at all participating schools at both museums, including many of those following the 'non-theatre' as well as the 'theatre' pathways: it expresses their enthusiasm for the whole museum experience, but especially the live performances, interactive displays, object-handling and role-play activities.

At the **Pump House People's History Museum**, both visits were on the theme of 1950s immigration from the Caribbean. The 'theatre' groups of children encountered an enactor in role as 'Gabrielle', who offered a performance ('No Bed of Roses') presented in three scenes spanning several decades. The use of this enactment was (and still is) an established part of the Museum's education provision. The 'non-theatre' group had a specially-developed guided tour and hands-on artefact handling session which was a variation of the museum's usual programme for schools.

The **Imperial War Museum** visit was themed around 1940s wartime Britain. The theatre group visited the 1940s House, linked to the Channel Four television documentary series recreating family life during the war, and encountered an enactor in role as 'Muriel', a 1940s housewife. This was a relatively simple and much shorter performance than 'No Bed of Roses', but was at the same time more conversational in style and more directly related to its recreated environment. The non-theatre group had a visit based on a detailed model of a 1940s house, supplemented with some artefact handling. Both these experiences were part of the museum's established education programme.

Defining 'effectiveness' in terms of museum theatre was one of the greatest challenges the project team faced. Phase One had focused largely on factual and historical recall as a means of establishing effectiveness, but the team felt strongly that recall was only one part of a multi-faceted experience which embraces affective as well as cognitive learning. Responses in Phase Two were therefore analysed under seven categories:

- **Experience**: *what was the child's overall impression of the museum: the visit as a whole and its component parts?*
- **Recall**: *did the child recollect key facts accurately and completely?*
- **Understanding***: did the child digest and process the information fully? Did the child demonstrate a grasp of the whys and hows of what happened in the past?*
- **Connection**: *did the child manage to connect and understand different elements of the museum experience and different events from the period?*
- **Surprise**: *did the child express surprise over any aspect of the experience? Were preconceptions challenged?*
- **Ownership**: *how did the experience encourage the child to relate personally to people and events of the period in question? Did the child show any evidence of emotional or imaginative empathy with the people of the time?*

- **Inspiration**: *did the child show any evidence of their inspiration being fired or curiosity triggered?*

These categories were developed further for Phase Three.

While Phase Two was limited to two museums and four schools, clear patterns emerged that would need to be more fully tested during Phase Three, in particular:

Where the 'story' of the visit is delivered by an enactor through a strong linear narrative in the first person, both recollection and understanding are enhanced, both in the short and in the longer-term.

- Where the visit consists of more fragmented elements assembled by the museum, without the organising function of a dramatic narrative, there appears to be more scope for children to construct their own meanings - and equally for them to misconnect elements of the story, leading to misunderstanding. This misunderstanding increases with time.
- Theatre group children showed more tendency to empathise, especially with negative or problematic aspects of the period in question.
- Each method is enhanced by the incorporation of hands-on activity: the children's recall of such activity was better than their recall of more passive activities such as guided tour and note-taking, a difference that became more marked over time.
- Theatre group children showed more of a tendency to relate personally to the character representing the period in question than did the non-theatre group children.
- Individual narrative can provide a powerful insight into the period in question, but is inevitably partial and may result in misunderstanding without wider educational support.

Website for the Phase two '*Seeing it for Real*' report (2002):

http://www.plh.manchester.ac.uk/research/resources/Seeing_It_For_Real.pdf.
A research article, by Jackson and Rees Leahy, '"Seeing it for Real?": authenticity, theatre and learning in museums', was published in *Research in Drama Education*, 10.3 (November 2005), pp. 303-26.

1.5.3 Phase Three

The current project. The Phase Two research team recommended that Phase Three should be broadened out, both in timescale and in groups and sites targeted. Over a three-year period, it would be possible, and valuable, to investigate the impact of theatre-based learning not just on school groups but also on family learners and older learners, and not just at museums but also at historic sites.

The 'Performance, Learning and Heritage' research project commenced on 1 July 2005 and concluded on 30 November 2008. It was funded by an award of £280,213 from the Arts & Humanities Research Council (UK).

Section 2: Performance, Learning & Heritage: Research methodology

2.1 Research overview

The **purpose of the project** was to undertake research into the increasing and varied use being made of performance (theatre and other drama-based activity) as an interpretive tool and a medium of learning with visitors to museums and historic sites – an expanding but relatively under-researched field of performance practice. The *detailed* research aims identified at the start of the project were:

1. To map the extent, style and functions of performance as a learning medium in museums and historic sites throughout the UK and abroad.
2. To observe, document and analyse a variety of performance styles in relation to their site-specific contexts, from 'first person' interpretation to complete dramatic performances.
3. To encompass the experience of independent adult visitors and families as well as organised educational groups.
4. To conduct longitudinal audience/visitor research to gauge effectiveness and impact over the longer term.
5. To initiate – and develop methods of assessing – innovative practice. In year 2, in collaboration with Manchester Museum, we commissioned a new professional performance piece to test and build on research findings as they began to emerge.
6. To facilitate the wider exchange of ideas and practice in Museum Theatre between scholars and practitioners through a dedicated website, a series of seminars and an international conference.

2.2 Defining our terms: Performance, Learning and Heritage

Performance

We chose in this research to focus on 'performance' in museums and historic sites, rather than on 'theatre' (as we had done in Phase Two of the research). There were pragmatic and theoretical reasons for the choice. First, 'performance' is a more all-embracing term that includes not only theatre performances that are clearly recognisable as such, but also 'first person interpretation' (museums/sites rarely advertise this as 'theatre'). 'Meet characters from the past', for example, is a common motif in the publicity for 'living history' events, such as Llancaiach Fawr Manor. Of course, 'third person interpretation' is also just as performative - the costumed interpreter may not be in role as a 19th century textile worker, but she is demonstrating a skill 'as if' in role and her (21st century) explanations to her 21st century audience are undoubtedly performative in their own way.

Secondly, we acknowledged the recent and rapidly expanding interest in 'performance studies' as an important theoretical construct with which to analyse and understand a wide variety of social experiences, from performances at political hustings through to the performative nature of 'simply' visiting a museum or historic site (see Kershaw 1999, Schechner 2002, Smith 2006). Carlson, in his seminal study of 'Performance', concedes that it is 'an essentially contested concept' and covers a multitude of possible definitions, but chooses to highlight two particular notions of performance, both of which are directly relevant to museum theatre. One involves the 'display of skills' (frequently to the fore in

third person interpretation – where, for example, the characteristics of a spinning jenny machine are demonstrated by a skilled operator). The other also involves display, but 'less of particular skills than of a recognised and culturally coded pattern of behaviour' (Carlson 1996: 4-5). By this he means that what distinguishes performance from mere 'activity' derives from the element of consciousness, or self-consciousness, of what is being done: 'I am performing here and now'. Performance is also distinguished by a conscious recognition by observers that this is performance: 'We are aware that we are watching/participating in a performance.' As Carlson argues, 'Performance is always performance *for* someone, some audience that recognises and validates it as performance …' (ibid. 5-6).

For the purposes of this report, we restrict our use of the term 'performance' to:

1. the clearly signalled dramatic performances given in museums or sites that involve actors in role, generally in costume, performing short plays or monologues to an audience fully aware that it is an audience

2. those instances of costumed interpretation commonly known as 'first person' interpretation or 'living history', in which visitors encounter personages purporting to be from the past, or from another culture, with whom they engage in dialogue. The dialogue will by its very nature be unpredictable but it operates within a clearly understood 'frame' – the game of 'let's pretend' – in the interests of discovery about the life and times these personages are endeavouring to depict. While there may be a 'scenario', there is no fixed script, no 'dramatic arc' and often no 'closure': life in the 1640s, it would seem at Llancaiach, goes on after the visitor has left.

Schechner, Kershaw, Snow, *et al*, use the term 'cultural performance' to indicate the range of performed events that take place in cultural settings that may include theatre but extend into such activity as carnival, historic re-enactment and the like. Schechner also draws a distinction between 'as' performance and 'is' performance (Schechner 2002: 30-5). Thus the clearly signalled monologues and plays from Case Study 1 and Case Study 4 constitute a recognisable form of theatre – it 'is' performance; whereas we can examine the experience offered at CS2 and much of CS3 in effect 'as' performance: it may not *overtly* claim to be performance, but it can productively be seen as strongly performative – it happens in front of us, around us, in its own time and space and we improvise (and perhaps perform) our responses as we can.

Subsidiary references are also made in the report to the 'performative' nature of visiting and to the ways the visitors often 'perform back' to the actors (prompted and unprompted), including the expression or demonstration of *ownership* or *agency***.** We have also referred to the performative (even theatrical) nature of the museum or historic site itself: the architectural arrangement of spaces and scenographic and narrative design of displays which invite visitors to respond in ways not dissimilar to those of a theatre audience. In the sections that follow, it is the primary rather than secondary uses of the term performance that provide the focus of attention. We consider the subsidiary uses of the term later, under 'Visitors & audiences'.

Learning

The *Performance, Learning and Heritage* study has been informed by a number of theoretical approaches to learning which it is worth summarising here as context for what follows in the report, especially under the theme 'Learning' (Section 4.3.4).

The traditional positivist (or behaviourist) models of learning prioritise the one-way transmission of knowledge – 'knowledge' usually being understood as a body of factual, verifiable information about a world that is objectively 'knowable'. Museums and other organisations concerned with promoting informal and lifelong learning have long had problems with this approach. Such models, which commonly assess learning outcome in terms of success or failure, do not account adequately for the range of experiences museums offer, for peoples' varied responses to them, and for individual active engagement with subject matter and sites. Institutions of formal education have likewise been taking steps to adjust teaching styles and curricula to accord with new understandings of how pupils learn, but the challenges faced within larger, far more rigid, learning environments have made change more difficult to accomplish than it has been within the informal sector.

In recent years, then, a number of other theories have been embraced by museums and heritage sites, as have a number of policy objectives within the sector. In particular, developments in constructivist learning theory have emphasised the ways in which we all learn by making connections and building on pre-existing 'knowledges' – a theory strongly influenced by Freire, Kolb, Dewey, Vygotsky and indeed by the erstwhile, often discredited child-centred philosophy that dominated so much educational thinking and policy-making in the 1960s. Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, contested by many, has nonetheless served to remind us that learners learn in different ways according to personal, and sometimes socially acquired, pre-dispositions - and that reliance on traditional measures of intelligence is deeply flawed. Learners construct knowledge in an individual and personalised fashion; cognitive, emotional and social dimensions need to be constantly borne in mind when designing educational programmes; and attention needs to be paid to the individual learning styles that Kolb and others have identified if genuine learning is to be promoted in museums.

Many museums and heritage organisations (in the UK as elsewhere) have therefore over recent years endeavoured to re-design their exhibits, displays and educational programmes in more visitor-centred and learner-centred ways. Examples include interactive displays, text panels that provoke questions and suggest connections with the everyday world, as much as they give information, and the training of staff to interact with the public rather than 'police them. (See especially Hein's notion of the 'constructivist museum' in Hein, 1998) Constructivist learning theory also underpins the influential initiative promoted by the UK's Museums, Libraries & Archives Council, *Inspiring Learning for All* (ILFA: http://www.inspiringlearningforall.gov.uk/), in particular the generic learning outcomes – and subsequently the generic social outcomes – which have attempted to systematise the ways in which museum learning officers attempt to shape and evaluate programmes for school and independent visitors alike.[2]

[2] ILFA 'describes what an accessible and inclusive museum, archive or library which stimulates and supports learning looks like' and aims to 'transform the way in which museums, archives and libraries deliver and engage users in learning.' (http://www.inspiringlearningforall.gov.uk/ last accessed 30/10/08)

A useful, succinct definition of learning is provided by The Campaign for Learning (CFL):

> Learning is a process of active engagement with experience. It is what people do when they want to make sense of the world. It may involve increase in or deepening of skills, knowledge, understanding, values, feelings, attitudes and the capacity to reflect. Effective learning leads to change, development and the desire to learn more. (http://www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk/ last accessed 30/10/08)

Both the CFL and the ILFA definitions[3] have informed the categories which we use to evaluate performance as a learning medium, although we have adapted and widened them in many respects – as explained in Section 4.

In putting the learner at the centre of the experience, museums have been part of a larger move evident in cultural institutions across the world, a move to ensure that visitors are not just 'targeted' but are considered participants in the process too. In this respect, the use of drama as a means of engaging potential learners has been embraced by many museum/site learning officers as one further valuable tool in their repertoire of strategies for offering varied and stimulating 'ways in' to the subject matter being addressed.

Heritage

The term 'heritage' remains complex and contested both in the literature and in institutional practice. Although as Robert Hewison recognises in his 1987 book, *The Heritage Industry*, it is a 'word without definition' (and a relatively new one at that), there are a number of assumptions inherent in its continued use.

Traditionally, heritage has been synonymous with the 'inheritance' of (mostly material) manifestations of 'the past' through the generations. 'Treasures' from that past (buildings and artefacts for example) have been recognised as having intrinsic value by the very nature of their being 'old', and as such, are preserved in order that they can be admired, enjoyed and (hopefully) found informative in the future. Preservation happens in a number of ways; sometimes privately and behind closed doors, but often publicly and on behalf of the 'nation' (the link between heritage and nation is a frequent one) as is the case with the National Trust or English Heritage for example. This very act undoubtedly confirms again the significance of the object and as such makes it an easy (perhaps inevitable) assumption that it has something to tell us about the world from which it came, and possibly even the one we now inhabit. Thus, as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett recognises, 'ethnographic objects are made, not found, despite claims to the contrary' (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: 3).

More recent notions of heritage however deem it to have not so much to do with material culture *per se*, but place more emphasis on the (many) stories these materials can tell us as resources. The materials are a starting point not an end in and of themselves: the material culture does not constitute 'heritage' in its own right. Thus, heritage becomes a process, of passing on and receiving memories, not just the artefacts themselves (Smith 2006). As

[3] The ILFA definition is closely based on that of CFL. It adds that 'Learning is most effective when it happens at both a belief and an identity level so that we can make sense of something and can relate it to our own life experiences. … (ILFA) is based on the firm belief that every experience in a museum, library or archive has the potential to encourage learning.' (http://www.inspiringlearningforall.gov.uk/ last accessed 30/10/08)

such, heritage inevitably becomes a site of struggle; these stories can be contradictory, controversial and contested within and between cultures and communities. The new museology (since the 1970s) is concerned with recognising not only the multiple? complex? nature of 'texts' and the transience of 'history', but also the assumptions inherent in any quest for 'truth' and for 'authenticity' - we can only see the past through our contemporary eyes. (Bendix 1999, Rubridge 1995, Vergo 1989). This can make various methods of interpretation used at museums and heritage sites problematic, but equally can be seen as a liberation from the tyranny of an ordered, one-dimensional, fixed - yet still fictitious - 'past'.

There has also been a recognition of intangible forms of heritage in shape of the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage initiative. The UNESCO project recognises that many cultures have a range of practices that constitute their heritage, and often different attitudes toward, and experiences of, material culture (including having it removed or destroyed by well-intentioned Westerners, including collectors). Intangible heritages, wherever they might occur, are forms of signifying cultural practice which are arguably also important to preserve in some way.

Quite significantly for our research project, it is also worth noting that heritage (and peoples' engagement in/with heritage) is increasingly being recognised as taking on elements of performance (Bagnall 2003, Smith 2006, Pearson & Thomas 1994). That is, that visitors might be involved in an active co-creation and exploration of the site or subject in question, when previously their role was hardly acknowledged at all. This 'performance' is very much shaped by our present, including the media context within which our expectations of, and language for talking about, heritage are framed (and learned), our social context, personal viewpoints and experiences. Visitors are not 'blank slates' to be written on (Bradburne, 2000) with a prescribed version of heritage, but are involved in an active, creative, dialogic and ongoing relationship with it. This view of the *potential* of heritage is one that we worked with in this report.

2.3 The Organising framework for the research

The research (both as a whole, and at individual case study sites) has been organised through and around four interconnecting ‘frames’. By exploring these different areas, we have built a detailed picture of the sites and the performance opportunities available at them. This overall framework underpins much of the report, and is used to structure the recommendations made in the final section. These frames are *(in the form of prompts for the research team)*:

1. **Understanding the Site:** (i.e. the museum or historic site)
   How does the site articulate its policy, 'mission', house-style?
   What are the characteristics of the theatricalised space?
   How is the gallery (for example) approached by the audience?
   How are the performance space and audience space denoted - explicitly or implicitly ('promenade', fixed, etc)?
   How site-specific is the performance, and what part does the site play in the event (gallery as backdrop, immersion within historic environment, etc)?

2. **Understanding the Content:**
   What is the subject-matter of the performance?
   What are the relationships between collections/exhibits/settings and the performance?
   What levels/kinds of meaning are picked up by audience members? (from absorption of pre-determined information to story to entertainment to contemporary relevance, intended or otherwise)

3. **Understanding the Performance:**
   Characters in role
   The use of costume
   The use of artefacts during the performance
   Exits & entrances
   ‘Register’
   Single vs multi-character events
   Audience interaction if any - how are the audience inducted into the performance? - how are they engaged?
   Use of story-telling
   Use of surprise (including the ‘wow factor’)

4. **Understanding the Audience:**
   Are the audience 'casual' or independent visitors, family groups or organised school groups? Are they tourists, older people, or pupils in uniforms?
   How do ‘visitors’ become ‘audiences’?
   How do the audience position themselves, at the start, during the performance, and at the end?
   What are their observable responses (body language, vocal, etc?) before, during and after the event?
   Are there noticeable points at which they begin to engage and if so when and in what way?
   Do they participate actively in the performance in any way? If so, how much, if any, prompting is needed?

2.4 Research approach and theoretical basis

The PLH project relied on a multi-disciplinary theoretical framework, and a number of differing research methods in order to collect and analyse data. Appendix E contains details of how the approach has differed by site, but some principles guided the whole research process:

- The research team employed a **mixed-method** approach to collecting both qualitative and quantitative data about sites, collections, performance activity and audiences.
- The research was **empirical** in nature: interested in how the *experiences* of groups and individuals (visitors to sites) can and should inform future practice.
- The findings are **grounded** in the data we have collected from our participating sites and their users.
- We were interested in knowing more about the programmes that sites are already running (the research is **naturalistic**: looking at that which is already happening) but also, for our final case study, in being **experimental** with form and content.

This mixed approach has been integral to informing the recommendations made in this document.

2.5 Research methods

The project involved the study of four distinct performance events at one heritage site and three museums, Llancaiach Fawr Manor, South Wales; the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich; the Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, Coventry; and The Manchester Museum.

Methods used include observation, site visits, participant-observation, visual recording, spatial mapping, interviews, surveys, creative methodologies (drawing, writing, various dramatic techniques), focus groups[4] and archival research. How much we used each method varied according to the needs of the case study.

Primary, interrelated research methods:

- **Longitudinal research:** sites and visitor groups were observed, interviewed and re-visited over a 12 month period, to test perception, engagement, recall, and learning outcomes. For *organised school groups*, research methods extended those successfully trialled in Phase Two (small-group interviews and other formal/informal means of testing prior knowledge, recall, etc). Unlike the Phase Two research, however, we have not attempted to compare directly the effectiveness of theatre and non-theatre pathways through each museum but rather allowed for more fluid (and realistic) practices in which theatre and other 'non-theatre' techniques may be combined. For *independent visitor/family groups*, we developed existing methods (museum visitor-research, educational theatre research), including 'snapshot' interviews immediately after the visit, focus groups, semi-structured interviews with selected visitors. Visitor-tracking (on film, through conversations and observations) helped determine, for example, whether visitors behave differently/have different conversations in relation to

[4] In line with usual practice, small incentive payments were provided to focus group members to ensure adequate numbers and as wide a social spread as possible.

a performance event compared with other parts of their visit, and how the experience of a performance contributes to or changes the experience of the museum/site overall.

- **Comparative case study research:** we made detailed comparisons between different sites and performance styles, allowing us to draw wider, more generalised conclusions (an aspect to which the related doctoral study contributed[5]).
- **Action research** and **experimental research:** focusing on the development of innovative practice, we worked in collaboration with Manchester Museum and a specialist museum-theatre company, to devise an experimental performance for the specific institutional context (a challenging, multi-vocal, interactive historical narrative, adaptable for both school groups and independent visitors). The performance was presented and adjusted according to visitor response. We captured, analysed and compared differences in visitor response and in the effectiveness of different interpretative modes (see Data Trawl 4).
- **Questionnaire surveys:** we undertook a limited number of surveys, primarily to provide a set of quantitative data to aid the triangulation of the qualitative research.
- **Video and stills-camera recordings** were made of the sites, events and audience response – for archival purposes, as a 'reality check' against visitor perceptions, and, where/as appropriate, as material for wider dissemination of good/challenging practice via the DVD resource.
- These studies were complemented by a broader **mapping** of developments in museum performance practice in the UK and abroad (part of the subject of the linked doctoral study) and surveys of relevant research literature and applications of museum-based learning theory.

[5] Joel Chalfen's PhD thesis examines particularly the work of museums within the 'Sites of conscience' consortium, with reference especially to the Lower East Side Tenement Museum (New York), The Workhouse (Southwell, UK) and the Gulag Museum, Perm, Russia.

Section 3: Project narrative

3.1 Changes made to scope and methodology

1. Change in number of sites under study:
The original project proposal indicated that three sites would come under study over the course of the project. This quickly rose to four, in order to glean as detailed a picture of the field as was possible. We decided that it would be a valuable addition to the project to look at the relationship between a museum and a theatre company, namely Triangle Theatre Company and the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum in Coventry.

2. Change of site (and emphasis at site):
We decided that the heritage site case study would take place at Llancaiach Fawr Manor in Nelson, South Wales. This not only widened the geographical range of case study sites but the range of interpreted 'heritages' and performance styles also. We decided that research at this site would focus on the experiences of school groups specifically (although trips to the site were made at other times also), and that research at the National Maritime Museum would look at the experiences of mixed ages of independent visitors (instead of looking at both groups at both sites).

3. Development of categories:
Over the course of Phase Three the categories for data analysis have been through a number of different permutations. The 'OCRUISE' categories developed for Phase Two [see Sect. 1.5.2] were a natural starting point, but the range of respondents, sites, subject matter and performance styles under study led to discussions about their suitability (within the research team, and with members of the Steering Group and Advisory Board). Finding ways of categorising individuals' comments on the research process itself, or their (often complex) analyses of the performances as media for interpretation became crucial. These and other challenges to OCRUISE led us to the themes that structure Section 4 of this document. The wider development of the framework for organising the research (Understanding the Audience, Performance, Site and Content) shaped the methodology, choice of sites and overall narrative of the research process (as outlined later in this section).

4. Change in emphasis on different methodologies:
The longitudinal nature of the research process also had its impact on the evolving methodology of the project. For example, ten months after our focus group meetings at the National Maritime Museum, a few of our respondents commented that their overriding memory of the day was in fact taking part in the focus group itself, meeting the other people and changing the very nature of their typical museum visit. This meant that we became more strategic in our use of focus groups for later case studies (see for example the Research Design document for Case Study 4: Appendix C.4). Our use of cameras and video recording techniques also evolved as did our methods for recording interviews (using more discreet digital recording devices, for example).

We have been flexible and responsive, adapting our methods in accordance with respondents' various ages, abilities and availability. So, for example, when following up with younger school children, we have asked them to draw us images depicting their visit or to write something about their trip (questions for interpreters for example) whereas with older pupils we have experimented with mind-mapping techniques and asking them to

interview each other (as if on television – this gives an interesting insight into the priorities and outcomes of the experience as expressed by the pupils in their own language in discussion with one another). For adult visitors we have used questionnaires, interviews, and written exercises (including meaning mapping), and experimented with using interviewers who more closely represent the various communities respondents come from (again, the school pupils interviewing one another, or Kurdish and African interviewers for case studies 3 and 4).

5. Increased number of respondents:
The research team followed the experiences and recollections of many more participants than we initially envisaged – which meant far more data than anticipated. We increased the number of participants to ensure we got as much as possible from the longitudinal nature of the research. Given that it is not always possible to re-contact all individuals up to a year after we first saw them, the larger number of participants meant we had a greater chance of reaching a sizeable number of them for the final interviews.

6. Decision to hold a number of seminars and events:
The project team decided to host a number of seminars through the course of the project, as well as the planned conference. Two seminars were held with guest speakers, as well as a launch party (with presentations) for the project and a closing event. The resultant discussions, contacts, visits and opportunities for dissemination have proved invaluable to the success of the project.

3.2 Website and database

The project's **website** was launched in October 2005 and has been a useful additional tool both for the dissemination of findings and the collection of data. The website provides an invaluable interface for the project, giving people information about case study sites, methodologies employed and available resources (a bibliography, list of web links and information about the research team for example). It has also acted as an occasional forum for discussions pertinent to the project. Visitors to the site can enter details about their role, site or practice which are immediately accessible by members of the research team. This information can then be fed into the project's database making it a more robust and responsive system of greater value than could have been anticipated at the start of the project.

The project's **database** has been a long time in the making, despite discussions and planning taking place from the very start of the project. The database was eventually designed and built by freelancer (subsequently our Project Administrator), Phil Styles. The database provides a home and interface for the majority of data collected by the research team, making the project transparent, and giving the artefacts collected an ongoing value for future use. It includes:

- information about all sites involved in the project's mapping exercise; contact details, web addresses and archival documents (including publicity materials and leaflets)
- information about practitioners and researchers working in the field (again including documentation)
- a map of the world through which the information can be presented geographically: sites, people and organisations

- information about all participants in the research case studies and links to their interview transcripts (currently only available to the research team)
- information about specific events and links to related artefacts (including the Performing Heritage conference April 2008 where copies of some papers can be downloaded)
- information relating to all case study sites, and all data collected at them (publicity materials, tickets, posters, scripts, photos etc).

Both the website and database will be available to access after the close of the project, and will continue to be supported by the University of Manchester. They will both be kept active and regularly updated, at the same time as they provide a valuable archival snapshot of the field during the period of the research.

The website and database are available at: www.manchester.ac.uk/plh

3.3 Mapping

The mapping process began in July 2005 and continues to this day. The research team were keen to hear from all of those who define their work as within the field of museum theatre/ live interpretation, and have had a positive response. Through internet research, keeping an eye on email lists (such as IMTAL and GEM), conferences and seminars, we have amassed a great wealth of information, although by no means a comprehensive list, about practice at sites throughout the UK, and around the globe. The conference in 2008 was particularly useful in this endeavour.

Other events attended by members of the research team (listed in Appendix F) have helped us gain a detailed and international picture of the field and how it is changing.

Information gleaned from such events, and through the research, has been and continues to be fed into the project's database (and the physical archive at the University of Manchester), which now provides users with a virtual map of this kind of practice, those involved in it, and the ways in which it is being promoted.

There is, however, further work to be done in this endeavour, and we would still like to encourage those involved in the field to get in touch with members of the research team and tell them about the work that they do. (See 'Your feedback' on page 8 for contact details.) We are anxious that, as far as possible, the archive remains a live and active ongoing process which can continue to inform researchers, practitioners and others who are interested, of the sheer size and scope of the field, and the variety of work which constitutes it.

3.4 Participating sites

3.4.1 Case Study 1: National Maritime Museum

Date of research: October 2005 – September 2006
Site: A national museum
Favoured performance mode: single character performances

Understanding the site:

The National Maritime Museum (NMM) in Greenwich, London, holds the largest collection of British maritime exhibits anywhere in the world - over 2 million objects and texts. The site uses a rolling programme of displays and exhibitions over 45 galleries to allow opportunity for all collections and objects to be interpreted in their own unique and timely manner. This is done through the use of five categories of exhibitions and displays:

- permanent galleries
- specialist exhibitions
- major temporary exhibitions (tend to charge)
- temporary/travelling exhibitions
- minor temporary exhibitions.

Alongside (and supposedly intentionally overlapping with) these opportunities for exhibit display, the Museum has a ten year history of running actor-interpretation programmes. For the most part, this programme consists of single-person, 'in character' monologue presentations within the Museum's various spaces. A piece will typically be presented three times in one day and will usually last no more than 30 minutes. The performances vary in the level to which they require audience participation (see Appendix B.1 for further details of the programme).

The National Maritime Museum currently hosts more than 1,500,000 visits a year from members of the public, 347,212 of which are from children, and 821,929 from overseas visitors (2004 figures). Of these visitors, surveys show a total of 98 per cent stated that their overall impression of the visit was more than satisfactory, and 99 per cent would recommend the Museum to a friend. Although these figures seem impressive, and far exceeded DCMS targets, there is still a concern that large sections of the population are *not* visiting. The Museum's social inclusion policy thus aims to: 'develop and promote a sustainable programme for social inclusion', 'ensuring equal access to the Museum's collections'. 'Access', according to the policy itself, involves 'multi-layered interpretation of the Museum's core values', and, in particular aims to facilitate an increase in the number of visitors from the C2DE social demographic.

Visitors to the Museum will find performances promoted on digital displays, by actors pre-performance, and on 'lollipop' signs around the museum. These lollipops generally include an image of the actor, and the title and times of the performance. In all instances we saw, this was accompanied by the name of the character to be depicted during the performance, a hint at the Museum's mission of showing the relationship of the exhibits and displays with real people. This also is evidenced on the Museum's website: 'Stories

from characters whose lives are linked with the sea and seafaring themes of our exhibitions'. (www.nmm.ac.uk/ accessed 31/10/05)

Understanding the content:

The *Trafalgar Voices* programme of performance involved four individual pieces written and performed by different actors. These pieces were 'brought in' from local interpretation companies including Spectrum and Paul Ross Interpretations. The performances were:

- *Waiting For Nelson*: about 'Nelson's Women' Fanny and Lady Hamilton. Both characters are played by one actor
- *The Gunner's Tale*: about Robert Bell, a seaman on board the Belleisle during the Battle of Trafalgar
- *The Pensioner's Tale*: a participatory performance about the life of a Greenwich Pensioner
- *The Midshipman's Tale*: performance about the life of a midshipman, including the use of flags as signals

The pieces ran alongside the big special exhibition – *Nelson and Napoleon* – designed to commemorate the 200th Anniversary of the Battle of Trafalgar. The exhibition, on two floors in the temporary exhibition space, contained a host of information and artefacts related to the Battle, but also to the lives of the two men. There was also an interactive digital battle tableau on which visitors could see the Battle played out and listen to an accompanying narrative (in English and French).

None of the performances happened within the exhibition space (which visitors paid £9 to enter) but in the main gallery spaces, the lecture theatre and in the Queeen's House (a separate building a short walk from the main museum).

The scripts were researched by their writers (who were often also their performers) using a range of sources, some at the museum (muster rolls, ships logs) and some in library store.

Understanding the performance:

Sample performance: *The Gunner's Tale*

The Gunner's Tale performed in the main museum

Able Seaman Robert Bell presents a monologue detailing and describing the Battle of Trafalgar, at which he was present, and exploring various relationships: between Nelson and Napoleon, the public and Nelson, the ship's crew and Nelson, and between the character of Bell and 'war' itself. Through the telling of stories about life on board ship, facts were imparted about the processes of battle, weaponry, and the life of a seaman (that of a 'powder monkey' is also explicitly referenced). *The Gunner's Tale* is not an interactive piece, containing only one brief incident that could be referred to as interactive, but does involve much audience acknowledgement (six instances identified in the script, 10 identified in

filmed actuality). Robert Bell is telling his story to an audience he knows is there to hear him speak, and he references them throughout. That audience, however, is not given a role as they are in some other performances at the Museum. They are faceless spectators. During the data collection period, this piece was performed in the main museum, adjacent to a large front window under a giant propeller.

The propeller space is the most integrated with the museum as a whole, and the best for gathering large audiences. Located at the front of the museum (unmissable on the right as you enter) and near the shop, there is heavy visitor 'traffic' past this area for much of the day. As the questionnaire responses show, the resultant audience is largely made up of people who were passing, saw the activity, and decided to watch. The space is light but the high ceiling means acoustics are poor. The actor has to project himself quite forcefully to be heard by all, a problem which is compounded by the frequent interruptions of tannoy announcements (in one performance, this occurs on film four times).

The performance space is tucked into a window bay, so has three 'walls' and even the beginning of a fourth. The audience space and that of the performer is kept firmly in place, the actor's being signalled by a sail on the floor, and the audience's space indicated by seating in a semi-circle around the sail. At no point during the performance do the boundaries become blurred, or are they crossed by either the actor or an audience member. Visitors who sit in the chairs will find themselves hemmed in and committed to staying for the whole performance if a line of standing visitors collects behind them. Those at the back can come and go – at one performance we observed roughly 60 people coming and looking at what was happening, but not staying (probably because their view was hindered and there was no free seating left).

Gunner Bell introduces us straight away to his seafaring identity - he is 'of His Majesty's Royal Navy' and has served 'many years continuance'. The piece concentrates on the details of his naval life - we learn nothing of life beyond the Navy. This is perhaps an indication of how little can be known about a character who has survived to the current day only in ship's logs, muster rolls and pay books. We do however learn something of his views on the events and personalities in his story. Robert Bell is war-weary, having seen battle, he wishes only peace: ' 'cos I've had a belly full'. Lord Nelson was a hero, and Napoleon ('Boney'), although respected, is the enemy (Napoleon is still alive but in exile at the time of telling the story). Given his life as a seaman and his presence at Trafalgar, this is hardly surprising, but with the presence of only one character, there is no room for discussion of these natural assumptions; outside the conflict of the battle, there is no room for the exploration of ideological conflict. The Gunner is thus a vivid, constant, if two-dimensional, character who exists to us solely through his naval persona.

Understanding the audience:

Audiences for performances at the Museum are varied. Weekend gallery performances are attended by mixed groups, independent visitors and families, of all ages. The Museum also runs occasional sessions in the week for school groups.

Our primary concern at the Maritime Museum was to explore the experience of independent visitor groups and individuals. On the weekend of 22 and 23 October 2005, the research team collected the following:

- 94 questionnaires from members of the public
  Gunner's Tale – 44
  Waiting For Nelson - 27
  Pensioner's Tale – 14
  Midshipman's Tale – 10

- Footage from 5 filmed performances (plus vox pops)
  Gunner's Tale x 3
  Pensioner's Tale x 2

- Other footage (filmed on camcorder), some stills camera images.

- 4 hours focus group recordings, drawings (See Appendix B.2), learning styles questionnaires, exercises (with 34 individuals)

- Follow up interviews
  - One month later: 31 individuals
  - Nine months later: 28 individuals

For a more detailed breakdown of audiences and their responses (specific to this case study) see Data trawl in Appendix B.1.

The full research design for this case study can be found in Appendix C.1.

3.4.2 Case Study 2: Llancaiach Fawr Manor

Date of research: February 2006 – January 2007
Site: Historic site, a 17th century, restored manor house, owned and run by Caerphilly Borough Council as tourist and educational resource
Favoured performance mode: first person interpretation

Understanding the site:

Llancaiach Fawr Manor (LFM) in Nelson, South Wales, is a Stuart era domestic property, dressed as in 1645 (see http://www.caerphilly.gov.uk/visiting/museums/llancaiachfawrmanor.htm, as at 15/05/07).

The favoured interpretation strategy immerses visitors in the 'normal', everyday life of the servants as they go about their duties. It encourages visitors to explore, through questioning, conversation and the artefacts they encounter, what life was like both for the servants but also (indirectly), for the family of the house, the Pritchard family (whom they seldom meet). The building, objects and geographical setting of the Manor provide one level of enquiry and understanding in a visit, but the political climate of the era is also encouraged as a topic for exploration, and is portrayed through the opposing viewpoints of the servants, and the history of Colonel Pritchard's shifting allegiance during the Civil War. This political context also provides the Manor with its largest annual 'event', the arrival of the King for a visit in August (King's Day, every August).

The choice of Llancaiach Fawr Manor as a case study in the PLH project reflected the team's interest in historic sites as well as museums, and school groups as well as independent visitors. We wished to include within the case study sample one instance where the site itself becomes an integral, and central, part of the site offering and visitor experience.

Visitors to the Manor House are varied. Visitors can be part of a school group (20,000 children annually), other large visitor group, or independent (such as families, groups of friends or individuals). The research team, through various visits to the site, saw all these groups in action. On one of these occasions, King's Day at the Manor, other visitor groups were in evidence, namely large, organised groups of visitors, and even groups of costumed volunteers from elsewhere in the UK.

Navigation of the Manor without encountering a costumed interpreter is unlikely and, in order to partake in the entirety of the proffered visitor experience, undesirable. Visits thus involve a certain level of co-operation with the idea of performance as an interpretative tool that is unnecessary for visitors to other sites such as NMM (most visitors to LFM presumably know in advance of their visit that this is what they will encounter). Some advance warning is also given to visitors at the visitor centre on arrival, including a personal 'good conduct' letter from Colonel Pritchard's brother-in-law.

Understanding the content:

Live interpretation has been employed at Llancaiach as an interpretation strategy more or less since it opened in 1991:

> We had the furniture, well, some of the furniture, but no soft furnishings – nothing at all to make the House look really lived in. So all of that had to come from our imaginations, and we had to instil what we were seeing in our heads into the heads of the people who were standing in front of us. [LFM/P/PP1/120]:

The hope was that immersion in a version of the past would help visitors to grasp detail about the site, but also about the wider social and political context of the time.

To achieve this immersion, interpreters have to use personas with complete, rounded characters and must have an understanding of the political environment of 1645. Naturally, much of this is achieved through research (the Manor has a resource library):

> Well, I was given a lot of material here when I first came, lots of information from books and things, [a] list of names that would be appropriate for the 17th century. I just chose a name from that then, it's just constant research really reading books and things and having information from people in the house. [LFM/P/PP1/122]:

Although the Manor remains in 1645 year on year, the characters who people it become, in effect, one year older each year the actors work there. Interpreters thus have another year's history to gen up on, and more back story to create. This is important if the Manor wishes to portray the sense of an authentic past to repeat visitors.

Interpreters are also trained beyond their immediate characters: skills of performance, craft, language, dress and audience engagement are worked at in on-site training sessions (every Monday in winter), but supplemented by visits to other sites around the country. Many extend their skills through being members of interpretation/re-enactment groups such as the Sealed Knot.

Understanding the performance:

School visit 1: Guided tour

The pupils are greeted by one of the Manor's education staff who introduces the full-day visit, tells them they will be going 'back in time' and leads them to the front of the Manor.

Here they meet their first costumed interpreter, 'Elizabeth Proud', a friend of the family. She gives an introduction (in character) to the rules of the house (no running, no gum, walk in order – elders and betters first, then boys, then girls). The 90 pupils have been split into three groups, to take three different routes. Once Elizabeth finishes the introduction, one interpreter takes a group to the top floor, Elizabeth takes a group to the middle floor, and another takes the final group to the ground floor kitchen.

Over the course of the day, the pupils all see and experience the same areas (in theory). They visit:

> *Kitchens*: In the first kitchen, pupils are introduced to cooking 1645-style, shown how to grind herbs and told some 'anecdotes' about the cook and the life of the spit boy, who turns the spit for ten hours. A pupil is asked to volunteer to be the spit boy and turns the spit for a couple of minutes. After this the interpreter takes questions from the pupils.
> In the second kitchen, the interpreters point out table settings and the food on racks above them. Pupils learn how to make beeswax candles which they take away with them. Questions follow.
> *The Great Hall*: The pupils are introduced to the Hall as a Court. The 'implements of justice' are displayed to them, including handcuffs and a scold's bridle. Questions follow.
> *The Parlour*: The pupils are introduced to the room and various objects: the painting of the family, the secret cupboard and toilet, a chair that turns into a games table, the day bed. Questions.
> *The Master's bedroom*: The pupils are shown a foldaway bed underneath the Master's bed – this is where John Bolitho (a character they will meet on the course of their tour) sleeps. The Master's fear of fairies and witches is covered. Questions.
> *The Lady of the House's bedroom:* The children are shown items including a bum roll and make-up made of a rabbit's tail and urine in a pot. Questions.
> *Children's bedroom:* The pupils are told a little about the children and their toys and furniture. Questions.
> *Armoury:* Interpreters demonstrate the weaponry. Three or four volunteers are selected and kitted out with armour, guns and helmets. Questions.

Understanding the audience:

The research at Llancaiach followed the experiences of groups from two schools:

School visit 1: Primary school, 90 children, years 3 and 4 (aged 7-9), inner city school with high Black and Minority Ethnic population. This group experienced the 'normal' Manor offering – a guided tour of the house by the servants.

School visit 2: Private secondary school, 66 Year S2 (aged 12-13) and 12 Year S6 (aged 16-17). This group, encouraged by the local Council Educational Officer for Heritage, took part in a pilot debates project in which the sixth-formers took on character groupings of Radicals who debated with the interpreters at the Manor. Second-formers watched these debates before taking part themselves. These sessions were interspersed with activities around the Manor.

Visit 1 took place on 28 February 2006, and visit 2 on 1st March 2006. A sample of pupils was followed up both in the weeks following the visit, and a further ten months later.

School 1: the experiences of 18 pupils were followed up in interviews over the following weeks (nine pupils from Year 3 and nine from Year 4). These interviews were held at the school, in groups of three, and were accompanied by a number of exercises (drawing for Year 3 and writing for Year 4). Two of the school teachers were also interviewed. Ten months later, interviews were held with 22 pupils (many of whom were the same as in the

first round), alongside some exercises (creating still images, and writing questions for interpreters).

School 2: Interviews were held with eight pupils before they visited, to establish their expectations. Classes were observed.

In the weeks following the visit, interviews were held with eight second-formers and four sixth-formers (2x4, 2x2) and after ten months with 12 second-formers and six sixth-formers (3x4, 3x2). This represented a significant proportion of pupils involved in the project. The teacher who had been the principal point of contact for the project was also interviewed at this stage.

Pupils from School 2

For further details of interview responses and analysis of these, please see Appendix B.2.

A detailed research design for this case study (also organised by organisational framework) can be found in Appendix C.2.

3.4.3 Case Study 3: Triangle Theatre Company and the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum

Date of research: April 2006 – August 2007
Site: A large regional museum undergoing renovation, with an attached theatre company
Favoured performance mode: community outreach and site-specific programmes.

Understanding the site:

Triangle Theatre Company (TTC)
Triangle Theatre Company is in residence at The Herbert Art Gallery and Museum (although their offices are not in the main building). The Company was established by Carran Waterfield in 1988, and now involves regular collaboration with Richard Talbot. Triangle cites its current work at The Herbert as being: 'engaged in performance and interactive projects using the Gallery's collections'. Past projects at the Museum have involved exploration of its wartime collections through the Little Herberts group (young people from the area), and the facilitation of 'training camps' where children have immersive, participatory experiences in different wartime scenarios. Previous projects include Dugout!, War is Over and Coventry Kids in the Blitz (see DVDs in PLH archive). The company has received the Museums and Heritage Award for Excellence for Best Educational Initiative (2005) and the Curiosity and Imagination Roots and Wings Award (2005).

Triangle's previous work at the Museum, as with the 'Chico Talks'project, seeks (amongst other things) to provide something of an institutional critique. Performances engage with the institution as an idea, and are playful in exploring what collections and performances in such contexts might 'mean'.

The Herbert Art Gallery and Museum
The Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Coventry, exists under the umbrella of the City Council's Arts and Heritage Service (alongside Lunt Roman Fort and the Priory Visitor Centre). Admission to The Herbert is free, and the Museum has a lively, popular cafeteria area on the ground floor (for many a destination in itself).

The Museum, which opened in 1960, was, during the period of research, undergoing a multi-million pound redevelopment, due for completion in late 2008. It will have a number of new galleries – history, art, science, peace and reconciliation, and temporary galleries –two further education spaces, and a combined gallery and performance space. This performance space (it is envisioned), will be available for community use, visiting groups and performance installations, and will have its own seating and lighting arrangements. While this redevelopment occurs, the Museum is operating very limited opening/access to just a few of its spaces (two gallery spaces, and display cases on the ground floor). With this in mind, the Museum perceives benefit in using outreach projects, and exploring collections that reside in store.

Triangle's work with The Herbert often involves taking groups out of the museum to partake in immersive participatory projects off site (War is Over, Dugout and The Pollard Trail). Where possible, the Museum's artefacts are used in preparatory work or performances themselves. In order to understand this relationship, it is important that we can reach an understanding of the aims of both organisations and where they complement one another (or perhaps even clash). To this end, collecting and analysing site policies and statements, interviewing and archival research have been paramount in our research.

This case study represents the research project's interest in both the production and reception of performance in museum/heritage contexts, and the ways in which such activities involve engagement with the various texts of the museum (artefacts, spaces, institutional prerogatives etc) and its audiences.

Understanding the content:

Chico the Clown, or Irving Pollard (1898-1975), was an accomplished children's entertainer who, it is said, was born in the circus. At the age of 42, while an air raid warden in Coventry during WW2, he lost his memory and voice in a Luftwaffe bombing raid. Triangle Theatre Company, intrigued by the Irving Pollard collection of ephemera - costumes, props, photographs, notes and newspaper clippings – at The Herbert, undertook some performed oral history encounters. In April 2006, they created "the CMP Soc", a group of curator-artists named after the Coventry Musical Play Society of which Irving Pollard was a leading light.

In August 1955, Alice and Irving Pollard and a small group of friends had taken a guided tour of the Coventry City walls. Inspired by this, Triangle rehearsed a structured 'living history' trail of selected sites.

Triangle Theatre: Aims and objectives of Chico Talks[6] project
Triangle Theatre anticipated that it could, as a result of the *Chico Talks* venture:

- devise a new project over a period of four weeks
- create employment opportunities for artists
- share methods with artists
- develop the musical content of Triangle's work
- develop new performance personae
- explore clownesque strategies
- work with designer with experiences of museum design/curation
- identify and support performance participants
  o the older people identified for the project (oral histories)
  o teenage participants and older people (august)
  o introduce small group of teenagers to the devising process
- document the research and development period
- work alongside The Herbert's curators.

It is worth noting that the emphasis in these stated aims is on Triangle's methodology, exploration and training. Audiences, or 'participants' are only briefly mentioned, and there is no explicit reference to 'learning' beyond that implied for Triangle as an organisation.

[6] The major outcome of this project, the heritage trail, was subsequently titled 'The Pollard Trail'.

In this respect, the aims are different from those articulated and oft-evaluated in and by other institutions the PLH research project has looked at.

The Herbert's aims

- *Learning*

The documentation for *Chico Talks*, the performance we studied, outlines the Museum's learning team responsibilities as follows: … 'to develop new audiences for The Herbert by working with local people who may not have been regular users in the past' (March 2006 Triangle documentation). In this instance, the various audiences developed through and with *Chico Talks* represented a new and exciting proposition for the Museum. They were both 'new' and hard to reach through traditional museum channels and outputs. Young people, minority ethnic groups and even local residents can be notoriously difficult to reach, and thus we increasingly hear the language of 'outreach' in our interviews. Although not originally an intention of the project, these were increasingly the terms in which the project was discussed and its relative 'success' or 'failure' determined.

- *Collections*

The history team's aim is to see the Museum's various collections used in innovative ways and in order to attract new audiences. That team is made up of those responsible for curating and displaying the museum's collections. The collection was indeed used in innovative ways in *Chico Talks*, and was built upon in creative and informative ways. Moreover, the stories which individual objects now tell are forever altered by their presence within the Pollard Trail, alongside one another, and the additional information that has been gleaned about them.

Understanding the performance:

The sequences described here offer just a glimpse of the performance events that took place on the Pollard Trail, mostly in August 2006. Although the structure of the trail and key moments were fixed, much was improvised on a daily basis. The audience were free to come and go as they wished during the course of the five hour event, which began and ended at the company's temporary base in Hillfields.

Triangle's experimental performances – often provocative, sometimes bewildering – attempt to map the affective, cultural and historical terrain in and around Irving Pollard's former stamping ground. This theatrical and archaeological hunt for a voice and memory, resonant of Pollard's clown Chico, took the performers from Hillfields, Coventry, where Pollard lived for most of his life, to the Llyn Peninsula in Wales, where he is buried. [Parts of Hillfields are currently undergoing destruction and regeneration, a process which threatens to eradicate finally all traces of Pollard's working environment: an ironic echo of the concentrated bombardment which contributed to Pollard's wartime trauma.]

The performances documented in our research were not attempts at an historically faithful depiction of Pollard's life. The inclination of the performances was – in the words of the Company – 'towards collapse, failure, incongruence and their attendant clownesque comedy'. Triangle (and the CMP Soc) were driven by a curiosity about the encounter between Pollard's story of accident and recovery and the carnivalesque and haunting figure of the clown. The trail was in part a quest - for an alternative language for collecting oral history and curating stories of destruction and recovery, including those of the current immigrant residents of Hillfields.

For more information on the look and feel of the Pollard Trail, see Data Trawl 3.

Understanding the audience:

Audiences for the project were varied in composition and recruitment, and consisted principally of local Hillfields residents, teenage participants and 'paying' members of the public from elsewhere in the city and beyond (and also the research team).

Teenage participants
Eight teenage boys were identified for participation in the project, representing a variety of backgrounds. We anticipated that these teenagers would form the bulk of our longitudinal study into impact/experience/ongoing outcomes of partaking in the project. The situation by August 2006 was in fact that few of these participants were actively involved in the Trail, but that a more significant number had had an input in devising and preparing for the 'finished' trail. We were able to interview two teenage participants, and observe many more during the devising process.

The Hillfields community
The local Kurdish community were in many ways an accidental audience for the project: they are the majority population living in the Primrose Hill Street area of Coventry; their input was never secure and tended to take the form of incidental happenings on the street. That said, the local population began to expect and anticipate the arrival of the performers, and to accommodate any audience they brought with them within spaces that were 'owned' (often literally) by them.

On the Friday and Saturday dates that the research team were present, there were more than 30 people on the street and in the shops who were present for (or forced to take note of?) the CMP Soc and their activities. The majority of these spectators and participants were Kurdish, young and male. Some paid more attention to events than others, and different types of interactions were on offer – the playing of musical instruments, one-to-one interactions as performers performed on the street, playing with puppets. Notably, much of this interaction was not spoken, for many of the locals have only limited knowledge of, and comfort in, speaking English. Our Kurdish-speaking research team member interviewed 11 local Kurdish men (including two shop owners).

The Pollard Trail on the streets of Hillfields

Alongside (and overlapping with) the Kurdish population were a whole host of other locals of mixed age, race and origin. The most evident of these were the children, who could be seen daily following and interacting with the tour. They too learnt to expect the arrival of the Trail participants, and found their own ways of making sense of and

interacting with it. These people were unlikely to be present for the opening of the tour, joining normally on the procession from the church hall to the church for the 'wedding'. The children displayed excitement at being involved, and often stayed with the tour right through until entry to the pub for Pollard's wake – that is, for those activities that took place very openly within the community.

However, audience members within the community did not always respond positively to the CMP Soc and their activities. Open hostility was occasionally displayed – shouting on the streets and throwing things, for example. Safety became a concern – the unpredictable nature of other people's negative interventions making for unease and genuine concern among participants.

The 'paying' audience
The Pollard Trail was advertised through the Museum's various outlets, local press and radio, listings magazines and online, and through Triangle and the CMP Soc as word of mouth. It was hoped that the tour itself (as 'culmination' of the project) would facilitate a dialogue between the Museum and the local community by bringing the collection/stories about Pollard out into the street. Local residents would be able to join in encounters with the CMP Soc, but at the same time, Museum visitors would be able to pay to see the events and sites of Primrose Hill Street perhaps for the first time. The audience would be able to drop in and out of encounters and choose their own level of engagement, interaction and participation. [There was no 'typical' profile for this audience. We met students, performers' family members and even old friends of Pollard himself.]

Triangle and the other artists
Lest we forget, this was a project very much about professional development, both for Triangle and the other performers with whom they worked in order to bring The Pollard Trail to fruition.

For more information see Appendix B.3; for the research design see Appendix C.3.

3.4.4 Case Study 4: The Manchester Museum

Date of commissioning and of research: June 2006 – February 2008
Site: major regional museum, part of the University of Manchester and dedicated to research and innovation alongside its regional role
Preferred performance mode: a specifically commissioned, experimental performance piece.

Case study 4 at the Manchester Museum (MM) represented a significant point in the Performance, Learning and 'Heritage' research project's timeline. As the last of the detailed case studies, this was an opportunity to both test and build upon findings from previous sites/audiences, and the last prolonged period of access to known audience members. We commissioned a performance, *This Accursed Thing*, to link into and expand the Museum's 'Revealing Histories: Remembering Slavery' programme

Understanding the site:

The Manchester Museum (http://www.museum.man.ac.uk), in its current location, was opened in 1890. In 2003, the Museum opened its newly redeveloped entrance and gallery spaces. It thus comprises two very differing performative spaces, which were recognised and used as such through the performance piece.

The Museum's mission:
'The Manchester Museum enables people to explore, enjoy, question, understand and reflect on the diversity and inter-relationships of humanity and the natural world, working in partnership with local and global communities, in ways that help to achieve the international ambitions of the University of Manchester.' (Strategic Plan 2004/05 to 2005/06)

A stated objective of the Museum is to 'provide [a cultural] interface between the University of Manchester's research output and the wider public'. The strategic imperatives of the Museum (in terms of academic strategy) are aimed at supporting and developing academic activity that:

• contributes actively to the academic purposes of the University
• meets the needs of the Museum's audiences
• achieves the strategic goals of the Museum.

The performance *This Accursed Thing* provided one model for how such 'interfacing' between research output and the public might be done. The Museum's Strategic Plan highlights the importance of 'developing new audiences' and 'widening participation in higher education' as one of its operational targets 'towards 2015'. This means attracting 180,000+ visitors/year, including 3,800 additional visits/year from 5-16 year olds. There is special emphasis placed on increasing visits by 'socially disadvantaged and ethnically diverse users in line with the University's objectives' (but also referencing DCMS).

The Museum's Access Policy (~2000) defines access as 'something which is facilitated when physical, cultural, social, financial, intellectual, psychological and emotional barriers are removed or reduced', and states a long-term commitment to addressing 'barriers to access at all levels of the museum service'.

The emphasis of the Access Policy and Strategic Plan are crucial to an understanding of the focus and language employed in the museum's Learning Policy. In fact, the Learning Policy is described as a 'companion' to the other documents. 'Learning' thus underpins many or all activities in the Museum, and 'is not restricted to the Education department alone'. Under the banner of Social Inclusion, the Learning Policy highlights the importance of access for all, diversity, collaboration with audiences, self-representation, debate and de-mystifying the institution. Again, the performance was in line with the aspirations of the Learning Policy of the Museum in the above respects.

Understanding the content:

The Museum's learning provision is carried out through a range of activities outlined in the Learning Policy. These include illustrated talks and demonstrations, drama and role-play sessions, storytelling, and music/dance/drama performances (41 activities are listed in all). Thus, we see the link between learning, access and social inclusion being made, and various kinds of performance being framed within this context.

Revealing Histories
The Greater Manchester Museums Hub's 'Revealing Histories' project is the context within which the performances took place at Manchester Museum. 'Revealing Histories, Remembering Slavery' aims to explore the history, impact and legacy of the slave trade on the cultural institutions of the Greater Manchester area, a region greatly influenced by the slave trade (see the DCMS website). As part of the bi-centenary of the abolition of the slave trade, each museum in the hub researched its collections to locate links with the trade and uncover hidden narratives which were variously articulated over the year 2007. Revealing Histories was a major programme of exhibitions, talks, debates, performances and self-guided walks involving eight museums [For further information visit www.revealinghistories.org.uk].

Understanding the performance:

The performance included the following elements:

Two actors, playing *three characters* each; in order:

- a curator
- Thomas Clarkson
- an African slave trader
- a British slave trader
- James Watkins, a freed slave
- a cotton mill worker from Manchester.

The slave trade sequence

Manchester features often throughout the performance, providing us with an accompanying narrative – one that many audience members express surprise and enjoyment at, and which has provided them with a 'way into' the story.

A promenade tour around the Museum, encountering different spaces (architecturally and symbolically) and different artefacts through the characters we, as an audience, meet. They span the history of abolition, eventually, cyclically, ending up back in 2007 with the curator.

An *out-of-character introduction* explaining what will happen over the course of the next hour, and what will be expected of the audience (in a non-threatening way, the audience are introduced to the option of questioning characters and entering debate). The actors give their real names, and acknowledge the transition that 'in-character' requires: to paraphrase: 'speaking of which, I'd better go and become the first character...'. This contributes to a distancing between actors and characters: 'they are not us' which in turn gives the audience licence to push, question and debate, but then when interacting with the actors out of role, to ask them those questions which are historically or practically impossible to ask en route.

There is also an *out-of-character de-brief* at the end of the performance, at which time audience members can ask questions about the research the performance is based on, the characters, the actors or, as was often the case, they can volunteer their own responses to the performance and its subject matter.

There is thus interaction both in and out of role. The audience get the opportunity to question the British Slave Trader during the tour, and to respond to verbal prompts throughout. The piece is based on in-depth research presented in order to convey the historical complexity of the subject matter: as one audience member said 'It made what I thought was a straightforward campaign into an interesting and complicated journey' (M, 19-30, Rochdale, 22).[7]

Understanding the audience:

There were two audiences for the research project to look at in detail: independent groups/visitors attending performances, and local schools groups (key stage 3) who were taking advantage of the Museum's formal learning programme. There were also a further 100 members of the public who filled in questionnaires immediately post-performance.

(a) Independent visitors

A total of 27 individual audience members in some way had their experiences of the performance tracked through conversations with members of the research team. These were divided into two groups, the first involved only for the day of the performance (group 1 (1.1 in the data trawl), the second (1:2) had its relationship with the performance followed over a nine/ten month period. This was done in such a way in a bid to limit the impact of the research itself on people's longer-term meaning-making and to maximise on incentive payments [see Appendix C.4]. The logic was that for group 1, we would make the research process more 'formal' (in order to glean initial impact, facilitate group discussion and identify areas for further questioning of group 2), and that for group 2 we could investigate long-term impact without having changed the nature of their experience on the day too drastically.

[7] Refers to focus group member.

This separation of Independent visitors into two 'types' was intended to produce a variety of comparative data, and to eliminate problems associated with the ongoing impact of focus group activity which became evident in the NMM research.

(b) Educational groups
Two very different schools were chosen (by Manchester Museum) to take part in this study. They were chosen because they had a prior record of engagement with the Museum, and were open to new opportunities.[8] Both were in attendance on different days, one with Year 8 and one with Year 9 pupils.

School 1: Year 9 groups (2x~30), had studied slavery in school, 60+ % pass rate at GCSE, high ethnic minority percentage, low number of statemented pupils.

School 2: Year 8 group (~22), had not studied slavery in school, 11% pass rate at GCSE, mostly white, economically disadvantaged area of the city, high truancy rate.

A combination of the following research methods was used for the school groups: meaning mapping exercises, observation, interviews, filming.

See Appendix B.4 for Data Trawl; Appendix C.4 for research design.

3.5 The Timeframe for the case study research

See Fig. 1 (over page)

[8] For more information about the individual schools, their records and our contacts there, see the PLH archive.

Timeline	CS1	CS2	CS3	CS4
Summer 05	July: Project begins			
Autumn 05	Oct 22 and 23 : Performances at National Maritime Museum with focus group data collection			
Winter 05/06	November: Telephone follow-ups with 31 individuals	Preparation for data collection		
Spring 06		31 February and 1 March: Data Collection at Llancaiach Fawr Manor April: Follow-up discussions in both schools (in person)	April: start of longitudinal data collection. Observation of Triangle devising process.	
Summer 06	August: Telephone follow-ups with 28 individuals		12 – 20 August: The Pollard Trail data collection and observation	Case study four call to tender sent out, interviews held and Andrew Ashmore commissioned.
Autumn 06			September: Telephone follow up conversations. Interviews with Museum staff	November: First draft received
Winter 06/07		December/January: Follow-ups with both schools (in person)		
Spring 07				Final rehearsals. Observation of preparatory classes in schools. March/April: data collection at the Manchester Museum
Summer 07			August: Telephone follow up conversations. Interviews with museum staff	Follow-ups with 20 individuals over the telephone and in schools (incl. meaning mapping exercises)
Autumn 07				
Winter 07/08				January/February: Final follow-ups: Interviews with 18 individuals and in both schools
Spring 08	Performing Heritage conference			
Summer 08	Data analysis & writing report			

Fig. 1: Timeline

3.6 The PLH project in numbers

4 case study sites

15 hours of filmed performances

204 questionnaires

350 interviews

So, for the National Maritime Museum
34 individuals took part in focus groups on the day
31 were interviewed over the following weeks
28 were interviewed nine/ten months later

Numerous drawings, mind maps, written exercises, photos

17 Performers interviewed

10 interviews with site staff (excluding performers)

37 different site visits (plus many re-visits)

90 sites mapped into the database

95 organisations mapped into the database

120 attendees at the Performing Heritage conference

61 speakers at the conference

Hundreds of brochures/publicity materials collected

Section 4: Research themes – a comparative study

4.1 Introduction

The vast amount of data gathered from all four case study sites, and to a lesser extent from the mapping process, has been sifted, analysed, interpreted and, finally, organised into five key themes:

- **Visitors and audiences [V&A]**
- **Performance**
- **Interactivity and participation [I&P]**
- **Learning**
- **Heritage and authenticity [H&A]**

These themes represent not only a productive way into the complex data, but a distillation of topics and issues that have recurred across all the four sites. These thematic summaries can only capture a fraction of the documentation, but they do provide an opportunity to reflect *comparatively* on qualities, characteristic features, issues and concerns in museum performance. We have, moreover, stressed the qualitative (rather than quantitative) aspects of the research findings and endeavoured to value the range of individual narratives that were offered to us. Through that route emerged insights into audience engagement that would have been missed in a more quantitative -based approach.

All quotations from respondents have necessarily been anonymised – they are shown with reference numbers [in square brackets] keyed to the archived documentation held at the Centre for Applied Theatre Research. The fuller discussions from which these quotations have been extracted are available in edited form in the 'data trawls' shown in Appendix A of this report. The research archive remains available so that future bona fide researchers can find their own routes through the full data.

4.2 Wider contexts

Before the comparative study of themes, we expand on two important contexts for the study: first, our approach to understanding audience engagement; secondly, our approach to the institutional context – that of the museums and the historic sites which provide the locations and cultural backdrops for the performances. We have highlighted key aspects of these accounts with quotations from respondents (visitors and professionals).

4.2.1 Understanding audience engagement

In 'museum performance' (including performance in historic sites) – as in all forms of theatre with educational claims – not only do we need to understand the power of performance in its various manifestations, but, just as importantly, we need to understand our audiences. That has been one of the key goals we set ourselves in this research: to better understand the nature of audience engagement.

Audience response to performance is complex and will inevitably vary, not only according to the style and setting of the piece, but also according to each individual visitor's pre-existing attitudes and inclinations. These include especially what are often referred to as the 'entry narratives' which people bring with them before any encounter with a performance takes place. Entry narratives have been identified, for example, by recent research in 'visitor studies'. (See for example John Falk 2006, who categorises visitors into types such as the Explorer, the Facilitator, the Hobbyist and the Spiritual Pilgrim.) Visitors are not 'blank slates'. They must be understood in relation to the 'horizons of expectations' (see Jauss 1982 *et al*) which they bring to bear on, and which shape their response to, new encounters. These horizons are fashioned by prevailing cultural norms and assumptions, as well as by visitors' own social and educational backgrounds and prior exeprience – and indeed (as Bourdieu has shown), by the 'cutural capital' they have been able (or allowed) to acquire.

These visitors to Manchester Museum illustrate the strong personal and varied responses to one performance, characteristic of audience response across all case study sites:

> if it's somebody like myself – I'm not a big book reader – so, for the knowledge that you're given on that day, I found it very, very interesting and good …, and it does open your eyes about it all. [MM/PP2/80]
>
> I think it's something that should be encouraged because people have different learning styles anyway. [MM_I_PP2_211]
>
> This was so personal to me, this one. Whereas I'd say always before that I'm looking at the children and seeing it through their eyes. …. I think it's the whole sort of humanitarian aspect of it: what went on and how black people have been treated in the past and how our relationships are nowadays. It was much, much more personal to me, this particular subject, at this stage of my life, I suppose. [MM/PP2/77]

Categories of audience engagement

The chart *[see figure xxx on following page]* indicates one way in which we categorised and organised the accumulated data from our audiences, in particular the stages through which they tend to encounter, engage with and respond to performance, at the same time embracing the whole experience of their visit. The chart cannot encompass the full complexity, intricacy and range of responses, not least because human beings rarely respond in neatly categorisable ways; but it does at least give some sense of the ways in which audience engagement with performance has manifested itself. The categories themselves (suggested initially by our own observations and documentation, by earlier research and by awareness of current evaluation methodologies within the museum sector) underwent a constant process of testing, review, revision and modification as our data expanded and as we found ourselves challenged by the complexity of the responses

offered. It was a process that followed closely the 'grounded theory' model (Glaser & Strauss 1967) which proved especially applicable to the nature of this research. The cyclical pattern is intended to reflect:

1. the **broadly chronological sequence of visitor engagement** – from prior knowledge, motivation and expectation, through response during and immediately following the performance, and

2. the **medium- to longer-term, more reflective processes** involved in recall and the conceptualisation (if any) of the experience.

3. the **long term impact** (positive or negative) that the event has in informing and inspiring the visitor's attitude to such experiences in the future, or indeed in deterring them from any such further encounters.

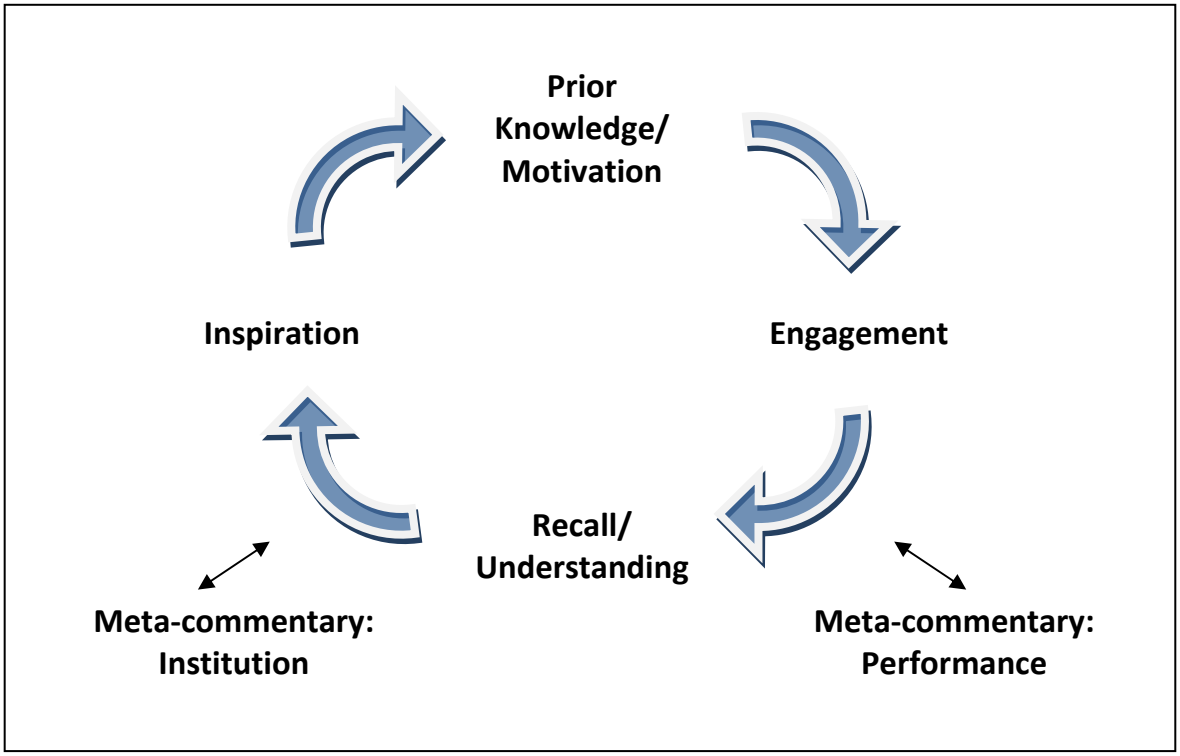

Fig ii Chart of categories of audience engagement

The two categories of audience response that stand at a tangent to this cycle – the 'meta-commentaries' – became inescapable additions to our original set of categories, deriving directly from what many audience members were saying to the research team. These cover the commentaries that visitors offer, usually quite explicitly, about the *making* of the event – looking beneath and beyond the experience offered and seeking to critique not just their own response but the larger 'institutional frame' in which it is set.

Thus, visitors comment on the design of the performance, the appropriateness of the acting style or the gallery space in which it was set, the alternatives that might have been considered, and sometimes the effectiveness or otherwise of the performance for *other* audience members [the performance aspects]. They also consider how well the event

meshed with the museum's wider goals, offer critical views of the organisation and publicity of the event or the perceived gap between intention and effect; sometimes they give observations on the research process of which they have been part [the institutional aspects]. The meta-commentaries provided some of the richest data in the research, not least because they throw light on the active and multi-layered engagement of which audiences are clearly capable:

> Well, I mean obviously if they are well done, and that was well done, then it has a use in that … they can catch people who are just passing through, they don't have to book in advance, and it is a vehicle through which people can learn in a pleasant way if they're in the mood for that sort of thing. … if they feel like going they go with the flow and they go. Often it's useful because there is such a length, half an hour that sort of thing. Parents are trying to cope with the children, have a sit down and get involved. So yeah, it certainly has a use, particularly for those who are going with younger people [NMM_I_PP3_15]
>
> you could see, like, just by the group whether, people even if they didn't verbalise, they were nodding or shaking their heads you know, so you knew where people stood or what their understanding was or how they felt. [MM_I_PP3_189]
>
> It [the group] felt quite big ... , whereas normally I think to get a proper discourse going between people you are looking at a dozen aren't you and obviously how practical that would be, you know, as they were trying to take as many as they can because it was so well advertised. It is a difficult thing to be honest with you. … I don't know, but if it was shown to school groups and stuff it would have been easier to explore with them rather than on a busy Saturday afternoon. [MM_I_PP3_196]
>
> I definitely think, certainly at the Maritime Museum, it is very much marketed within the family, school holiday information and I think that is a bit of a missed opportunity really. I mean great, of course kids really appreciate it, everybody can enjoy it. And maybe it just needs to be flagged up in a way that other people can see themselves going to it as well. [NMM_I_PP3_14]
>
> I felt that many people going to the exhibition might miss him because he was too much on the side, they'd get their tickets and turn left into the exhibition and you had to turn right deliberately to get to him. Although I can see why he was there because it was a nice clear space with a well lit area, in a corner. [NMM_I_PP3_16]
>
> Certainly taking part in the research has made me think more about it. [NMM_I_PP3_40]

The cycle has, incidentally, several points of correspondence with David Kolb's learning cycle as expounded in his account of 'experiential learning'. He identifies four stages of physio-mental activity which, he argues, make up the most fruitful kind of learning (*Experiential Learning*, 1985): Kolb believes the learner needs:

- to experience
- to observe
- to experiment actively
- to conceptualise.

If experience and observation are taken to correspond with an encounter with performance, and 'active experiment' is said to correspond with opportunities to engage verbally or actively with the performers (in or out of role), then our own stages of 'Recall/Understanding' and 'Inspiration', and our meta-commentaries, align themselves closely with Kolb's 'conceptualisation'. It is frequently in the process of recalling, making sense of and reinterpreting their experiences – or of conceptualising and generalising from the issues the performance raised – that we find the most revealing indicators of the values and meanings audience members have drawn from their experiences.

In each of the performances we have documented, it was clear that the opportunity to reflect on the performance and its connections with the rest of the site, and to reflect with others, was valued by visitors. This reflection enriched their experience of the performance and of the visit as a whole. Evidence showed this, irrespective of whether the opportunity for reflection was built in to the event or simply occurred in conversation at a later stage. Interestingly, some visitors commented positively on the research process itself, finding the experience of participating in a focus group for example (as at NMM) had sharpened their appreciation of all elements of their visit and of the performance in particular.

It is then critical to consider what opportunities – or encouragement – are offered for audiences to 'conceptualise', or to 'process' the stimulus they have received from a performance. It may be that, if the conceptualising phase is missing, or insufficiently catered for, then the full richness of the learning experience which performance can generate is likely to remain unfulfilled. If Kolb is right, then we need to take careful account of this when designing performance events into any museum programme from which we want people to learn. We do not argue that 'conceptualisation' must be designed in to a programme – that would be unnecessarily prescriptive, and people conceptualise in different ways and at different times, sometimes long after the event – rather that the importance of conceptualisation be at least borne in mind and allowed for when performance is designed and scripted.

In the performances documented in this research, those 'conceptualising' opportunities were variable – they were sometimes:

- an integral and explicit part of the performance event (e.g. the 'de-briefing' session that always followed *This Accursed Thing*)
- encouraged but kept firmly outside the remit of the interpreters (e.g. at LFM where teachers are provided with advice on how to follow-up with their classes after the event)
- dependent on individual audience members' initiatives (as at NMM where a few visitors might approach the actor who had just finished performing *The Gunner's Tale* to raise queries or offer comments), or
- calculatedly denied in any conventional sense, in part as a deliberately provocative attempt to get audiences to make up their own minds in their own time, without relying on guidance from out-of-role performers (as in *The Pollard Trail*).

> I walked away completely entertained and enchanted, thinking this is precisely the meeting point between theatre and heritage - where the physical landscape is recreated from its origin, in a new way that remembers or touches upon something past, through my presence and participation [TTC_observations_5]
>
> At first I was bewildered and confused. I had never heard of Irving Pollard and only had vague memories of a visit to Coventry Cathedral as a child. So with no prior knowledge I spent the day discovering and piecing together facts about the man. This was intriguing and kept me engaged as I sought to understand more. But it was frustrating. At times, especially in the first venue, I felt a little stupid as I felt like I was expected to know about Pollard and that I was the only one who did not. For me this raises questions on how educational the piece is, if at all it's meant to or should be educational? (TTC_observations_4)

One focus group member at *This Accursed Thing* talked of some fellow audience members exhibiting signs of 'physical revulsion' at hearing about the treatment of slaves, and wondered just how you close down such a subject – should you? Can you? Another felt that she needed a quiet place for reflection after the performance. A number talked of wanting to go away and process what they had witnessed, and talk to others about it, implying they would prefer to do this themselves, individually, rather than have it facilitated by the museum staff. Each strategy has its strengths and weaknesses, then, and different audience members respond in very different ways, even at the same performance.

For some, not all, visitors, the opportunity to reflect and debate 'on site' – especially following a performance that aroused curiosity and stimulated new ways of thinking about 'the past' or connections between then and now – proved to be a welcome means of adding value to their visit. Museums and heritage sites may therefore wish to consider whether such structured opportunities to reflect in concert with others (by means of, for example, focus groups, debates and Q&A) might sometimes be worth offering to visitors who may be interested, especially after or as part of a performance event.

The implications for learning in the museum are considered in Section 4.3.4.

4.2.2 Understanding the institutional context

Sites employ performance for a number of reasons, and claims are made that assume one or more of a **range of benefits**:

- performance is a powerful way of opening up aspects of a museum's collection or an historic site to a wider audience. In the UK especially this has been part of a wider political and policy agenda related to social inclusion, access and diversity. (See V&A, Performativity, H&A)

- it can aid interpretation, helping us to understand the social meaning of the artefacts or architecture, animating the inanimate. (See H&A, Learning)

- it may throw light on, or fill gaps in, the partial knowledge offered by the exhibition or the ruins of a castle or a 19th century workhouse. (See Learning, V&A)

- it is a means of enlightening people about the past, enabling them to 'read', and/or re-think their 'heritage'. (See Learning, H&A)

- it is capable of generating *more* engagement with, and insight into, the past (or other subject matter) than traditional methods of interpretation, and may promote actual dialogue with the notions of 'heritage' portrayed. (See I&P, H&A)

- it is a medium of learning – it can promote genuine curiosity and active learning about past events; and aid visitors (whether general public or organised school groups) to grasp the significance of what it is that they are seeing, offering a unique opportunity to make their own meanings from it – to relate it to their own world, to make connections and understand difference. (See Learning,)

These claims will be explored in the sections that follow, using data from the research project in order to test the extent to which these 'benefits' exist in practice, and whether institutions may actually be gleaning further benefit than those identified above.

In the attempt to understand how performance is placed within the context of the institution, we refer to the idea of 'framing'. There are a number of 'frames' within which performance activity takes place at museums and heritage sites.

The event frames

The audience's *quality of engagement* and the *extent of their learning* will depend not just on the novelty of the experience (though that should not be lightly dismissed), nor just on the quality of the performance itself, nor the volume of information conveyed, but, at least as much, on the way the experience is framed.

As sociologist Erving Goffman (1974) has shown, it is the invisible 'frames' constructed around social events that influence how we 'read' them, make sense of them, draw meaningful connections with other aspects of social life. There are the culturally conditioned frames the potential audience bring with them (their notions of 'museum' for example) and there are the frames established by the performance.

There have been many discussions of framing as a means of understanding the nature and context of performance (see especially: Bennett 1990, Carlson 1996, Heathcote 1984a,b, Jackson 2007, Jackson & Rees Leahy 2005, O'Toole 1992). For the purposes of this report, however, we refer to just three basic frames within which it will be helpful to locate what happens before, during and after the performance: the institutional, the performance and the internal frames.

- The **institutional frame –** the institutional context within which the performance event is located and within which it will be read and understood – for our purposes, the museum or the historic site. It includes the architectural style of the building and its permutation of spaces, the style and foci of the collections, and its location (urban, rural, metropolitan, etc). Of course, this frame itself operates within, and is largely conditioned by, a much wider social, political, intellectual and economic climate within which any cultural institution has to function (see research context section).

- The **performance frame** – that which marks out the theatre event itself *as* theatre and signals where and how the audience will position itself, and the role (if any) expected of audience members (e.g. via the entry point into the performance area, including the collection of tickets where applicable, the formal seating or 'promenade' setting, the marking out of the 'stage' if any, the level of formality that is established, and whether or not we are we being encouraged to 'play'). It governs anything and everything that goes on within the space and place of performance (see Performance section). At LFM, and at other similar 'living history' sites, the event may not be explicitly signalled as 'theatre' but the frame is well-delineated by the geography and architecture of the site (the approach to the Manor house, for example, and the stepping-over the threshold into the world of 1645 to be greeted by a costumed interpreter in role as servant or other household official).

- There are then **internal frames** within the performance, operational only once the performance, or the progress round the site has begun (led and 'performed' by our 17th century guides, for example) - devices used to signal shifts of time, place, character and relationship with the audience, including invitations to interact.

The need to frame what a theatre company does, for the benefit of other staff as well as audiences, especially when that company works experimentally, is underscored by the Education Manager at The Herbert:

> There's no doubt that Triangle are massively respected, the only issue … is the way that we, as a [museum] service, need to frame what Triangle do, as part of our overall service.' [TTC_M_Pre_183]

Investment, resources and status

It was not within the original remit of the research to consider how or to what extent museum performance was funded, nor to offer a cost-benefit analysis, nor to make recommendations on the extent of investment museums should make in performance activity in the future. This is an area that requires further research.

However, it has become clear to the research team that there is frequently far more demand than supply; that many museums, once they have seen performance work of real quality and of genuine interest to their visitors, would wish to sustain that work well

beyond what their financial means allow. Buying-in a specialist performance company involves payment not only for actors' salaries but for the research and writing skills that must necessarily underpin work that will support and enrich the exhibition or gallery displays. Retaining actors on a permanent or resident basis – while common at a number of historic sites and museums such as the Royal Armouries (Leeds), the Royal Palaces (London) and the World Museum, Liverpool – requires long-term strategic planning. At LFM, just as (on a much larger scale) at Plimoth Plantation, Massachusetts, Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia, and Sovereign Hill, Victoria, Australia, the team of costumed interpreters is central to the policy and *modus operandi* of the site: their first person interpretation is integral to, and part of the marketing of, the programme on offer to the public.

Indeed marketing and promotion of this work remain an issue for many institutions. There appears to be a nervousness and confusion about how to market the work, and who to market it to. Our adult participants have told us time and again is that they had always assumed that this kind of interpretation was not for them; that it was for children and families (and this is often affirmed by marketing materials that target performance as a 'family activity'):

> I would have assumed it was aimed at children to entertain them while the adults are going round the exhibition, but I thought it was interesting and next time I would certainly go and seek out the performance piece. [NMM_I_PP2_61]

We will explore this further in the section on Visitors and Audiences.

Over the course of the project, we have looked at a number of different institutional performance arrangements. At the National Maritime Museum and Manchester Museum, performance is 'bought in' as and when it is required – at the Maritime Museum on a weekly basis (and more than that for school groups), on a more occasional basis at the Manchester Museum . At Llancaiach Fawr, the performance is a daily one that is ongoing even as the visitor leaves the site. Case Study Three with Triangle Theatre Company was altogether different.

We have been interested in exploring something of **the relationship between performance groups and institutions**, so one of the ways in which this research project has been unique is in its inclusion of a theatre company as a case study (one resident at a heritage institution). This focus has illuminated the opportunities and resources available for work in the field, but also the barriers existing within it. It has also, by the nature of the theatre company, given us an opportunity to broaden our definition of 'museum theatre'.

Triangle Theatre Company, resident at the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum in Coventry, is in a unique position both in terms of its set up with the museum and other funders, but also of its approach to heritage. More can be found out about this in the data trawl but it is worth noting here some of the aspects and implications of the partnership. The Museum is keen to become a creative and original institution:

> in my mind The Herbert, both in its arts and museum manifestations has got to be a creative organisation. What I like to have if we can is partnerships with organisations that have got their own creative objectives and see what comes out of that creative partnership [TTC_M_Pre_184]

The Herbert's relationship with Triangle is seen to be one part of that endeavour. One of the aims of the partnership is to help bring different perspectives to the core activity of the galleries (including an interrogation of that practice) and this is something that provides for a whole range of challenges. The relationship has not only had an effect on the approach of the institution, but even an impact on the design of the (newly renovated) building which now houses 'small but significant areas where museum theatre can take place' [TTC_M_Pre_183]

Triangle Theatre's work on *The Pollard Trail* (the project referenced in the following pages) is inspired by the collections, curatorially driven, motivated by a desire to dialogue and improvise, and, crucially, performative through and through; 'a genuinely experimental and exploratory thing' [RT in TTC_P_PP2_169] using a collection that had been in store. In practice, the project became very much about community, cultural exchange, playfulness, risk and, above all, an exploration of the limits of heritage practice:

> We're not representing our experience of life, as artists, I don't think. You know, we're living it. We're seeing how far we can go; what the limits are... It's not: let us show you how we've researched this story and what we think about it and it's applications in this community; it's how far can we go with this experiment' [CW in TTC_P_PP2_169]

This is an approach not unique to Triangle Theatre. As we have seen, it is more in line with the new museological approach to collection and exhibition. What will come through in the following pages however is the extent of Triangle's dedication to experimentation and process, and some important questions will be raised that are relevant to any partnership between museum and an independent arts (theatre) organisation.

4.3 The themes

Here we explore the themes that emerged as particularly significant over the course of our research. We have grouped our observations under each of these five thematic headings as a means of organising and focusing our findings about the function of performance and audience response, and as a means of highlighting similarities and differences across the case study sites. These inform our Conclusions.

There are five overlapping themes:

1. Visitors and audiences (referred to as 'V&A')
2. Performance
3. Interactivity and participation (referred to as 'I&P')
4. Learning
5. Heritage and authenticity (referred to as 'H&A')

Visitors and Audiences: *The transition from visitor to audience (and often participant) and back again; recognising prior knowledge and individual entry narratives; visitor contexts and visitor types; the 'eventness' of the visit, and of performative aspects of the visit; the framing of performance; the relationship between the visitor and the institution.*

'I felt as if I was there, involved. Very much more like theatre, sitting on the edge of my seat theoretically.' (CS1)

'Rather than them saying, "Hey, look: you are back in the sixteenth century now", they sort of… It was like as if we were just visiting and they were just showing us, and because we knew that as well, we accepted that' (CS2)

Performance: *The performative nature of the museum/site; the site as 'stage' or 'set'; the capacity of museums to provide dialogic encounters (and of performance to do the same); performances analysed as 'performance'; the 'eventness' of the performance, the frames of the performance*

'I found the characters we met rather absurd and unbelievable. However I was amazed at how quickly I relaxed into them. I feel that I decided to 'buy into' the drama and the characters; I accepted them so I in return could be accepted into the drama.' (CS3)

'I also think it is incredibly powerful somebody saying 'I saw it, I was there' and that really kind of hits home doesn't it' (CS1)

Interactivity and Participation: *The 'rules' of interaction; different levels of interaction (eg. promenade, controlled verbal response and immersion); the language of interaction; the place of 'unsettle-ment' (from challenge to alienation); the place and articulation of 'choice'.*

'for me I'm slightly on edge if I know there is going to be audience participation because I'm always terrified I'm going to be picked on' (CS1)

'It made me sispized [sic] because no one in a play have ever talked to me' (CS4)

'...not only the fact that we were learning about the history side, but also the fact that we had to get up and do it.' (CS2)

Learning: *the importance (or otherwise) of factual remembrance; empathetic engagement; ownership; the benefits of dialogue; the place of 'unsettle-ment'; How do people articulate their learning? And the importance of learning at such sites?*	'It made what I thought was a straightforward campaign into an interesting and complicated journey' (CS4) 'I learnt that it's better, we're lucky because we live in 2006 and 2005 and stuff, instead of thousands of years ago' (CS2) 'Using the museum and its space was interesting. I feel inspired to learn more' (CS4) 'I don't think I learnt anything of value to me. Apart from, maybe things about myself that had nothing to do with the history, narrative or artefacts' (CS3)
Heritage and Authenticity: *Authenticity and a sense of 'the past'; the 'reality' of encounters with 'the past'; Inspiration/curiosity and imaginative engagement.*	'And it wasn't like a lesson, because you were treated like it was like olden times. So it wasn't modern at all. It was really realistic' (CS2) 'exhibits in museums tend to be fairly dry, and the performance is supposed to bring it to life, it's all about bringing history to life' (CS1) 'the performance was an excellent medium with which to engage visitors with the subject of slavery. Really brought the subject alive. I am giving a talk on the subject at Salford museum and hope that my audience is engaged to the same extent' (CS4)

4.3.1 Theme 1: Visitors and audiences

Introduction

We have been intrigued by a recurring thread in our analysis of visitors' experiences at museums, sites and heritage-trails: the ways that visitors become (or resist becoming) audiences, or in many cases active participants in the performed events. It is noticeable that there are various performative roles which visitors, consciously or sub-consciously, play as they encounter museum performance; and that there are complex transitions between the roles of (for example) 'visitor', 'audience', 'participant' and 'learner'. Often they will switch back and forth between those roles from moment to moment as they negotiate a relationship both with the performance and with the museum or site environment; sometimes they will play one or more roles simultaneously such that the distinctions blur or dissolve, with noticeable effects upon the kinds of response they offer, not only in discussion at the end of the visit but many months later too.

In the spectrum of possible roles, it is also important to acknowledge that these are not passively donned at the prompt of the museum or performer. There is tacit or explicit, momentary or extended, negotiation of the roles played; and there is, moreover, often a degree of **'agency'** in the visitor's choice and performance of those roles (see Smith, Bagnall). That agency – including the notion of 'ownership' – is considered in more detail in Section 4.3.7 ('Learning').

Most visitors to museums or historic sites do not go expressly to see a performance so their expectations and the choices they make differ fundamentally from those of the conventional theatre audience. Indeed at many museums, performances are only advertised on arrival. The *Gunner's Tale* at NMM, for example, gets very little prominence in the museum's publicity brochures or website, but it is advertised once you are at the museum, by means of A-board and video-screen displays and public announcements; it takes place at prearranged times and there are usually about 20 chairs positioned round the small performance area at one end of the ground-floor galleries to denote the theatre space. It is clear where those who choose to watch should place themselves and where the demarcation line lies that will separate audience space from performance space. Once the performance begins, both audience and performer remain separate, even if only a few metres apart.

The distinction between theatre audiences and museum visitors is highlighted by many visitors: they comment explicitly on the similarities and differences between the theatre as theatre and theatre in the museum, and on how their own expectations and prior experience shaped their engagement with the performance under discussion. For some, performance is simultaneously familiar and, because of the unusual setting, alien. At NMM, responses were very mixed with rather more respondents professing to have felt like theatre audiences for the less interactive *Gunner's Tale* (this also had more seating although set in an informal and only temporarily theatricalised space):

> I would say I felt more like a member of a theatre audience, because it was the performance that I was enjoying. Because I knew by and large what he was telling me so I was just enjoying his performance really [NMM_I_PP3_23]

> Probably a bit of both, I mean museum visitor in that they are using the artefacts and the objects in the museum, and theatre in that they are watching and being integrated in a performance so a bit of both really [NMM_I_PP3_17]
>
> Oh definitely museum visitor [NMM_I_PP3_43]

For *This Accursed Thing*, one audience member is clear about the theatrical nature of the event but also reveals how prior knowledge and experience serve to shape his perception:

> It was very much a performance, I thought. It was obviously scripted as a performance; there were actors coming and going; there were people wearing costumes. It had all the ingredients of a performance. I think, these days, we're kind of familiar, aren't we, with the kind of drama that is effectively based on the artist actually taking… like the Thomas Clarkson speech … literally taking dialogue from real life and making a drama of it. [MM_I_PP2_75]

In the more immersive experience at LFM, 12 year old school pupils had to negotiate their way through, and in some cases, resisted, the categories offered, although most were sure it was not museum-like:

> INTERVIEWER: Did it feel more like going to a museum, or did it feel like going to a theatre? Or was it like something completely different?
> ANON: It felt a bit like theatre, in a way.
> ANON: It didn't feel like a museum, because museums have things in a glass case and you just look at it.
> ANON: It felt really real, 'cause everything was… There was absolutely no models.
> ANON: It felt like going back in time. There was no technology, just…
> ANON: Plus everything was just going on around you. [LFM_S_PP3_123]

'Tiers' of engagement

It quickly became apparent during our first case study at the National Maritime Museum that during the performance of *The Gunner's Tale* there were three observable 'tiers' of audience engagement and positioning (see also Kidd 2007: 63-4). The first was created by those who gathered before the performance began and chose to sit on the chairs (or on the floor if numbers dictated), displaying the behavioural traits of the traditional theatrical encounter. A secondary tier was created by people who stood to watch the performance, choosing to stay but wanting to keep their options open, or perhaps feeling compelled to stay by the spatial restrictions. At the very back was the third tier: usually people who were prompted to join by hearing or seeing the performance after it had begun, displaying interest but less commitment, and treating (or perhaps being forced to treat) their encounter with the whole spectacle of the performance as if it were another display in the museum to be viewed in passing.

Those in the first tier invariably stayed to the end - either because they were closely engaged in the performance or because the second tier had created a barrier (physical or psychological) between them and the exit. For those standing at the back, there were no evident obstacles to a quick exit: some would leave during the performance while others stayed. In one performance, the research team observed 'approximately 60 people standing

and observing behind a seated area, and another 60 coming behind these people to investigate the activity before leaving' (*ibid*.: 64). Moreover, they were replaced in constant rotation by an almost equal number of new observers – almost as though there existed an invisible but definable audience space which had to be filled. *[This process is illustrated in the 'time lapse' sequence on the project DVD.]*

The intense frustration of finding oneself too far back (on the outer tier) is recalled three weeks after the event by one respondent.

> … you know when they were doing the show, talking about the ship, … when there was the stones [used by the actor to demonstrate the ships' battle positions]. I thought it was pretty appalling too because people at the back, people like me…you couldn't see. And … you can get confused which side is Napoleon's army, which side is Nelson's. [NMM_F_PP1_117]

And then nine to ten months later:

> Well I don't think it was ideal, but it was a very busy day, there was a lot of coming and going, but … I could hear perfectly well, I could see perfectly well so I can't complain about either of those things, but there was a lot of activity around the edge as it were, I'm not sure that everybody around the back would have been well placed as I was to see and hear it. It was quite near the sort of reception desks, and enquiry desks and entrance to the museum wasn't it? [NMM_I_PP3_45]
>
> I remember liking the fact that it was quite informal, that people were sort of sitting down on the floor, that we were actually in a space where there were paintings on the wall and the actor referred to the paintings themselves, so you sort of had a visual prompt for what the ships would have looked like and perhaps how the Battle took place. [The Pensioner's tale, in the Queen's House] [NMM_I_PP3_14]
>
> It was quite difficult to see because we were quite near the back and because everything was on the same level so certain things that he was doing on the floor which one couldn't actually see what he was doing but never the less it still came over as a very enjoyable experience. [NMM_I_PP3_39]
>
> I referred to this at the time and I remember it exactly, it was very crowded unfortunately because so many people were interested, and one couldn't see as much as I would have liked. [NMM_I_PP3_42]

There is then, in this clearly signalled gallery performance mode at least, an observable tendency in audiences (and potential audiences) towards three distinct tiers of engagement. The tendency was observed in a range of other performances at other museums, including (with some variations) the promenade performance of *This Accursed Thing* at the Manchester Museum. Here, the first tier was constituted in the initial gathering of people who had booked in advance, in the clearly demarcated audience space where the performance began; the second consisted of those who had only just discovered there was a performance and joined the audience moments before the start or soon afterwards, drawn by curiosity, most of whom stayed for the rest of the performance; and finally there were those who almost literally stumbled across the performance as it progressed through the

galleries, and tended to watch from afar before (usually) carrying on with their separate journeys through the Museum. Once on the move, from gallery to gallery, audiences had the opportunity to renegotiate which of the very fluid 'tiers' they wished to place themselves within. Some became fully immersed and stayed close to the action throughout ('You're in the story': [MM_I_PP3_197]); others were more tentative ('Not sure who we 'were' all the time': F, 31-55, Manc, Irish, 81); while a number were not drawn in to the action in the slightest ('I was really bored': M, 11-18, Stretford, Br-Indian, 50)[9]

Performer/director Carran Waterfield acknowledges the varied levels of engagement evidenced in the experimental Pollard Trail through an inner city Coventry neighbourhood:

> 'It depends on what you mean by audience as well, because you get different levels of participation in it. It's on, like, a kind of radar, with people on the periphery, sort of.' [CW in TTC_P_PP2_169]
>
> In each venue different possibilities were available - from literally looking down from a tower block to sitting in a huddle in a cafe or pub. Also these pre-existing locations in which people practice ergonomic or social positioning had a big influence on the content of performance: when we devised the work we were not looking for a pub per se, but the right performance of Pollard's story to fit the pub which was significant to Pollard. (Email correspondence 20/9/08)

All the events we have examined and observed require different kinds of performer-audience relationship and different ways for an audience to negotiate their way through the events they witness and through the demands made on them by the performers and the space they commandeer. The rules of the 'game' of theatre may or may not be clear to the unsuspecting visitor – and it begs the question of how much, if any, **induction** into the event might be needed. It can be a complex process and the research has begun to provide some significant pointers and aids to understanding better what happens in those encounters, as we outline below.

The 'audience contract': the 'rules of the game'

For the *Gunner's Tale*, at NMM, the tell-tale signs of performance – the chairs laid out in front of a space in the gallery with a notice giving the time of the next performance, may be all that is needed. But not all visitors will readily and confidently sit down to watch a performance about to happen just a few metres away from them – many will hover until the actor is in place, the boundary lines clearly established and the style of performance indicated (narrative, direct address, comic interplay, physical theatre, promenade), before they contract-in. There does indeed seem to be a kind of unwritten contract on offer to the visitor – if you agree to participate, by implication you agree to give licence to the actors (within reason) to take you on their metaphorical (sometimes actual) journey through time and space. But a contract is of course a two-way thing. While the contract may be established in the opening minutes, it will be open to re-negotiation as the drama unfolds and as the 'internal frames' shift and get re-positioned. In the fluid settings provided by museums and historic sites, some people will decide to opt out when the opportunity arises, or may re-position themselves – closer or further away – as they make up their minds about their level of engagement.

[9] References to questionnaire responses.

There are often clearly observable moments when the audience decide to commit to the contract - reinforced by comments made to the research team in questionnaire and interview responses. In *This Accursed Thing* for example, the sudden appearance of Thomas Clarkson on the balcony above the audience, and his descent of the staircase to greet his 'supporters' at a rally in 1807, was cited by many audience members as one of the most memorable and engaging moments of the performance – as much for its signalling of their own immersion in the events of 200 years ago as for its theatrical effectiveness. This school pupil's comment is typical of many:

> When I realised there wasn't a stage, that surprised me, 'cause I thought we would go in to another room, with a big stage, to watch it. But when the guy came on the balcony, that surprised me. [MM_S_PP2_158]

This moment in particular seems to send a message to the pupils about the nature of the event and their role within it.

At LFM, as soon as you step over the threshold you are in 1645. A contract between visitor and characters is implicitly and informally established through a number of important devices – initially by means of the letter of introduction to Colonel Pritchard, the owner of the house, given to each visitor at the visitor centre and handed over at the doorway of the house. There onwards, the world of 1645 prevails, and you are immediately enrolled by the 17th century occupants who profess to know no other. If you expect to be able to hover at the back, keeping all options open while the actor-interpreter, in role, explains the kitchen and its staff to a group of schoolchildren, you are soon disillusioned. Before the group can move on, certain social norms must be observed: adult males must progress through the door first, while others lower down the social order must politely stand aside. No matter how perplexed or annoyed the girls may be at bringing up the rear, this re-ordering of the visiting group is done without fuss, as though perfectly natural –in this world, everyone knows their place. This momentary re-ordering provides both a further indication of the rules of the game and a sharply-focused insight into one aspect of the 17th century world: embodied, active, calculated to be gently provocative and a pedagogically valuable discussion point for the teacher to raise when back at school, or for the independent visitor to discuss once they return to the 21st century. It was noted, however, that the reaction of different school groups varied considerably: the primary schoolchildren who participated in the case study – at 9 years old somewhat over-awed by the whole experience, initially at least – accepted this re-ordering without a murmur: they were all too used to being marshalled by their elders in playgrounds and on to buses to see this as anything other than an extension of the everyday.

At LFM, the sixth formers' confusion and anxiety felt on arrival at the manor - about their role and positoning in the staged debates - was still evident months later.

> ANON: We should have been told a bit more about what the debate was about, you know, the whole overview of it.
> ANON: We just kind of walked in to a cold, wooden room and saw people sitting down and we were like, "What's happening now?". [LFM_S_PP3_132]

ANON: No. I didn't think it would be like it was. I think that's what I thought, not as serious as it was; a bit more "jokey". But most of it was quite serious at most points. [LFM_S_PP3_133]

ANON: Yeah. We didn't really expect… Well, we did, but we didn't know what to expect when we went inside. [LFM_S_PP3_123]

ANON: Yeah, 'cause we were told what was going to happen, but not about it. So we knew what was coming, but we didn't, in a way. [LFM_S_PP3_123]

INTERVIEWER: Okay. So do you think it could have been described better for you, when you were sat there? …
ANON: Yeah. I think it might have been better if they had given us an information sheet, just to read at first, to find out what was going on in the debate. [LFM_S_PP3_132]

Of course a degree of confusion may often be a productive part of the experience - and the challenge - of encountering something new; for most of these youngsters, the confusion soon, it seems, gave way to growing confidence and grasp of what the event was really about.

In experimental performance, where the 'rules of the game' are left to the audience to decipher – where they are implied rather than explained - audiences express a very wide range of opinions, positive and negative, about their involvement:

I feel that I decided to 'buy into' the drama and the characters; I accepted them so I in return could be accepted into the drama. (TTC_observations_4)

'I found it very hard to communicate properly with her as I was always trying to understand what she 'really meant' i.e: … had the potential to make the audience uncomfortable from the outset. I wasn't sure how much I was supposed to 'play along' and somehow felt a little clumsy when I was attempting to.' (TTC_observations_3)

'How should I react? Could I laugh?' (TTC_observations_4)

'I felt I didn't 'get it', if that makes sense' (TTC_observations_3)

One respondent at NMM displays an acute awareness of the 'rules' of the game and their benefits:

the performance itself, the actor – the re-enactor was very good, so I enjoyed his performance. Because they do sort of act at two levels, because there is the level where you know that they're re-enacting somebody, but they're not the person and there's that kind of knowing complicity between the two, and there is an edge of human between the two that wouldn't have been there if the person hadn't been the real person. [NMM_I_PP3_23]

The need for induction is articulated from the perspective of a Museum Learning Officer at the Herbert, aware that, however experimental, the event has to work for a variety of audiences:

> I would like them [the audience] to know what they've let themselves in for, if you like …. If it was me - I think I represent what you might call a fairly normal person who's interested in local history - what I would want to know is: this is interesting, it's a well researched project about a local person who happened to be a clown; I understand that it's been interpreted in a sort of unusual way by clown curators; I need to know that it's going to be unusual but based on facts. I think that's what we've achieved. I think someone coming from a more 'arty' perspective, … would be very happy not knowing anything about it at all. All they need to know is it's a… Tour is the wrong word; it's a series of happenings, a series of events around street theatre, if you like. ... I really hope it can actually succeed in offering an experience for those quite widely differing audiences' [TTC_M_Pre_183]

So the design and crafting of the 'performance' and the 'internal' frames (see Sect. 4.2.2 above) require particular care and attention, not least where the performance event takes place in non-theatrical spaces and often with little advance warning. The potential audience will not *necessarily* be aware of, or understand, the conventions being deployed; some will be wary until they gain some reassurance of exactly what they are 'letting themselves in for'. The conventions will often have to be introduced and negotiated as the performance progresses. This is not to minimise the value and power of surprise, challenge, even confrontation, where the subject-matter and dramatic approach demand it – and audiences will usually respond positively when it is handled skilfully and they can, sooner or later, see the point of it. The need to challenge, to unsettle, surprise, stimulate, is often a key part of the aim of the piece *but* it has to be balanced against the counter-productive risks of embarrassing, confusing, de-motivating, even angering, the visitor who has not yet agreed to 'buy in' to the process. How the event is framed, then, how the visitor is inducted into becoming a willing audience-member, or indeed a participant, the extent to which s/he is allowed a degree of choice as to whether, or how far, to participate, and the opportunity s/he is given to ask questions or express opinions at the end – all these are vital issues that have to be addressed in every performance event in a museum or historic site. They become even more vital if that event is intended to promote – implicitly or explicitly – learning.

Expectations

Expectations matter greatly, and will often condition the responsiveness of the audience. Those expectations are governed by many factors that stand outside the 'performance frame', including the many personal and social variables, impossible to predict or quantify. Within the wider context of the 'institutional frame' of the museum or site, therefore, marketing and publicity clearly play a large part. The research shows that most visitors' expectations of what they will find in a museum tend to be not of live performance, but rather of well-staged static exhibitions, in which artefacts or works of art are carefully placed, 'dressed' and lit for maximum impact. Performance by actors – dynamic rather than static – can all too easily seem at odds with the 'normal' relationship between visitor and display. Careful management of visitor expectations may therefore be vital if the maximum benefit of performance is to be obtained. This does *not* mean that expectations can or should be *controlled*, simply that publicity has to be appropriate: it

should first and foremost publicise so that visitors know the performance is happening, where to find it, how long it will last, and its suitability – whether for all-comers, adults and children alike, or aimed at more specialist interests.

> No, I thought it was a really good experience to go to the performance piece and it was not necessarily something I would have thought of doing previously and it has definitely changed my perception of what those activities, who those activities are for. Whereas I might not have considered they were for me, I now do. [NMM_I_PP3_14]
>
> …before I wouldn't have really sought it out to be quite honest, because I probably thought to myself 'I know about Trafalgar and it will be very dry and boring', but having been there I actually thought it added to it. It was quite interesting and certainly very enjoyable. I have a more positive view of theatrical performances now than I did before I went. [NMM_I_PP3_20]

Story-telling events will need relatively little explanation; more complex, extended or promenade – let alone experimental – events will at least need to alert potential audiences to their nature and duration, and the extent of movement, walking or standing if any.

There is also much to be said for work that confounds expectations, where surprise is a strong part of the very enjoyment and/or educational impact, and for the 'wow factor' which by definition should not be prepared for.

> No, I don't think, you can't be prepared for anything like that. We were told by my friend that there was going to be a short play, I didn't realise we were going to be sent all over the building, which was great. I thought it was much, I thought it was going to be like a stage and we would sit and do and we went into a room and they started to show us a few things and then he said right if you can just go into this area under the stairs and we can start by directing you to such a such a place and I thought we were [to go] somewhere and sit down, watch this play and the next thing they are acting it out in front of you, really good. [MM_I_PP3_190]

Museum theatre often suffers in many people's eyes from being 'worthy' and rather predictable, or from being aimed at children or at the lowest common denominator. As a result, excellent, challenging work is sometimes by-passed for want of adequate or appropriate publicity.

'Un-settlement'

The notion of 'un-settlement' was coined by the team to indicate an experience our respondents at all sites frequently articulated: that of having expectations overturned, assumptions about the subject-matter challenged, of finding that they were personally being confronted with strong emotion or were expected to participate verbally or even physically. Such 'un-settlement' may often be positive: stimulating, surprising, generating a sense of dissonance that requires further thought, perhaps even a revision of closely held assumptions and beliefs. It may be negative: visitors finding themselves trapped inside an event that they find exasperating, irritating, demanding more of them than they wish to give, but from which there is no escape. Strong feelings remain long after the event, especially where the visitor is angered or provoked by the subject matter (e.g. slavery):

RESP: Well it wasn't, it wasn't good actually you know, the way he was saying, the way the slaves were treated and the way they were stacked. They were stacked like bloody sardines. It was horrible you know the things he was saying and people tried to make him feel guilty by saying how would you like it if your family had that done to them and he said oh that won't be done to me, we're a nice white upper class family, you know going on like that with himself.

INT: So how did the performance make you feel?

RESP: Well it opened my eyes about slavery, I mean I have never given it much thought because I obviously wasn't born in that time you just get on with life don't you, but it made me ponder a bit it about well it must have been really tough and upsetting to have been dragged away from their families and then just brought to this other country and then treated like a piece of rubbish. [MM_I_PP3_190]

Or when the visitor is frustrated, irritated, confused or feels let down by the quality of the performance or (in the view of the visitor) its misguided or ill-informed content. On the Pollard Trail, two audience members with a strong personal interest in the subject were far from won over by the method of dramatising it; the strength of their disappointment seemed to have increased over the year since.

Oh, and the churchyard where they were supposed to have got married. The story about the bloke who'd murdered someone – it was complete rubbish! And the suggestion that Irving was a great drunk – that was a total fallacy. (TTC_I_PP3_215) *[The stories related did have some basis in fact but were re-told in ways that aimed to subvert any authority that might be seen to reside in the teller. Not all audiences will see the events in that way however.]*

On reflection, you know, having seen what they [Triangle] did, I'd say the concept was excellent. But it needed to be done properly. The idea was good but it was just unfortunate that the people who did it hadn't got a talent for it. With the right presenter … it could have been a much better, more sympathetic event. (TTC_I_PP3_215)

The event? It was all very odd. I'm very glad I went – but how much better it could have been! (TTC_I_PP3_214)

The un-settlement may then be a deliberate part of the aim of the piece but it has to be handled with skill and sensitivity. It begs the question again of just how, and when, the un-settling or challenging elements are introduced, and how to ensure that the audience has had sufficient time to 'tune in' to the style, rhythm and subject matter of the performance. *This Accursed Thing* offers just one example of how this factor was planned for and executed – but, not, it must be emphasised, a model of 'how to do it'.

A final note: On occasion, there may be some for whom the experience may be un-settling in a negative, physical sense. In performance settings that require physical movement by the audience or sustained bouts of standing and watching (promenade performances and heritage trails, for example), comfort levels will inevitably matter to some visitors more than to others. While many are prepared to put up with short spells of minor discomfort,

recognising that there are trade-offs between comfort and the unique opportunity to watch a drama unfold ‘on site’, for others the lack of a well placed chair or an over-crowded space at an important moment of the action may well distract attention.

> I suppose towards the end I would have liked a comfy seat and it would have held my attention for longer… [TAT p.155] [11]
>
> Yes again, the spaces are difficult. I found that room quite cramped where we started and ended, it wasn’t really designed to have that many people [TAT, p. 155] [11]

There are often compelling reasons to avoid having an audience settle comfortably into chairs for an event that is designed to benefit from its non-theatrical location; but a balance has to be struck. For events that are intended to appeal to all-comers, it is important not only to ensure, wherever possible, adequate access for the disabled, provision for mothers with small children, etc, but to build in some allowance for general audience comfort where it will serve rather than work against the richness of the experience on offer, and where it will enable the less physically fit to benefit equally from that experience.

4.3.2 Theme 2: Performance

Why 'performance'?

One of the strongest arguments for including performance in the repertoire of interpretive strategies is that it provides museums or historic sites with a resource that helps them fill some of the inevitable gaps in their collections and associated narratives. This is less to do with compensating for missing artefacts (though this may be one of the aims) but more importantly with finding the human stories that give life, meaning and context to those collections. (*This Accursed Thing* for example was designed to complement and contribute to the 'Revealing Histories' project involving the museums of Greater Manchester.)

Museums are, by their own admission, not the authoritative repositories of knowledge and truth that they traditionally were assumed to be. Not only are collections usually incomplete, and historic sites no longer in the state they were when first built, but the very acts of collection, cataloguing, preservation and re-presentation have shaped, distorted, or at best given only partial impressions of the past. For every object on display there are probably many narratives that could be told, voices heard and alternative cultural meanings revealed. Some narratives can be represented through textual explanations or visual prompts from the curators, but many cannot. As the 'new museology' has been urging for years, museums must themselves be seen as artefacts, in need of self-reflexive interpretation, and their collections are likewise in need of radical re-interpretation. The attempt to restore historic sites to some 'perfect' state is equally suspect, portraying as it does a reified view of 'the past' as something fixed and readily knowable.

As museums and sites endeavour to offer new opportunities to 'look again' at their collections and listen to other, till-now invisible and unheard narratives, performance *can* provide one powerful way of filling some of those gaps, and giving voice and embodiment to those missing narratives – for example to those of the artisans who built the walls or worked the fields or weaved the yarn, whose traces are otherwise hidden in the fabrics of the curtain or shawl, or the craftsmanship of the sword, plough, goblet or stonework; and indeed of the slaves upon whose backs the wealth and grandeur of so many historic houses were built.

A simple but effective example from Case Study 1 (CS1): *The Gunner's Tale* at the National Maritime Museum: one focus group member exemplifies a common response: he was enthused by the Museum's major exhibition on 'Nelson & Napoleon' and was already knowledgable about the period, but was struck by the small details of life at sea for the ordinary able-bodied seaman revealed in the performance – the poor quality of the food in particular, the 'sea biscuits' – details that did not add greatly to his store of knowledge but did give him a vivid, tangible sense of how life must have felt for the sailors below decks.

From CS2 at Llancaiach Fawr: the 'owner' is away, so we receive an alternative view of life in 1645, that of the servants. Each of the 'characters' draws on their carefully-researched biography, can demonstrate the operation of the kitchens or the weapons of the time, can explain how their own daily lives compare with those of their master and mistress, and each knows precisely their place in the great chain of being.

From CS3: the life and times of Irving Pollard are recalled, celebrated, interrogated and sometimes subverted. Triangle Theatre conscripts its visitors into a semi-fictitious amateur dramatic society, the "CMP Soc", as it re-visits moments in the unusual, at times

disturbing, life of Pollard. The trail also involved some extraordinary cultural exchanges, some planned, some not, along the route of the trail through a now predominantly Kurdish-speaking area of the city. Other, unanticipated voices – and songs – from a marginalised community were heard and incorporated into the event, in ways that counterpointed and occasionally further subverted the main narrative.

From CS4: *This Accursed Thing* was planned to coincide with and complement the launch of the Revealing Histories programme of events dealing with the history and legacy of slavery. Interestingly, while the promenade play focused on the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade, it was performed in a museum which has very little in its exhibitions directly to do with the slave trade. What the performance did (among many other things) was focus on the hidden histories of the artefacts and collections, many of which owe their very existence to the inherited wealth of the collectors, built on the profits made by their family ancestors from the cotton and sugar plantations in the West Indies - and hence the slave trade itself. One of the characters in the play was Manchester itself – as the hub and wealthy beneficiary of the cotton industry and later as one of the leading centres in the abolitionist movement.

So performance can undoubtedly fulfil the vital function of offering alternative and complementary versions of history and generating further questions and debate about 'how and why it was'. It may also offer simpler, more limited but still valuable contributions to the museum experience, those of *illustrating and demonstrating* or of *explaining* aspects of the collection or exhibition in ways that complement or supplement the text panels in the gallery. Diagrammatically, we might reperesent the main functions of performance as four interconnected points on a network of possibilities – see fig. iii below. Of course most performances will fulfil more than one function at any one time.

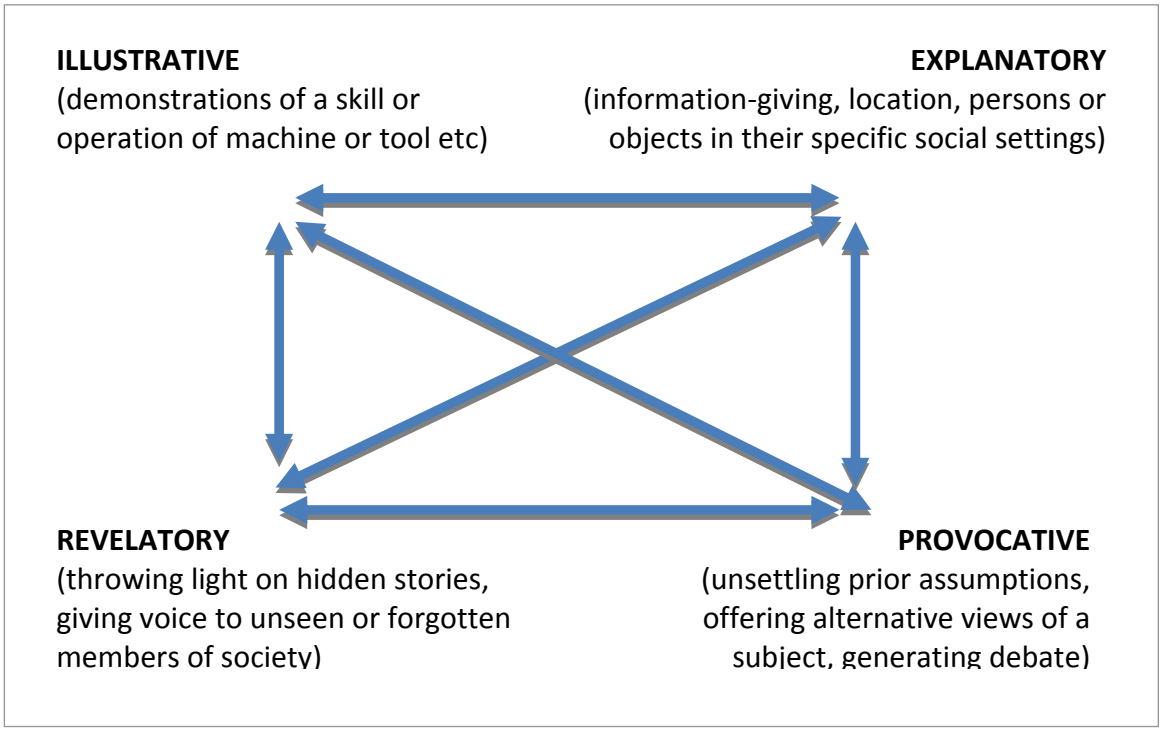

Fig. iii The four key functions of performance in museums and historic sites

Whatever the specific function, teasing out hard evidence of the performance's actual impact upon audiences is a challenging exercise. Does the use of performance to engage audiences and interpret historic sites or museum displays actually work?

Audience members refer to performance in many different ways, in part conditioned by the museum context within which it takes place. Terms used for the more conventional NMM performances include: 'presentation', 'drama' 'performance', 'audio visual', 'entertainment', 'a bonus', 'a lecture dressed up as something interesting' [NMM_F_PP1_117]. A teenage member of a family group commented interestingly on one of the NMM single character performances:

> And I also think the size of the room was right as well. Had it been a bigger space with more people it would have changed the dynamic … it would then have become a theatre piece as opposed to somebody there talking to us. [NMM_F_PP1_116]

For some, their prior associations of what theatre is govern their response to museum performance. This was a quite different concept of theatre:

> … in a theatre… well, they're quite rigid aren't they? The way there's an audience sitting there and there's a stage … there's a demarcation line between the audience and the actual performers … the purpose of a museum is to educate. The theatre is a venue for entertaining, primarily. When people go to theatres they dress up; when people go to museums they don't. it's a different concept, isn't it? That's why I think it was successful. [MM_I_PP2_209]

One of the second year pupils at LFM attempts to identify just what kind of performance it was he witnessed, and whether it constituted acting or re-enacting:

> I think the actors in the house did an excellent job of trying to act. … It was portrayed as if you were actually in that time period, but not… It's hard to… It showed you what it was like in that time period, instead of being 'Oh, I'm in it.' [LFM_S_PP3_139]

The 'eventness' of the performance

Wilmar Sauter has coined the term 'eventness' to capture the sense of occasion and uniqueness that is, in his view, vital to an understanding of the experience of live theatre. Taking his cue from the work of Hans Georg Gadamer (see *Truth and Method*, 1960) his contention is that all art has its basis in 'playing'; that playing becomes art when a communicative act between player (in the widest sense) and observer (onlooker, listener) takes place'(Sauter 2000: 81). Distinguishing sharply between what he calls the 'written culture' (that which is created for posterity) and the 'playful culture' (that which is created in and for the here and now), he insists that 'theatre becomes theatre by being an event, in which two partners engage in a playful relationship' – the performer and the spectator are united as 'two indispensable partners of the theatrical event' (Sauter: 5). The usefulness of his term, eventness, is to highlight the importance of the immediacy and the visceral and playful dimensions of any kind of live performance, not least when it happens in a museum which many of our respondents usually associate with the preservation of artefacts for posterity (the 'written culture' in Sauter's terminology). Museums of course

have an equally important remit to *interpret* but the perceived contrast between what performance does and what the museum is seen to stand for is underlined time and again in the responses of audiences.

Frequently, respondents talk about the 'realness' and the 'immediacy' of the performance, the fact that it was right in front of them in the 'here and now', and are touched by the intimacy of the experience.

> I always think something live stays with you even if you're not thinking about it. [MM_I_PP3_191]
>
> It was 'realistic' [MM_S_PP2_161]

For some the 'reality' of the performance was balanced against, often preferred to, the 'authenticity' of the exhibition, because it embodied in the here and now what otherwise would have been restricted to artefacts in glass cases.

Second form pupils (12-13 year olds), when asked, 10 months after their visit to LFM, whether it was the people or the place that made the experience 'feel real', focused primarily upon the people they met and the costumes they wore – more than on the house (ironically the more 'authentic'):

> ANON: I think the way they did it, the actors, was really good. I don't think they need to change any of that.
>
> ANON: They must have to know a bit, you know, about what they're talking about, because you can't just act like that. [LFM_S_PP3_132]
>
> ANON: I think it was quite realistic, because they all knew exactly what to do and what to say. So, if you asked a question, they knew the answer. They were very well prepared. The house did look quite realistic as well.
>
> ANON: You could ask them any question and they'd know how to answer.
>
> ANON: And they also dressed in the way that they would have. (123) [LFM_S_PP3_132]

For one second year pupil, it was precisely because it was 'unstaged' that it became 'authentic':

> It was very authentic. They hadn't deliberately staged it. [LFM_S_PP3_132]

They were fascinated by experiencing the past in the present, with all the contradictions that seemed to entail:

> RESP 1: Yeah. When they talked, they talked differently to how they did in the olden days, so that made a difference.
> RESP 2: I didn't feel like I was going back in the past, but it felt that they were presenting… They had points to make you think, but I don't really feel like I was going back in time, or anything. [LFM_S_PP3_133]
>
> RESP 1: You're like thinking, "Right: I could actually be here, maybe, in the past". Then you see that radiator and you think, "No, it's gone. I'm not there any more". [LFM_S_PP3_133]
>
> ANON: And it wasn't like a lesson, because you were treated like it was like olden times. So it wasn't modern at all. It was really realistic. [LFM_S_PP3_123]
>
> ANON: Yeah. It wasn't sort of, like, modern. You couldn't…
> ANON: It felt really strange.
> ANON: Yeah.
> ANON: It felt really strange, because there was nothing in there. It was freezing as well.
> ANON: No electricity. [LFM_S_PP3_123]

The sixth Formers tended to view the interpreters as existing in the current time – they are acting in the present rather than contriving to get them to suspend their disbelief; at least, this is how the interpreters are represented in the discussions (so it is always 'ye olde talk'). None-the-less, the interpreters had a role to play in making the site more authentic and adding an element of the 'real'. The pupils clearly display an awareness of the performative nature of the experience as enabled by the interpreters who 'show' and 'demonstrate' on the Manor 'set':

> It was very serious, because, even when you weren't in the house, the people were acting. So it was different than I expected it to be...It's just different. It makes it more fun, 'cause it's not just normal people telling you stuff, it's like acting. [They are well aware of the game that is being played] [LFM_S_PP3_133]

While the second form boys are under no illusions about the fact that these are actors, they do sometimes display an uncertainty as to when the acting stops:

> [Interviewee F]: Well I think the best person was that person who took us around the place, because he was the best at like acting ... he was really good at acting it
> [Interviewee H]: The one you had to answer in like olde talk
> [Interviewee F]: Yeah, and I went 'Where art thou toilet?' [LFM_S_PP2_130]
>
> 'Sometimes you don't know like whether they are acting or not cause when he came back the second time he was like "Whenst thou is in another household thoust behave thyself" and it's like you don't know whether they're actually like telling you to behave, or whether they're just acting.' [LFM_S_PP2_130]

When asked how such a visit helped them learn, 10 months after their visit to LFM, many of the 9-10 year olds stressed not only the 'reality' of being there but the belief that they were 'seeing it for real' – a phrase that cropped up time and again in our phase two research (2001/2):

> RESP 1: Because in the classroom, sir just tells you about it, but when we're at there we can actually see it for ourselves…
>
> RESP 2: In the way like, if sir says and shows us a picture and we can actually see it for real, not in a picture…
>
> RESP 3: We could see how they used to dress and all that.
>
> Mi: And we wouldn't know how to make the candles and that they waited till the cows died and stuff. [LFM_S_PP3_144]

Not all were convinced about the reliability of what they saw however, recognising the staged (or 'fake') nature of the event. But they oscillate between the two kinds of 'truth' that seemed to be on offer: the actors could not be 'real' people from the past, and yet they were remarkably convincing. It's difficult to put into words:

> RESP 1: I think it's fake though, because how could they know it? They might have been… Oh, well: probably they might have been born when it was…
>
> RESP 2: No, there might have been someone from the future, who was still alive when this person… He's probably alive. He's probably with the Tudors and he was probably alive ages ago and he probably told Jonathon, or something. Then, after they told the story over and over… [LFM_S_PP3_150]
>
> Int: So were they real people? What were they?
>
> RESP 1: They were actors. I know they weren't real, because they wouldn't still be alive now. ...
>
> RESP 2: They were like… The clothes they were wearing were from years and years ago, when the other people who used to wear them, that's what the other people were wearing, that we met.

Int: Okay. So the clothes were old, but the people were new? Kind of…

RESP 2: yeah the people that we met, they were wearing the clothes from, like, many years ago.

Int: … So those people: do they live in the house now?

RESP 3: No.

RESP 2: No, not all of them.

Int: No. Some of them?

RESP 1: Well they might, 'cause they wouldn't keep a bed in there if they're never going to use it. [LFM_S_PP3_151]

Int: Did you think that they were people from the olden days?

RESP 1: They were actors.

RESP 2: Well, before. Now we know they were acting. [LFM_S_PP3_150]

Occasionally, adults wondered whether the 'realness' of the performance served to dilute the reality of the subject-matter:

INT: I suppose there's always a risk, isn't there, that no matter how carefully you do the research, when you start editing it down for a performance…

RESP: You lose some of it... It dilutes the actual reality. [MM_I_PP2_211]

The power of the performance to take one by surprise, to overturn expectations, to make a strong impact 'in the moment' - its 'eventness' - is valued by many. The performances at NMM for example are 'real', 'alive', 'life', and the character is a 'live witness' - language that is not used to describe the exhibition and its artefacts. At MM, school pupils recall (three weeks later) moments when a character made them suddenly feel part of the drama, part of the reality of the event:

> ANON: I shook someone's hand.
> INT: Yeah? How did you feel doing that?
> ANON: It was like they were making you feel like you're a part of it. Like it's sort of real and things. [MM_S_PP2_158]
>
> ANON: Yeah, the guy shook my hand, and I think it was Thomas Clarkson, he shook my hand right at the beginning.
> INT: Okay. And how did that make you feel?
> ANON: It made me feel like I was back then [MM_S_PP2_158]

Interestingly, the strength of the event in the immediate present is underlined, if in a different way, by the 9-year olds who experienced LFM. When recalling the event (one week later), they talked readily and clearly about the characters they met on the day, in the here-and-now, and knew that they were from the 'olden days' while at the same time aware (for the most part) that they were acting, but they demonstrated confusion about – or perhaps lack of interest in – the absent 'off-stage' characters (such as the Colonel who they hear much about but never meet):

> INTERVIEWER: And do you know where he was then when you were there?
>
> SH: He went out.
>
> INTERVIEWER: Go on R?
>
> R: I don't know.
>
> SH: He went on holiday? He went on holiday and went shopping.
>
> INTERVIEWER: You think he went shopping. Where do you think he went shopping?
>
> M: Tescos.
>
> SH: There's no Tescos by there.
>
> R: In the shop downstairs.
>
> INTERVIEWER: Do you think they had Tesco's back in Tudor times?
>
> AlM: No.
>
> INTERVIEWER: No
>
> M: Don't know where he went, he's just gone off somewhere. [LFM_S_PP2_141]

The time frames of history and of the visit sometimes get blurred and mixed up by respondents; sometimes being engaged by a performance is likened to going back in time,

> He came across as being believable, and you could almost find yourself going back in time and listening to some old tire down the pub relating his tale [NMM_I_PP3_27]
>
> RESP 1: I thought I was going to go back to the olden days.
> RESP 2: Same as me. [LFM_S_PP2_148]
>
> It felt like you were actually there, watching them. [MM_S_PP2_161]
>
> I felt that I was back there in the past with that situation at the time. [MM_I_PP2_79]

for others the past is being played out in the very 'real' present:

> it's almost as if your meeting with this guy today, and he's dropped in from two hundred years ago, [NMM_I_PP3_41]
>
> SH: He went on holiday? He went on holiday and went shopping.
>
> INTERVIEWER: You think he went shopping. Where do you think he went shopping?
>
> M: Tescos.
>
> SH: There's no Tescos by there.
>
> R: In the shop downstairs. [LFM_S_PP2_141]
>
> INTERVIEWER: so do you think that people really did live there?
> Yeah, because there were loads of people and I thought they were real, back from the Tudor times. [LFM_S_PP2_147]

These quotes say much about how our research participants view the reality of what they are seeing. The very young pupils show a more significant confusion about temporality (although not a confusion that causes them any discomfort), possibly also due to their lack of ability in expressing the duality they feel:

> INTERVIEWER: Did you think that they were people from the olden days?
> GW: They were actors.
> MS: Well, before. Now we know they were acting. [LFM_S_PP3_150]
>
> INTERVIEWER: Where do you think he was?
> D: Died, dead, dead, dead.
> INTERVIEWER: Okay, when did he die then do you think?
> D: In the Tudor times? I think.
> INTERVIEWER: Does that make sense to you? [The pupil sounds unsure]
> D: I'm not quite sure. [LFM_S_PP2_143]

They fail (in certain instances, and without encouragement) to differentiate between the past, and the very different present (one in which Tescos is a by-word for all things contemporary). What we often see happening with older pupils and independent visitors is that they acknowledge they are entering into a playful relationship with temporality; that they are able to experience their environment, feelings, social context and expectations in the present, whilst simultaneously using their imaginations and the reality that is being presented for them to inhabit the past as well:

> ANON: Yeah, 'cause while we were walking around in other parts of the thing, the other people who were there who were acting, were just doing their jobs naturally, just as if it was a normal day and there was just somebody taking a tour, or something.
> ANON: Yeah and there were cleaners, you know, just cleaning.
> INTERVIEWER: So a bit like they lived there?
> ANON: Yeah.
> INTERVIEWER: Except that you knew that they weren't.
> ANON: But that doesn't cross your mind while you're there. [LFM_S_PP3_132]
>
> ANON: It kind of makes you want to do the "Back to the Future Thing" and go back in time to see…
> ANON: To see what it was like? [MM_S_PP2_161]

One case study highlights the extent to which audiences are willing and able to take this **playfulness** with temporality. *The Pollard Trail* (case study 3) is split into a number of different segments, some of which are faithful to fact and location, others which take licence in numerous respects. The length of the trail (around five hours in its entirety) means that it is neither desirable nor expected that audience members will see the whole 'story'. Much more likely was encountering a moment or moments of the trail where although one perhaps sees a whole unit of activity, there is no 'beginning', 'middle' and 'end' in any conventional way and thus no unified explicit whole.

Time, as presented through the Trail, is only very superficially chronological. It is deliberately but understatedly historical – we are encouraged to think about the past and the present simultaneously. Stops, starts and pauses are common, nothing is presented in real time but neither are they presented in an imaginary other (or past) time. The reality and fiction of a past Hillfields is being presented in a real and fictitious present.

> As for the experience, it seems most appropriate to remember it like it was a dream. This is mainly I think because there were so many individual appearances and moments of clarity with no overall sense of plot. [TTC_observations_5]
>
> It was like a person's bewilderment [TTC_I_PP2_180]
>
> I was able to piece together a few of the fragments on the way round [TTC_observations_3]

There is thus a reliance on audience members to use the experience in order to unpack and resurrect the story themselves, to find within the experience a line to follow, or a comfort with no plot at all. Of course this is also something which the audience need to work out

on their own. It is no surprise that a common feeling amongst audience members after following the trail was one of physical and mental exhaustion.

Being playful with temporality is not something new to museums and heritage sites, and certainly not new to performance. There are ways in which all of our case studies represent playfulness in this respect:

- At LFM, every visit may well take you 'back' to 1645, but every year, the people you meet will be one year older, they will have another year of life story, experience, knowledge and opinion.

- In MM, *This Accursed Thing* took audiences on a journey around the museum, ostensibly through time, but also playing with different permutations of place through the building and its architecture.

- At the National Maritime Museum, the characters we meet (as 'real' as they are) play with temporality in the moment of performance. We are immediately 'transported' to a past which we inhabit, with the character, for the entirety of the piece. Within this timeframe however, the pace of the performance is used to affect the frenetic speed of the gunfire, or the agony of the waiting that the character experienced.

There are many ways then that performance can explore the temporality of history without relying on the seriously resolutely chronological.

Another way of exploring this is through the use of characterisation. Respondents testify time and again that it is the chosen characters (and no doubt the actors who play them) who aid their engagement with the heritage:

> all the manuscripts she was reading, the exact words, said in history, she read them out, and when she read them out, it made so much more sense. Somebody reading it, she was the actual person who said it you know? And the way she read it, she was really Lady Hamilton or she was really Nelson's wife you know? Her noises, her comments, everything she was saying [laughter] was making the whole story very very real you know? [NMM_I_PP2_33]
>
> They [the characters]were rare [LFM_S_PP2_148]
>
> I found the characters we met rather absurd and unbelievable. However I was amazed at how quickly I,and I believe the others, relaxed into them... Yet by the end of the day I called Alice Alice because that was her name and likewise with the others. (TTC_observations_4)
>
> Although we knew it was the same two men, when they acted out those characters, you really believed that you were talking to that person. [MM_I_PP2_80]

Respondents invariably see the characters as being accessible (the younger respondents often mimic their voices and attitudes), and with an important role to play in making not only the piece more authentic, but the audience's responses, feelings and memories more authentic also. One revealing description references a character as a 'real alien', he has been both more familiar and yet stranger than other aspects of the museum experience: a

memorable combination. The language interpreters use in portraying these characters is also commented on: accents, historical reference, dialects, and 'olde worlde language':

> 'Cause they spoke, you know, like in "olden-talk" for the whole thing and they must spend a while just learning to talk like that. If you ask them a question they would just answer. [LFM_S_PP3_132]
>
> B: Yeah, he was talking in the Welsh ways, in the old ways like… [LFM_S_PP2_149]

All of the above help to create in audiences a sense of a past that is accessible, interesting, memorable and open for exploration.

The skills of the actor

When asked to comment on the quality and effectiveness of the performance immediately afterwards, the appreciation of the acting is often at the forefront of people's minds. This was applicable especially to the more overtly theatrical of the performance pieces, that is at NMM and MM. Even ten months later, impressions are often still vivid, and there is real pleasure in seeing good acting. Descriptive terms (mostly positive) include: brilliant, exciting, amusing, entertaining, convincing:

> it was a combination of very good acting and powerful information . [MM_I_PP2_77]
>
> The beauty of that little acting session was that people were drawn in to the situation by the brilliance of the acting, it was well done. [MM_I_PP3_195]
>
> he made it come alive [NMM_I_PP3_39]
>
> Definitely! I mean he was good, and it was the smallest amount of props of staging and you were there! He was very good and it gave you a handle on it. [NMM_I_PP3_37]
>
> He came across as being believable, and you could almost find yourself going back in time and listening to some old tire down the pub relating his tale. [NMM_I_PP3_27]
>
> The actor portrayed him really well and was very engaging [NMM_I_PP3_14]
>
> He was there, he was living it, he drew you in and he was so believable and still talking to the audience. So he wasn't sort of you know, just performing and ignoring you. [NMM_I_PP2_48]

The ability of the performer to tell a good story, to command the attention of his/her audience in testing conditions, was highly valued. Indeed, for one audience member at *The Gunner's Tale*, it was the quality of performance that overcame reservations about its staging:

> I wasn't quite certain about it when he started, because it felt as though he were shoved up in a corner. Once he started you tended to forget where you were, but if he hadn't have been as good I don't think you would have forgotten that you were shoved up in a corner. [NMM_I_PP3_37]

And the primary school children at LFM remembered what had been told them by characters they meet, clearly having listened intently to the stories related and the objects demonstrated:

> L One of maids she was really a servant, she just come, and she had a little thing coming down that went on her dress and if there was an awful smell then she put it by her nose and she smells it, and it smells a disgusting smell. And if any bad luck or danger comes to her then she opens it – then no harm can get to her....
>
> SH: She's got a thing her husband gave her for her nose and it's got little patterns on it.
>
> M: Oh I know what you're talking about. She opens it and smells it [LFM_S_PP2_141]

There was appreciation of the skills involved in switching from one character role to another, and of the value of 'multi-vocality': the stimulating presence of several, often contrasting voices:

> It is very difficult to get people to listen these days and it was done in a dramatic way and the two men were very good at changing their characters, being the sleazy slave seller, if you like. [MM_I_PP3_195]

But equally, there was occasionally disappointment that more than one voice, or point of view, was not always heard during a single-character monologue:

> It might have been quite nice to have the equivalent French pensioner Joe Brown to put the French side of the battle… Just to have that sort of balance, this was the French side, this was the English side [NMM_F_PP1_116]

The actors' multi-faceted roles, especially their ability to switch from being out of character into character and back again (e.g. for a final Q& A), were highly valued. Interpreters require sharply honed skills as 'actor-teachers' in these circumstances. Not only must they be able to answer factual questions about the subject matter but, within the performance (even where no overt interaction is required), an awareness of the audience and the degrees of attention and understanding they are displaying from moment to moment is essential, together with the ability to adapt rapidly to the needs of the moment.

They worked the audience if you like...Well, they posed the questions and then they sort of worked round to getting people to say what they thought; did you think this was right and people would stand up in a protesting manner saying no that wasn't right or it was a good thing or whatever. [MM_I_PP3_195]

when [the actor opens it up] to questions ... I mean at some points it got quite heated, you know, when people thought [others] were talking rubbish basically. So people disagreed with each other even, and the actor or actors that were involved in the talk, sort of like, not … disagreed with anybody but they sort of put their point of view across to reflect what really is happening or not happening, without taking sides, very diplomatically. [MM_I_PP3_189]

I found that he was an old salt, and he was very good at dealing with the crowds and talking to people and getting people involved, and got people to join in and take part, and he was very good. [NMM_I_PP3_26]

Although at some performances the generation of questions obviously worked less well:

I always think in all these situations, sometimes the people who are performing as it were or conducting whatever it is, ought to be a bit more coaxing of people, as I say because not everybody will ask the question even if they have a question that they want to ask. So perhaps they should have the ability to make people feel at ease, hard as that is to do. [MM_I_PP3_191]

At LFM, 10 months after the visit, the children try to articulate their impressions of the people they met, who were sometimes friendly, sometimes strict, who were simultaneously people from the past and the present: characters, actors, guides and teachers:

INTERVIEWER: It was the character who was telling people off?

RESP 1: I think half and half.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. What did you think of those people then, that you met?

RESP 2: I thought that they were friendly.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah? So do you all think that they were actors then?

RESP 1: No.

RESP 3: I'm not sure.

INTERVIEWER: How would you describe them?

RESP 1: Some of the people, they were actors, but they…

RESP 3: They wouldn't be that old, so they must be actors.

> INTERVIEWER: Why? Otherwise if they were really from the Tudor period, then…
>
> RESP 3: No, they'd be dead, a very long time. (LAUGHS)
>
> INTERVIEWER: So they're real people, but they come in to the house and do some acting?
>
> RESP 1: Yeah, actors. And that's their workplace. Like, they go in there to keep everything clean and stuff, whenever children are not in there.
>
> RESP 3: That's why they're strict.
>
> RESP 1: Yeah. [LFM_S_PP3_144]

The second formers are still (10 months later) impressed with the skill of the actors, able to sustain their roles over the course of the whole day:

> ANON: It was that they were really good actors.
> ANON: And it didn't matter what we did or asked, they didn't sway from their characters at all. [LFM_S_PP3_132]

The closeness of actor and audience, and the need to convey information and generate interest and curiosity within a very compact time-span are vital in museum performance. The data underlines the very high levels of performance skill, interpersonal and communication skills, alongside the abilities to research and work to a brief, that this work, at its best, requires.

Performance and the use of space: journeys, actual and metaphorical

The physicality of the performances and the spaces they occupy is frequently commented on, mostly very favourably. In particular, audience members talk of the sense of going on a journey, metaphorical or actual, with the characters, and of the imaginative use of space – whether gallery that momentarily becomes a slave ship or manor hall that is transformed into the setting for a 'great debate' or the run-down suburban street that suddenly becomes peopled with clowns, singers and traces of a life that was lived 60 years ago.

Thus, the primary school children are able to recall vividly and precisely the order of the rooms they visited at LFM, and the activities they took part in in each. Likewise the second formers, again ten months later, recall vividly the journey round the house and the various roles that the interpreters took on both during the debate and around the house. For all the independent school pupils, the scale and 'feel' of the manor were felt to be essential to the operation of the debates:

> But the house, certainly, I think was invaluable to the day. I don't think it could have worked without it. [LFM_S_PP3_137]

For the second form pupils, the house contributed both atmosphere and a spur to the imagination:

> It was good like being in a manor that was actually that old, cause you can sort of imagine that time four hundred years ago [LFM_S_PP2_131]

At NMM, the different locations – the historic setting of the Queen's House for the *Pensioner's Tale* and the noise and bustle of the open gallery for the *Gunner's Tale* - produced a variety of responses:

> I remember liking the fact that it was quite informal, that people were sort of sitting down on the floor, that we were actually in a space where there were paintings on the wall and the actor referred to the paintings themselves, so you sort of had a visual prompt for what the ships would have looked like and perhaps how the Battle took place. [NMM_I_PP3_14]
>
> It was quite difficult to see because we were quite near the back and because everything was on the same level so certain things that he was doing on the floor [demonstrating the battle with pebbles] which one couldn't actually see what he was doing but never the less it still came over as a very enjoyable experience. [NMM_I_PP3_39]

Not all respondents were as forgiving about the difficulty of seeing and hearing everything at *The Gunner's Tale*, as the questionnaire responses indicate. In part the unusually busy 'Trafalgar Weekend' exacerbated the problem – there is an optimum number for a performance in such a space, but it is difficult and probably undesirable to restrict numbers without 'fencing off' the space and providing 'gate-keepers'. In the end – as the video footage demonstrates – the process is self-regulating. If you can hardly see or hear, you move on and perhaps return for the next performance.

The Pollard Trail was by definition a performance that demanded a journey be undertaken. Not everyone followed the entire route, but that element of choice – to dip in and out as the mood (or energy levels) took you – was for many part of its attraction.

> I am really proud and I would like to help them however I can. If you look at this area it is our home. We feel at home here. We respect these people coming here and creating such a great performance. [A2 in TTC_O_PP1_177]
>
> [Int]: How did you discover this shop?
> [C in TTC_O_PP1_177]: I thought about owning a shop, came here because the Kurdish Community was here, saw the shop, bought it and set it up as a sweet shop.
> [Int]: Did you know it was a sweet shop in the 1940's?
> [C in TTC_O_PP1_177]: I didn't know about it until this group came here and told me about the history of this shop. They brought some puppets and flyers to hand out to the people.
> [Int]: What was your response to that?
> [C in TTC_O_PP1_177]: I liked the story very much, they tell me every time we are sorry for disturbing you, and I say "It's no problem"

At *This Accursed Thing*, the promenade element of the performance was frequently commented on, by school pupils and independent visitors alike, as an essential and

engaging part of the experience. Here though it was clearly important to follow the entire performance from start to finish.

> It was good, 'cause, as they moved us around, they told us different stories and everything, and it was good how they moved round. Like, when we went in the boat place. [MM_S_PP2_203]
>
> It's quite riveting really, 'cause, like you said, yes, it's that type of thing where, "What's going to happen? Let's get to the next stage before we've even finished this stage", basically. You know? It's exciting as well as it's obviously very serious. But it's exciting… That's not the right word. It's exciting in a sense of, feed me more; give me more; give me more information, I need to know more. I want to be on this journey with you. Where else? What next stage are you going to take me to, and what am I going to learn? On that journey of learning, what can I do to do something about it? [MM_I_PP2_79]

Further issues and questions arising

- The evidence suggests that over time audiences tend to remember the activity of performance rather than the details of its subject matter, and that performance is remembered as an experiential whole and often, after time, the facts themselves get forgotten or mis-remembered. (See also under 'Learning'.)
- Performance may be just one mode of interpretation on a spectrum of interpretative methods. We need to be wary of separating off performance as a wholly unique interpretative medium. Guided tours can sometimes be powerful, stimulating and performative in their own right.
- Questions of standards and value require further consideration. How are standards measured, and who decides? Matters of excellence in the arts have recently climbed higher in the national arts policy agenda, and museum performance will need to engage in the ensuing debates. [10]
- Can and should the actor be facilitator as well? Or is there value in separating these roles for organisational or 'empowering' purposes?

[10] In the recent McMaster Report for Arts Council England (*Supporting Excellence in the Arts* 2007: 9-10), it is suggested that 'Excellence in culture occurs when an experience affects and changes an individual' – it is a 'life changing experience'. 'Excellence is about experience and good practice is what leads to it' (pp. 9-10). Good practice alone does not constitute excellence.

4.3.3 Theme 3: Interactivity and Participation

Issues around participation and interaction are fraught with complexity, yet are simultaneously crucial to conceptualising more democratic relationships between audiences/spectators and performance events. The use of such devices in heritage encounters is a concrete example of the ways in which the changing landscape of debate (as outlined in section 1.2) is being translated into practice. Much is being claimed for interactivity:

> 'Whether interpreting science, art, history or anything else, an interactive exhibit will be memorable ... the visitor will be shaken out of the glazed and passive role of the ambient couch potato into that of an agile mental gymnast' (Bridal 2004: 3)

The rhetoric surrounding the *possibility* of such encounters often (as above) takes on an air of euphoria, not only overstating the claim for participation (in the assumption that being an 'agile mental gymnast' is of universal appeal or significance for example), but often conforming to stereotypes of 'traditional' exhibitions that render the role of the visitor as one of glazed passivity. What we have seen in the research is that people are increasingly expectant of participatory or interactive encounters, but remain wary of them also. People still exhibit different degrees of demand and readiness for active involvement.

Participation in heritage performance can take place on a number of different levels. For example, a promenade performance requires physical involvement; first or third person interpretation more often than not require verbal co-operation between both audience and performer; and many gallery performers try to provoke verbal responses (although without depending on them for 'success').[11] In these differing performance scenarios, it can be seen that a variety of relationships and encounters are on offer, some which require more commitment than others. This inevitable (and rightly) leads us to a discussion about power relations; Who controls participatory proceedings (if anyone)? What information are spectators (and performers) privy to in advance? Who instigates the interaction? Who maintains control over the direction of the interaction (if anyone)? Who decides when it ends? How far do performers (and institutions) have a care responsibility for participants? How do we deal with 'risk' in such encounters (without necessarily resorting to the bureaucracy of 'risk assessment')? These are questions that we begin to explore in the following sections by looking at participant responses.

For the purpose of this document we will be looking at interactive or participatory performance activity and defining it as follows: activity where comingling (Blau 1990) is a desired and actual outcome of a piece, where physical and/or verbal exchange takes place, or where audiences can intervene at will in performance proceedings.

[11] More detailed discussion of how one measures the 'worth' of participation will take place in the forthcoming *Performing Heritage* book (publication late 2009).

- **Participation** refers to those performances that involve audiences but in which they cannot control the direction of events.
- **Interactive performance** refers to those performances whereby audience members can genuinely inform the outcome of the piece; the experience is more a two-way stream of influence.

The following sections will deal with a number of issues including the language used for talking about participation, the physicality of experience and the role of audiences as performers. It will also look at what happens when interaction fails ('failure' as perceived by audiences, performers or institutions). Worth noting is that two of our case studies have explicitly used participation for experimental ends – as a way not only of engaging audiences, but of aiding the learning of the institutions too. In this sense we see that, as Turner and Warner state, 'Drama can both communicate experience and give the communicator a greater understanding of the participant' (Taylor and Warner, 2006:31)

Language used by participants

The language our research participants use to talk about their experiences of participatory performance is almost always active (even when the experience itself has been a negative one). It also tends to be rather stronger language than is used to talk about other encounters during the visit:

> It was much better actually doing something than just sitting and listening [NMM_F_PP1_116]
>
> Nobody looked too scared or too timid to say anything. Everybody was like, yes – I want to say this; I want to say that. [MM_I_PP1_70]
>
> we were a part of what was going on. [MM_I_PP3_192]
>
> it wasn't just saying what happened, it was – I don't know – drawing it or something, it was interactive... I had to go up in the crows nest and then my hands got stuck on it because it was icy, and they had to get cut off. [NMM_I_PP3_213]

Often the experience of a performance without participatory elements is described in more passive terms:

> it was a lecture dressed up as something interesting. [NMM_F_PP1_117]
>
> To sit down and be told is nice isn't it? [NMM_F_PP1_117]
>
> I am more likely to listen to a performance again in future. [NMM_F_PP1_117]

At all case study sites, the language of participation is that of doing and feeling. At Llancaiach, the pupils describe what they do variously as 'hands on', 'acting', 'talking', 'acting out'. The pupils who visit MM say the piece was 'drawing us in', they were 'included', 'involved', and 'part of it'. The pupils are interested in (but surprised by) such interactive forms of interpretation in a museum environment, and have vivid memories of such encounters in retrospect.

Independent visitors say similar things: ‘we were a part of it’; ‘it’ being variously ‘dialogue’, ‘asking’, ‘including’, being ‘involved’, ‘being in the story’, ‘heckling’ and ‘participation’. This participation is referred to in a number of ways: ‘conversation’, ‘not forceful’, ‘lively’ ‘pro-active’ and that it ‘broke the fourth wall’. On *The Pollard Trail* a differing kind of encounter was on offer. There was a changeable, constant negotiation going on between actors and audiences, and the audiences respond to this in (predictably) mixed ways, often in surprisingly (and often unpredictably) passionate ways. They ‘feel’ a number of things: ‘tired’, ‘angry’, ‘elated’, ‘duped’, ‘frustrated’, ‘joyful’. This negotiation means that decisions have to be made continually about how far and in what ways to engage with the piece. Some participants in the performance at MM also acknowledge the element of negotiation:

> I wanted to speak and didn’t want to speak, you know? [MM_I_PP1_73]
>
> I think it made people feel, there was a certain awkwardness...it was demanding of me something that I wasn’t necessarily prepared to give and it made me feel a little bit uncomfortable at certain points. [MM_I_PP3_197]
>
> Like, he came up to me with a piece of paper to read; I’d rather have just stood there and not done that, but it made me have to be involved, and I think that’s the point of it. [MM_F_PP1_205]

The complexity of participation quickly becomes apparent. Also, the possibility that participation can be an internalised mental process; it is not always and necessarily a physical or verbal response. This of course only serves to make it a more difficult quality to predict, respond to, and of course, measure.

There are those who talk about participating in mostly negative terms. For *The Pensioner’s Tale* at NMM, of those people who mentioned the participation in follow up interviews, seven talked negatively about it (whether involved or not), and six talked positively. The physical involvement required by the piece (about which little warning was given to audiences) was articulated by our audiences variously as: ‘picking on’, ‘frightening’, ‘not a choice’, ‘being trapped’, ‘making you vulnerable’, ‘embarrassing’, ‘a treatment’, ‘dragging you up’ and ‘pulling people out’.

One particular narrative of this is worth re-producing for it indicates the strength of (negative) feeling that such encounters can foster:

> INTERVIEWER: Would you, do you think, sit and watch a performance piece again?
> RESP: Depends. Mainly on whether I was dragged in by my wife or not.
> INTERVIEWER: So you wouldn't do it voluntarily.
>
> RESP: Probably not, no. Definitely not one who decides to involve the audience as much as he did. I didn't enjoy that part of it at all... I don't think he gave me an option. And it would have been churlish of me to refuse to… Yes. I could have said no, but I didn't feel inclined to...it will make me steer clear of them in the future. [NMM_I_PP2_47]

And at an even later date (nine months later) ...

> RESP: I think it was a bit of a farce.
>
> INTERVIEWER: Would you like to tell me a bit more about why you think that?
>
> RESP: Well I… I just didn't enjoy it.
>
> INTERVIEWER: Can I ask you what your overriding memory of that performance piece was looking back on it now?
>
> RESP: Lots of people standing on the floor, don't know what they're doing basically. [NMM_I_PP3_24]

This respondent's intensity of feeling about the experience has not faltered over time, in fact it was very difficult to get this respondent to take part in the last discussion at all so strong was his desire *not* to have to reflect.

The research tells us that increasingly there is an expectation that elements of a museum visit will be interactive (this is not always a universally positive prospect for our participants, with some comparing it to 'Disneyfication'). However, when it comes to performance, the possibility of participation remains a surprise to many:

> I think it was a bit more hands on than what I what I thought it would be. We joined in, in the debating stuff [LFM_S_PP3_132]
>
> Yeah. It was like, he came up and came in to the whole audience and everything and shook their hand. It was shocking 'cause if you went to a play not many people would do that [MM_S_PP2_154]

There is also some discussion of what it means to be 'the type' of person who enjoys the very public process of participation. A particular set of terminology and (mostly quite negative) connotations:

> I didn't [get involved], I suppose it depends on the type of person you are really [NMM_I_PP3_20]
>
> Perhaps it's the attention seeker in me!' (TTC_observations_3)
>
> I'm used to that 'cause I do drama, so I'm alright. [MM_S_PP2_157]
>
> INT: did you get involved in any interactions?
> RESP: No not really, I'm not that kind of person. [MM_I_PP3_194]
>
> I don't mind. I'm a community worker so I'm used to being gobby. [MM_I_PP3_196]

This no doubt links to people's level of comfort in the role they are being asked to assume, and is no doubt an issue of power relations also.

Who holds the power?

Interactivity and participation in performance are unquestionably an issue of power relations. A number of questions have been explored in this research: How is the visitor made aware of the rules of an interaction? If at all? Is there an induction? Or a de-brief at the end? How does the encounter itself or its frames facilitate a return to 'normality'? What is the place of 'closure'? Audience members can be made vulnerable in their participation in any number of ways – the performer necessarily holds most if not all of the cards.

The frames are thus critical to the success or failure (however these may be being measured) of any interaction. 'Induction' for example was something the research explored in case study four. Even in this scenario however, it appears there is no one-size-fits-all way of ensuring participants are prepared. A mix of responses appear below:

> I think if I knew beforehand that there was going to be interaction, I would have been a bit more kind of mentally tuned to that. [MM_F_PP1_205]
>
> it was made clear that it was very much an opportunity to ask questions and get involved. [MM_I_PP2_210]
>
> You have to prime people and that performance did prime people, if you like. [MM_I_PP3_195]
>
> I think it took a while for us really to know that we were allowed to really be part of the dialogue, you know? [MM_F_PP1_206]

At other case study sites there is also a confusion based on misunderstanding of the rules of the interaction – it has not been made clear how, when and in what ways participation is an option:

> Sometimes you don't know like whether they are acting or not cause when he came back the second time he was like "Whenst thou is in another household thoust behave thyself" and it's like you don't know whether they're actually like telling you to behave, or whether they're just acting. [LFM_S_PP2_130]

Moreover, the data tells us that audience members desire genuine choice about whether and how far they participate. They may decide to 'opt in' at any given moment, but knowing that this is not a requirement of their involvement is important to them:

> I tried not to make eye contact at that point. [NMM_I_PP3_23]
>
> he did make it clear that if you didn't want to be involved you just had to say so... I certainly didn't feel any degree of intimidation or involvement. [NMM_I_PP3_15]
>
> Yeah. It wasn't like you have to do it. It was alright. It was quite good. [MM_I_PP1_74]
>
> I think you have to be given the chance to stay quiet. I think it would have been quite excruciating if people had had to come up and act a part if they had not really wanted that [MM_I_PP2_207]

As we have seen in the narrative of one negative interaction above, the mere illusion of choice (as perceived by a participant) was not enough. Here lies a problem. We are dealing with peoples' interpretations of what is being asked of them and their vast array of personal responses to that. One case study that explored a fuller range of participations/interactions and possible responses was CS3 (*The Pollard Trail*). During the trail, audiences showed varying levels of willingness to get involved. They were seen to be (and articulated themselves as being) sometimes pushing to interact with the characters and even with each other, at other times pulling away from participation with which they were uncomfortable. Participation was in constant negotiation and naturally some audience members were more comfortable with this than others. The work of Triangle on *The Pollard Trail* interestingly and creatively explored the historical 'push-and-pull struggle between an audience desire to participate and an authorial desire to maintain a controlled textual coherence and inpenetrability' (Cover, 2006: Pg 145).

One of the difficulties with this is that ultimately, it must be the actor(s) who maintain control over the direction of the performance and any participatory proceedings. This means that in actuality there are very limited opportunities for genuine two-way interaction; audience members rarely get the opportunity to instigate interactions on their own terms, or to control their direction:

> What I really wanted to do was stop him and ask him some questions … I didn't have a chance [NMM_F_PP1_116]
>
> you didn't feel that you could stop him when he was in full flow [NMM_F_PP1_116]

> I felt that they already knew what they wanted to hear and that they had built their performance around the answers that they anticipated. [MM_I_PP1_69]

None-the-less, many participants respond that they felt there was opportunity for two-way interaction (certainly more so than elsewhere in the institutions):

> the re-enactor can respond to people [NMM_F_PP1_116]
>
> you can go and ask them questions and they'll come back to you as though they're those people. So I guess it's more interactive.' [LFM_S_Pre_127]
>
> I also liked the way you had total control over what you did as each person created their own experience (TTC_observations_4)
>
> it was like what they gave out you could give back. [MM_S_PP2_154]
>
> INT: What did you like?
>
> RESP: the interaction and the two-way communication. So yeah: it was good. [MM_I_PP1_83]

One thing that participation in such performances can usefully achieve is a sense of ownership over the characters, institution or subject matter that might not be achieved elsewhere in the museum or site:

> What I can say, is that I didn't really want to let them go (TTC_OBSERVATIONS_2)
>
> I have never been so drawn in by chaos (TTC_observations_5)
>
> It's better to take part in than just to be told lots of facts; you can actually take part in the facts and stuff. [MM_S_PP2_156]
>
> … it's just part of the… It's not like you're watching, but like you're part of the whole thing. [MM_F_PP1_205]

As we will see in Section 4.3.4, this can usefully translate into a learning outcome for participants.

One of the consequences of providing interactive possibility and encouraging 'agency' however is an inability to legislate for the directions in which people will want to take the performance:

> during the performance, there was one group of women that constantly interrupted it. The were on a tangent; it's not what was going on. … It was like somebody using an opportunity get their point over, when it's not relevant really. [MM_I_PP2_78]

It appears that when others' responses interpretations or expectations for the interactive encounter do not tally with one's own, it can be a frustrating experience for (some) other audience members.

Performing

> In ordinary social life, we are performers one moment
> and spectators the next.
> (Yi-Fu Tuan in Counsell and Wolf, 2001: 161)

There are a number of ways in which audiences perform within museum and heritage site contexts, including 'actual' performance within drama events. Respondents articulate the process of becoming willing performers in a number of ways (although being willing is not always a pre-requisite to involvement):

> we, um, had to play the part of various ships in the battle and lined up, if I remember rightly, and he tried to get everybody involved, [NMM_I_PP3_20]
>
> I was the lookout and I had to pretend to have my fingers frozen to the rope [NMM_I_PP3_18]
>
> I think it would be good to try and stick in character all day and actually get into it [LFM_S_Pre_128]
>
> Well I was playing in my part all the way through the day [LFM_S_PP2_101]
>
> at times I felt I was truly participating at others only vaguely observing. (TTC_observations_4)
>
> you actually feel part of the thing, like you're actually performing the theatre, as well as taking a step back and watching it at the same time. [MM_I_PP1_70]

For some, their comfort in performing increases as the event unfolds:

> In the second and third debates when we knew what we were doing they went really well because everybody knew their stuff once they learnt how to put it across, it was really good [LFM_S_PP2_100]
>
> The cup of tea session afterwards also had a slight 'what am I supposed to do now?' feeling, but that was starting to change into feeling like a participant rather than a spectator. [TTC_I_PP2_178]

The performing of particular characters, certainly in case study two, helped enable an ownership of the material to take place:

> Basically we just talk to the kids and just give our point of view [LFM_S_Pre_92] [it has become 'our' point of view]
>
> Yeah. You start believing your own ideas: what you're arguing for. [your ideas] [LFM_S_PP3_139]
>
> Yeah that's what I generally thought. Then I tried to think, if my viewpoint is this on the land, or god, or something like that, what viewpoint should I take on this? What viewpoint would they take? [LFM_S_PP3_138]

There is also a difference evident between being 'in the moment' of performing, and one's feelings when reflecting on that moment later. The 'failed participation' outlined earlier in this section is a case in point here. The respondent can be seen on our video footage participating in the action on two separate occasions during the piece. Firstly, he comes up on his own, later, he is one of a cast of seven. He is called up (he does not volunteer), he is an adult, and his family are watching. He is smiling and apparently playing along. In discussion later that day he professes to have found the performance of little value, and he half-jokes about having been frightened by the performer. One week later, in conversation, his language has become more forceful in asserting his unhappiness at the exchange. Nine months later this has become his dominant focus. It appears that the performance of the visitor possibly also includes performing enjoyment when none is felt, or perhaps even feigning understanding.

For others, being a momentary performer makes them recognise the particular skill of the actors:

> ...also the way they argued between each other and especially the bishop that was quite impressive. [LFM_S_PP2_101]
>
> It's good that, even when we were walking down other corridors and he was taking us to other places, he still stayed in character. He talked to us… [MM_S_PP2_202]
>
> With another person it might have felt confrontational, but with him it didn't, because he had a lovely manner. [MM_I_PP2_77]

Experiential elements

> Drama in education is built on the assumption that learning arises from experience of and engagement with a dramatic world, either as a spectator or participant, and from reflection on the roles, issues, situations, and relationships that occur within it. (Taylor and Warner, 2006: 31)

Both for younger and older participants, the experience of being inside the performance is often an integral element of their enjoyment, ability to recall, and overarching memory of the day. Interaction and participation are very important in this regard, as is the experience of being part of a social encounter. These experiential moments also enable respondents to

get an idea of 'the past' in a more personal sense, the participatory elements often being equated with 'actually seeing' or experiencing complex non-linear narratives; that is actually showing the movements or 'bringing it all to life' in a way that static exhibits cannot:

> He was there, he was living it, he drew you in and he was so believable and still talking to the audience. So he wasn't sort of you know, just performing and ignoring you. [NMM_I_PP2_48]
>
> 'I like the armoury thing in the top floor because it's quite good how they let people try it on and actually show what armour they had' [LFM_S_PP2_130]
>
> It was like you were actually talking to a slave; it was like you're actually there, talking to them. [MM_S_PP2_161]
>
> I had my hands cut off, because I had my hands frozen to a rope and they had to be cut off, that was fun … even though it's not real, you remember the experience. [NMM_I_PP2_35]

At Llancaiach Fawr Manor in particular, the experiential qualities of the day are remembered very vividly (from making the candles and trying on the armour, to traversing the Manor house itself). There are links made quite regularly between doing and learning that will be explored further in section 4.3.4:

> 'I think learning through action is easier than just listening' [LFM_S_Pre_126]
>
> And you probably remember more if you get involved' [LFM_S_PP2_100]
>
> Yeah, 'cause if they interact with you, you learn more. [MM_S_PP2_156]
>
> 'Cause it makes you learn more stuff, 'cause you're getting involved in an activity. [MM_S_PP2_161]

Although not always:

> C: Yeah. It was kind of practical, rather than actually learning stuff. [Here there is a negative correlation between experience and learning because it differs from their perceptions of what 'successful' schooling entails] [LFM_S_PP3_138]

To some it has meant a different kind of engagement, trying harder than they might have otherwise:

> It wasn't just an easy day out, because if you got asked a question in the debate and you weren't listening… You know, you had to concentrate and think things for yourself.
> [LFM_S_PP3_123]
>
> We actually started debating between ourselves, instead of sticking to the… Well, we were pushing our ideas forward and debating thoroughly behind them, instead of

> just having the points and then saying them, then sitting down again. [LFM_S_PP3_139]

There are also moments when respondents profess to feel immersed in the drama, and this again makes the experience more memorable:

> ‘I think you take it in more easily when it’s happening around you, rather than just listening to a teacher or something’ [LFM_S_PP2_101]
>
> ‘I think it is better than the museum again because you’ve got the [pause] you know there are no barriers and it’s all hands on, you’re inside it all’ [LFM_S_PP2_100]
>
> ‘Perhaps I was lucky being basically alone amongst the company - because it seems to be a show that you do need to be a part of it. Residents who interact with it join in - they don't just stand back and watch. Everyone is implicated. It is genuinely spontaneous’ [TTC_observations_5]

There are a number of ways in which the experience of participation links to people’s learning. It aids longer term recall of the event and the artefacts, it provokes emotional response and can directly aid understanding:

> It was made clearer in the performance piece as people represented the ships, that made it much more obvious as to what actually happened [NMM_I_PP2_31]
>
> ‘it’s definitely going to be easier to remember and to recall, you know to associate things ... Cause if you read about the Ranters in a book compared to if I see [J] running around pretending to be one, it’s going to stick’ [LFM_S_Pre_128]
>
> So if it didn’t have the “Q & A”, some people would have got away with learning less from it. But you had to be constantly on your toes; constantly thinking. [MM_F_PP1_205]
>
> … It made me feel quite awkward actually, ‘cause there is a genuine dilemma in answering those sort of questions and I thought that was good. [MM_I_PP2_75]

Children’s participation

There is an automatic assumption displayed by our participants that children will enjoy participatory moments more than adults, something that has also been concluded in prior studies of the form:

> He did pick on the child in the front as well didn’t he? And I think that’s nice, kids enjoy that. [NMM_F_PP1_117]
>
> I think it makes a nice change to go out and do it – I suppose – physically. Especially when you are a bit younger [LFM_S_Pre_127]

> But, you know, as a kid, he really enjoyed it and it was great to see that. [MM_I_PP2_207]

This is something we have seen supported by museum and site publicity materials again and again, with the desire to get children involved through experience and action often not extended explicitly to adult audiences. The nature of the contract is perhaps different with adults and the range of responses more nuanced (although it is worth noting that children's responses are by no means universally positive). But we have seen adults respond with great positivity and enthusiasm to participatory events and desiring more of them: more opportunities for dialogue, debate and possibly even disagreement on a range of subject matter. Perhaps this is one way in which museums and heritage sites can transparently interrogate their practice and introduce an element of 'risk' into their institutions.

Working with risk (focus on CS3)

> Risk-taking is about experimentation and pushing boundaries in ways which artists and practitioners themselves may not be sure will work. It demands courage, curiosity and desire, and a degree of spontaneity… The biggest risk, of course, is taking no risks at all. (McMaster, 2008: 10)

CS3 was an interesting example of how risk might be introduced by institutions, performers, and audience members into each other's experiences of heritage. The various interactions on offer (see data trawl for more detail) required different levels of emotional and physical commitment, and created balances of power which were often awkward and uneven. Throughout the work, the rules for engagement and the expectations of 'participants' were made apparent in various ways, some more obviously transactional than others (relying on a verbal contract for example).

From the beginning of the day, those who were there to follow the trail in its entirety (paying customers), were made aware that this would be a participatory event, some even signing up to be honorary members of the CMP Soc. For these people, being (to some degree) a participant, was to be an expected and joyous part of the day's proceedings. For others, those encountered on the streets of Coventry for example, such a decision was made on the spur of the moment, and was in constant re-negotiation depending on the outcomes and perceived success of interactions as they happened.

The role of the audience member was thus one of constant negotiation, decision-making and self-evaluation. It was necessarily an active mental state to be in, even if physical participation was not always required. This role was not presented to you as such, but thrust upon you, for you to take in whichever direction you felt appropriate, and were comfortable with. There was little induction to the Trail as a whole, and little overt commitment made to taking a 'care' responsibility for participants. There was however, at times, a desire to provide opportunity to de-brief, although with performers remaining in character, this remained a part of the game and not an opportunity for a completely open and reflective response.

The mix of experiences on offer represent differing levels of risk, no doubt dependent on the perceptions of that risk by audience members. In this scenario, expectations would be

made and framed by (amongst other things) their prior knowledge of Triangle's work and motivations, their familiarity with the museum and the geography of the city, and, no doubt, their age, sex, and cultural background.

Thus, our respondents decipher the rules of the game and the context of risk in a number of ways and respond to them accordingly:

> He came as himself. I have to be very careful. I have to completely divorce the two and talk to them as one or the other. ([TTC_I_PP1_175]) *[responding to characters and actors very differently]*
>
> 'I hadn't made any sense of it and wondered if I was supposed to' (TTC_observations_3)
>
> 'How should I react? Could I laugh?' (TTC_observations_4)
>
> It was ... very dark. Such darkness carried temptation which tried to bring me the dark side. It scared me and shook me. But now I feel each moment like a picture.' [[TTC_I_PP2_180]b]
>
> 'I was relaxing into my own role' (TTC_OBSERVATIONS_2) *[some feel more comfortable than others]*

How performance can embrace and work with risk (and whether it should) is something that can only be explored within the particular contexts of sites and institutions.

Experimentation with audiences' perceptions of what constitutes participation (as we have seen in a number of our case studies) provokes various responses. Those who choose to engage in such a way take away memories of experiences that remain vivid, urgent and can genuinely change their attitudes not only toward the subject matter being interpreted, but toward the form also, in pronounced ways. Those who are forced to participate can be turned off the idea of interpretation of heritage in this manner altogether.

4.3.4 Theme 4: Learning

As outlined in section 2.2, there are a number of approaches to learning that have informed this study. The following section outlines the ways in which peoples' learning has been framed, facilitated or frustrated by the use of performance in heritage contexts. It takes as its start point the original 'OCRUISE' categories (from the Phase 2 research, see section 1.5.2). Recall, Understanding, Surprise, Inspiration, Ownership, Connection and Experience are all looked at over the following pages, but the current research has attempted to build upon and go beyond these categories, looking at the ways in which Empathy, Skills development, Complexity, and not least Enjoyment also contribute to the learning process.

All of these various elements of the learning experience feed into the Recall/Understanding and Inspiration elements of the chart outlined at the beginning of this Section (in 4.2.1). This is a process that begins in the moment of the performance, but continues well beyond its parameters (although of course, not inevitably). The 'conceptualisation' of the experience (no doubt also enabled by the data collection process), has been made transparent through the research in ways that show it can be a vivid and active process of ongoing value to participants. Learning is revealed to happen in countless and complex ways, and to be of varying importance to, and subject to multiple definition by, the visitors we have spoken to. Knowledge is described by one of our participants as a 'jigsaw', and it is this collection of 'pieces' - experience, understanding, memory and perhaps even the desire to know more - that we bring with us to future encounters with 'the past'

Recall

Many research participants were able to recall new pieces of information that they had acquired as a result of encountering a performance (or being part of a performance – participation aided recall).

> Actually, the guy during the performance said that Napoleon kept a bust of Nelson, which I didn't know before. [NMM_F_PP1_117]
> I remember when we went to the place in the kitchen, where the lady showed us. They took the bull's horns and made it in to spoons. [*the lady showed us – demonstration*] [LFM_S_PP3_144]
> Triangle Theatre told us he was a clown / street performer in the 1940's. He used to own that sweet shop. The sign is still there. In the Second World War, he became a victim of the war. He lost his mind and hearing. After that he became a performer and became famous in his community. And now, the performance that this theatre group are doing is a commemoration of his life. [R2 in TTC_O_PP1_177]
>
> INT: Do you think that you found out anything new from the performance?
> ANON: Yeah, about how, when they were going to stop the slave trade, like it was against the law, they only put two ships out to stop them, when there was loads more slave ships.
> ...ANON: Round here, in Manchester and that, we were the first to abolish slavery. [*Ownership*] [MM_S_PP2_158]

Perhaps unsurprisingly it is often facts that have inspired shock or an emotional response that are remembered. People are able to use the things they remember in order to reflect: to work through and make sense of what they have seen:

> Well, I didn't know about the indigo. I didn't know about the coffee either; I thought it grew higher. I thought it needed a bit of mountain… And then, suddenly, it makes sense, because all the Americans drink coffee, don't they? Whereas we drink tea... And I didn't realise that Indian cotton took over, and I didn't realise how many Manchester workers were in support of what was happening, in spite of the fact that it meant unemployment here. Powerful. [MM_F_PP1_205] [*Working with prior knowledge – interpreting and re-adjusting*]

Worth noting here is that this latter participant is something of a specialist on slavery, having written books on the subject and having a very high level of prior knowledge. This does not preclude an individual from taking something new away from the experience.

Being able to process and reflect upon the information that has been gleaned is often aided by remembrance of feelings that were stirred or an increased ability to empathise with the subject matter. These are often enabled by the characters and artefacts that are encountered, and the way in which the history has been made 'real' to audience members (it has been demonstrated and experienced through the interpreters). There will be more on this later in this section.

We have seen that on occasion the peculiarities of the different media for interpretation at a site mean that different things are remembered. At the Maritime Museum for example, the exhibition (material culture, artefact led) is remembered through the objects encountered (and not necessarily the stories they told collectively). On the other hand the performance is not recalled immediately in terms of factual information (although that is remembered), but instead it is the stories told, movement, emotion and character that are referenced.

Also evident on occasion are incidences of mis-remembering (recall that is not factually correct). These are quite often connected to the use of artefacts rather than to the wider historical context, and the significance of these mis-rememberings varies. For case study four, for example, many of the adult visitors do not remember that the manila ring they saw was used as a currency for trading slaves and instead are of the belief that it was some kind of shackle:

> I do remember actually, because they showed us – what was quite striking – they showed us… Now I'm not sure if it was a slave collar, or if it was a horrible handcuff. It was from, kind of… Yes: slave metal, used for slave shackles. [MM_I_PP2_71] *[Mis-remembering]*

Whether this is of significance is questionable, as the impact of the ring has been remembered and is still being emotionally engaged with (as it would perhaps not have been had it been in a collection). However, if the visitor was inspired to return to the museum and try to find the 'handcuff' they would perhaps be met with confusion. This was a common error for many, and a tendency that increased over the months following the performance.

Understanding

Many respondents displayed significantly increased understandings of the subject matter once they had experienced a performance. Our research explored this through the use of interviews and focus groups prior to performances and then afterwards, and also by using meaning mapping exercises.

Often, participants displayed an increased insight into the subject matter, and a sense of the immediacy of that heritage (it had relevance today and involved people and individuals 'just like us'). There are many supporting quotations that could be produced below, but here is a sample:

> I didn't understand what motivated them or that that allowed them to have such a victory, if such a thing is a victory in war. I didn't understand that, I didn't consider that. I certainly do now. [NMM_I_PP2_60]
>
> Mr Farr's protest was hilarious and at the same time incredibly informative and intelligent. The way he used the analogy of the animals to describe what the council was doing to its tenants was very memorable. [TTC_observations_3]
>
> I was pretty ignorant to the whole thing, to be completely honest. I've never looked at the American civil war. I never knew it was related to that at all. I never looked at Manchester's relation to it at all, so I learnt absolutely loads from it, like very modern history that I think I should have known before, but I'm glad I've been made aware of it through this. [MM_F_PP1_205]
>
> It was brilliant and, for me, it made me understand it and have a better understanding of it as well; sort of connect. [MM_I_PP2_79]

This is linked very often to the experience of encountering artefacts:

> instead of just seeing them in a case where, that is a ships biscuit and they were covered with weevils, to have somebody describe it, and what it felt like…And that you had to suck it for ages because it was so dry, that is giving you so much more information than if you read it in some diary or you read an account of it [NMM_F_PP1_116]
>
> if a lady used to boss a man it's like a helmet with these things to the mouth and then it broke - the thing was really sharp so that it broke the nose and then all the mouth was like split open. [LFM_S_PP2_142]
>
> The holding up of – what was it that we talked about? – the manila ring. That was a really powerful moment of concrete imagery, where they were saying: this is the life of a person, and this is what a person was worth. [MM_I_PP1_73]

Many respondents felt that what they were finding through performance was another way of understanding things that they already knew. They were gaining another perspective, being able to visualise things more clearly, and embracing the physicality of the past and its complexity in new ways:

> Often it is kind of a curiosity element that you are seeing something tangible about what you know already. [NMM_I_PP2_59]
>
> RESP 1: You learnt about what people wore, how people lived and their lifestyle and stuff like that.
> INTERVIEWER: Okay. And was that stuff that you didn't know before, do you think? Or…
> RESP 2: Sort of know from different stories, but not exactly. [LFM_S_PP3_133]
>
> RESP 1: it got stronger. I knew that it was bad and that they were being punished, and all that. But what we were shown on that day just made it…
> RESP 2: Easier to see. [MM_S_PP2_155]

This was also aided no doubt by the use of dialogue and debate which gave audiences a mix of viewpoints, perspectives and attitudes to digest:

> We were pushing our ideas forward and debating thoroughly behind them, instead of just having the points and then saying them. [LFM_S_PP3_139]
>
> I loved the way they gave a variety of voices from the slave trade... It was very stirring; very moving. [MM_I_PP2_71]
>
> It's very difficult for us to look back with our twentieth century eyes and put ourselves in that position. Obviously that was one of the things that the play tried to expose you to, all sides of the story, and left you scope for you to fill in the gaps. [MM_I_PP2_210]

Participants often comment that the performance provided a suitable and informative introduction to the subject matter; it is often seen as being a suitable pre-exhibition activity which can make encountering the site's collections more productive, familiar, and personally significant:

> That's what I was going to say, if I had arrived knowing nothing I would have learnt quite a lot, learned roughly what happened [NMM_F_PP1_116]
>
> If I had known nothing about it before, I would have liked to see the performance first to get me in the mood as it were. [NMM_I_PP2_50
>
> But, yeah: I think it's a fantastic way to begin and to, basically, expand it from there. Yeah, I really, thoroughly enjoyed the show. [MM_I_PP2_79]

As we have started to see, audience members are keen to comment on how the piece informed their understanding. What we also found was that they were able to make a range of connections to other parts of the site, the visit, and the artefacts they encountered.

> I think the things that I gained from the exhibition or the enthusiasm to gain something from the exhibition was spurred by the theatre piece. [NMM_I_PP2_60]
>
> actually halfway down the exhibition it suddenly linked in with what he'd been talking about and that again brought a bit of life to it [NMM_I_PP2_104]
>
> I was able to piece together a few of the fragments on the way round (TTC_observations_3)

It is worth noting that invariably these responses had to be prompted by the research team and that making those connections was not something they might have done otherwise. These connections, crucial to an holistic encounter with both the site and its 'heritage', could be encouraged in a number of ways more usefully than at present.

This was also the case with making connections to the present (something that was easier for audiences for case study four where it was actively encouraged):

> I saw another kind of war, because of the war in Iraq, I see another type of war and I realised that war has been there for a long long time [in exhibition] [NMM_F_PP1_117]
>
> Despite the appearances that are different and all that, you could argue that not much has changed in that four hundred years. On a basic level, we are still pretty much the same civilisation, because we're still arguing about those main three points. [LFM_S_PP3_139]
>
> I don't think you can split them in to evil or good because everyone had reasons; everyone had an argument. So it's just like basically modern day, just in the past.

> They seem inhumane now, but they wouldn't have seemed that bad then, 'cause people who were against it were in the minority. In two hundred years time, if say something like cloning humans was actually done then it looks stupid that people were complaining against it now, because it's just done then, or something like that. [MM_S_PP2_154]

Some of our respondents would like more to be made of these connections to the present, especially in case study four where they felt links with the slave trade could have been more productively extended to prostitution and sex slavery, low pay, sweatshops and ongoing racism.

This would supplement and expand one of the more productive forms of increased understanding that we discovered through performance, that is, that it aided audiences to grasp the complexity of the subject in new ways. One of the principal criticisms of the form is that it simplifies 'the past', not engaging with its multiplicity and depth. Our respondents told us again and again that the content, when presented through performance, was being made not only more real, but more multi-faceted also. Their ability (and willingness) to make judgements about that past is thus vastly (so they tell us) improved.

> it is another piece of evidence in a great big jigsaw of what you are learning about. [NMM_F_PP1_116]
>
> it makes you realise that something that you might just be putting a paragraph in your essay about, there is a lot more to it the deeper you go. So don't always just, you know, if you read one paragraph in a book, don't just translate that across, because there might be more to it. [humanising history] [LFM_S_PP3_139]
>
> I didn't really get a sense of finding out about a 'real' Pollard, or a narrative of his life. I thought Pollard really was Godot in this, and the looking for him was what was important, not the finding him [TTC_I_PP2_178]
>
> I was engaged enough with the history to be excited to meet Brian Pollard and to see Alice Pollard's hat and one of the original puppets in the sweet shop. For me the educational value was the questioning created and the planting of the seed that one man's life is of historical value, that each person and community has a story to tell (TTC_observations_4)
>
> INT: Did you know before that Africans were involved with the trade?
> ANON: No I thought it was just white people going to get slaves...
> ANON: I sort of feel like betrayed, innit. It's like one of your own people doing something bad to you, and it's shocking. [MM_S_PP2_158]

Again, case study four was able to engage people in the complexity of debates at the time (about abolition). This was one of the intentions of the piece and seems to have been a big success:

> Before the play I couldn't understand why people did it, but once we had that scene where we asked him questions and he gave answers, you start to understand why they did it. It was still wrong, but you understood the motives behind it; they weren't just cold hearted. They actually had reasons for doing it and stuff.
> INT: And do you think that that's important...
> Yeah, 'cause if you're trying to persuade someone against it, then if you use the other person's arguments, then it makes your arguments stronger. So that's good. [MM_S_PP2_154]
>
> RESP 1: He was coming out with loads of random stuff that didn't make any sense whatsoever.
> RESP 2: But it was still good.
> RESP 1: If that's what they were like then you just couldn't win [MM_S_PP2_155]

People are thus (in part) enabled to cope with the ugliness of this particular past, something that would not have come simply through engaging with the collections (so respondents tell us). There is something about the immediacy of the arguments being played out in front of them through multiple voices (some of which are particularly disagreeable to our modern sensibility) that makes them memorable and of ongoing value to participants.

This case study, perhaps more than any other, was also evidence of performance challenging people. It can challenge either people's prior ideas and knowledge about the subject matter, or their ways of engaging with that subject matter:

> We were looking at this exhibition with people who understand the experience much closer first hand than us... and that was quite challenging [MM_I_PP3_187]
> *[Being a part of this audience was a challenge: a running comment for this respondent]*
>
> Most people just would now have a view that was straightforward, regarding the rights and wrongs of it. But I think the performance embittered it; it made it possible to have that kind of challenge to it, you know? [MM_I_PP2_75]

In another instance (case study three) there is a sense of cultural exchange that has been fostered through the use of performance – respondents have an increased understanding of another culture as a result of their engagement:

> I must admit that it was a terrific eye opener for us to see the whole Kurdish community ... Didn't know it was there ... it used to be a community of quite a few, sort of theatrical people living around there ([TTC_I_PP2_174])
>
> Because they were coming everyday, the oldest member of the team asked us to teach him to read and write Kurdish and so he began to learn and started reading Kurdish better than me! He was reading "Sherean, bahara" from the CD better than me!! [R2 in TTC_O_PP1_177]

> It's good for living together to know about the culture of each other and this opens the doors between dialogue and discussion. [F in TTC_O_PP1_177]

One other way in which peoples' understanding has been increased is in their personal self-knowledge. This is not always something that sits comfortably with people's notions about, and expectations of, 'learning':

> I don't feel I learnt anything of value to me. Apart from, maybe things about myself that had nothing to do with the history, narrative or artefacts. It was due to the experience of the Pollard effect on day one. (TTC_observations_3)
>
> Triangle were able to blur illusion and reality resulting in me examining social conventions and my own reactions to these conventions and other people who step out of the norm (TTC_observations_4)
>
> Also it had an effect on me because, obviously, the certain things that were passed around – the objects that were passed around – I felt quite a connection with it really in a very sad way. [MM_I_PP2_79]

As can be seen, increases in understanding *can* happen in a number of ways through engaging with a performance. It is worth reminding ourselves however that they are not a universal and inevitable outcome of engagement. Much work has been done to inspire the responses above, on the part of the institutions, the actors, and indeed the audiences themselves.

Skills development

One case study in particular inspired a different kind of learning on the part of participants. CS2 at Llancaiach Fawr Manor involved sixth form students taking on character roles (Radicals from the Civil War period) and debating with one another (and interpreters) on a range of subjects. Not only did they display an increased understanding and recall of the issues under discussion (who has the right to land, to vote, and to heaven), but, as was hoped, they learnt some new skills as well. Researching characters, standing up and performing their ideas and defending those ideas in front of an audience were a new set of challenges for pupils which they recognise:

> I think it was [beneficial] for me because I haven't done that much public speaking. I know there were a few of us who were quite nervous about it. Actually getting the opportunity to get up and speak about it was quite helpful for us. [LFM_S_PP2_134]
>
> I think, definitely, some people's confidence may have grown in public speaking [LFM_S_PP3_139]
>
> But I think it was less things that we learnt there and more skills and experience …, My impression, and I could be wrong here, is that the learning was primarily for the younger boys; whereas the skills were for us. That was the impression I got from it anyway. [LFM_S_PP3_137]

They are keen to assert that these skills will be useful for them further down the line both in their studies, and in their lives more generally (including their working lives). These new skills become a part of their latent skills base which they can tap into at any time necessary.

Ownership and agency

In three out of four of our case studies, there was a demonstrable sense of ownership fostered through performance, over 'heritages', artefacts and institutions. This manifested itself in a number of ways. Firstly, and especially with the children we interviewed, it was through imaginative engagement with the sites that we saw them exert their sense of ownership. Their recollections become tied to experiences of encountering 'their' ghosts at the Manor house for example, or at the NMM, performance gives them a new way of looking at the material they are being presented with. People profess to feel invested in the material in new and more creative ways than they would otherwise, and they feel they have a relationship with the site which other people do not. As one respondent from the Maritime Museum told us on the day, she had a different level of investment with the story of the Battle of Trafalgar:

> To be honest since then, when we've been talking about the battle, as soon as that ship is mentioned, I'm immediately drawn to it almost as if I know somebody who was on it. [NMM_I_PP2_48]

And in reflection from ten months later:

> [*the day after their visit at a dinner party*] we were all given ships with our place cards - given the name of a ship on this lunch, and I was looking round to see who had got the Belleisle and nobody had because obviously there were more ships than people. So nobody got that, but I was interested to see if anyone had got it. I reread the battle we got …, well I borrowed a book from a friend about Trafalgar, and whenever that ship was mentioned I'd be very interested and it somehow made it more relevant that I had heard first hand from a sailor on it, as it were. [NMM_I_PP3_37]

So, as we start to see, some respondents display a new confidence in their relationships to the history being presented:

> Then we went in my first room [*The room has become 'mine']* [LFM_S_PP2_141]
>
> There was no respect for us [*This is my story* too] [MM_I_PP2_208]

For some, arriving at this point is described in terms of being 'on a journey' (especially for case study four):

> I think that was my personal, individual avoidance. Avoidance because of the pain; avoidance because of… It actually took me on the journey that I didn't want to connect with, because it was a connection of thinking, this is what my ancestors went through. ... at some point, it got more emphasised and it got more… It was harder not to get involved on the journey. So, basically, yeah: I went with it because trying to avoid it – it wasn't happening any more for me. You could not help but be there with them. [MM_I_PP2_79]
>
> so it was very much that you felt a part of it and you were treated as if you were on the journey with them. Which, again, is part of the putting you in to a different place and position. [MM_I_PP1_83] *['journey' is helped by the interaction]*

And for others (again with case study four) they are taking ownership of their perceived ignorance and addressing it:

> How did it make me feel? Well, I don't know. On a very personal level, it made me feel ignorant [MM_I_PP2_75]
>
> The whole thing of the slave trade really. I knew very, very little about it; I was particularly ignorant before that.[MM_I_PP2_67]

For many respondents at the Manchester Museum, it is through an increased emotional engagement with the story or stories being presented to them that gives them a new sense of investment in the subject, and a new positioning *within* it:

> You acknowledge it, but you don't really take it on to that next level that you could if you actually knew what they were feeling and everything... So they're showing you more emotion and then it feels better, 'cause if you're reading from a textbook then they can't really show you the same emotion that a person performing it could. [MM_S_PP2_154] *[Comparison to classroom]*
>
> There was definitely a lot of hurt, that… I'm from England; I'm proud of England and England's my country, and seeing it in that light. It disgusts me in a way. To see that so many years… Well, not so many years ago, that that's the way that English people were. To quite happily discuss people's lives and just sell them for treats, effectively. I just couldn't believe… It just makes me feel like I don't belong here. That's not something that I believe in and therefore it's not something that I wish to be involved in. [MM_I_PP1_70]
>
> So it was a weird, strange feeling really – wanting to connect in the past and, at the same time, having that fear and that sadness within all that process. It was quite touching; I found it very touching. But, yes: I felt that I was back there in the past with that situation at the time. [MM_I_PP2_79]

A few of these responses above indicate that people are taking ownership and even responsibility for that past in ways that make them feel uncomfortable, but in ways that are simultaneously useful to them.

This level of engagement can lead to a desire to repeat the experience:

> But it was that intense and you're wanting to know more – you needed the knowledge... My fear was, what's going to be said next; what's going to be done next? But it was important and a big opportunity for me to experience that and embrace that, and I felt that it was an opportunity that I wouldn't, knowing what I know now… I would love to go and see that play all over again. [MM_I_PP2_79]

Empathy

> Heritage performances are not only physical experiences of 'doing', but also emotional experiences of 'being' (Smith, 2006: 71)

'Being' in terms of these kinds of performance (related to individuals' experiences, priorities, hopes and fears) can very easily become a process of empathy with those individuals: a feeling that one is identifying with the experiences of the other (whoever that 'other' might be). This is commented upon as being more easily engendered through performance than other interpretive strategies because of a performance's inherent focus on physicality, immediacy, humanity, direct engagement and the 'live':

> I think what it does it helps you empathise more with the people taking part in these things. You know, it's like when you watch the Hollywood blockbuster and you see all these people getting maimed and killed, it's detached from reality, but when it's put across from one person in that kind of environment I think perhaps it makes you think a little further about what people actually went through. So from a social point of view I think it had some distinct value there. [NMM_I_PP3_27]
>
> I think I used to look at… When I'm writing an essay, I look at all the different areas at face value, just see in a book, or something like that. Then I've started to take in to account the feelings of other people: why they did it, instead of just thinking they just did it. [LFM_S_PP3_139]
>
> It put us in the place of the family, because we had to think about how to defend the house, with all the weapons and so it is different than just being on the outside and watching it, because you have to think for yourself and do it. [LFM_S_PP3_123]
>
> I felt really sad for those people. You really felt what they were feeling, if you were there. If you were one, you felt it. [MM_S_PP2_161]

The ability to empathise has, for some of the pupils at LFM, enabled a depth of thinking that might not have been possible otherwise, enhanced too by the difference in techniques employed at the Manor from their usual classroom study:

> it made you listen more and be more involved, because you didn't have your notes to just perform. You had to be listening to what's actually… [LFM_S_PP3_139]
>
> RESP 1: Yeah. And you're also trying to use other people's arguments to remember some of your points, if you see what I mean?
>
> RESP 2: We do presentations in class, but you're telling people what… Well, in history, you're telling someone's opinion. Whereas, in this debate, you have people fighting back and you're saying, "No, that's wrong". [*In the debate it is not just someone's opinion but 'your own'*] [LFM S_PP3_139]

One adult respondent (already discussed above), finds it very hard to engage with the wider history of the period portrayed since she has encountered an individual character about whom she cared so much:

> Well he was, when you read about the battle and you walk around and look at things, you go "Where is the Belleisle on this", because you were on it with him, and that was part of it. [NMM_I_PP3_37]

Given the feelings that are being inspired in (some) audience members it becomes important that a proper care responsibility is taken on by the institutions (and actors). As respondents stated in discussions about *This Accursed Thing*, you cannot legislate for the meanings people will make and their personal gravity:

> You can't tell the whole story. Because people's emotions are involved, maybe it is an idea to do it and to do a series, to engage people in shorter bursts, because it is a very interactive… It can be very intense – and it should be an intense experience. [MM_F_PP1_206]
>
> I think it's a dangerous ball game to get in to, because even with the emotion that was shown upstairs by some people, when you open that up, how do you close it?.. Potentially some people are going to be walking wounded from what they hear and see, because they've never heard it, black and white... But, you know: lesson's over now, see you next week. (LAUGHS) [MM_F_PP1_206]

These quotes indicate a concern about the sustainability of such projects. What happens when the 'lesson' is over? When sensitive issues are raised in compelling ways, how can the museum provide opportunities for follow-up, or plan for an ongoing programme of activities (debates, performances, etc) that continue to address such issues?

The 'empathy paradox'

As we have seen, empathy is a powerful emotion and it can provide insights into and understandings of the lives of other individuals that are hard to achieve through other formal, more cognition-based modes of learning. It can also generate motivation to learn more, to engage more closely with the performance and its subject matter, and to take a further step towards becoming a participating audience member, at least emotionally if not physically.

But the research suggests there may be qualifications to be made about the effect of performance upon audience engagement – that there may be narrowing as well as deepening aspects to the empathy process. Perhaps we are sometimes faced with an 'empathy paradox', especially amongst younger audience members.

It has been noticeable that the empathy that performance often generates between audience and character, can, in certain circumstances, tend to narrow the perspective, offer a very partial 'monocular' reading of events and therefore, perhaps, deny or discourage the opportunity to see the larger picture. Empathic engagement with a character from the past may offer us one set of understandings but at the same time narrow our vision, induce us into thinking that's 'how it was' and all we need to know. This tendency was evident in several of our case studies and was apparent too among junior school pupils in the earlier second phase of the research.[12] There may then, sometimes at least, be an implicit trade-

[12] In *No Bed of Roses*, from the Phase 2 research, for example, the theatre group children certainly showed a greater tendency to empathise, especially with negative or problematic aspects of the period in question:

off between a high level of personal engagement with a figure from the past and a decreased alertness to the larger picture: a reduced incentive to conceptualise from the particular.[13]

Younger pupils especially sometimes find it harder to think of the historical context *outside* the characters they have met and prefer instead to see everything *through* those characters. For example, at LFM, pupils were unable to answer questions about children at that time in history without thinking of the members of the family about which they have been told so much (by the interpreters).

> INTERVIEWER: Do you remember them telling you how old girls were when they got married in those times?
> RESP: Three and seven [*the ages of the girls who lived in the Manor; the age of girls generally at marriage was in fact 12*] [LFM_S_PP2_142]
>
> RESP 1: 12, and boys were only allowed to get married when they were 18.
> INTERVIEWER: Was it 18, do you remember?
> RESP 1: Yeah, it was, I remember.
> RESP 2: The boys died though. [*Respondent 2's confusion is symptomatic of the mis-remembering displayed above*] [LFM_S_PP2_149]
>
> Int: Do you remember how old the girls were when they got married?
> RESP 3: Seven and three.
> RESP 4: Twelve [*Respondent 3 again finds it hard to think beyond the characters she has heard about through the interpreters and answer in relation to the more general factual information about the period that has also been explained by the interpreters*] [LFM_S_PP2_147]

This matter has relevance, although in different ways, for adults as well as for children. One audience member at *The Pensioner's Tale*, in articulating his strong empathy with the sailors of the fleet at Trafalgar and his grasp of how 'we won', reinforced a very partial view of the battle, seen wholly from the perspective of the victors, even if through the eyes of one of the unsung heroes from the lower decks who also suffered most of the casualties. On its own, the piece offered a lively, engaging, persuasive and enlightening perspective on the events at Trafalgar, but tightly focused on one individal's perspective. This is not necessarily a problem, particularly in view of the fact that the performance is designed to complement, not stand in place of or isolated from, the other events, exhibitions and

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manifested particularly in their evident readiness to identify with a character who could tell those stories in *first person* and *share* her anxieties and aspirations with them. And when trying to articulate their grasp of subject matter unfamiliar to them, they found the drama and the character in particular a useful reference point through which to explain their understandings. In this respect, theatre-group children showed more of a tendency to 'own' or relate personally to the period in question than did the non-theatre group children. (See Jackson & Rees Leahy 2005) On the other hand, the theatre experience clearly had its limitations. The interpretation of past events through character-based narrative and empathic characters did in some cases seem to limit the children's ability to see and to make connections with the broader picture.

[13] Bertolt Brecht had not wholly dissimilar concerns about the dangers of too close an emotional identification with the tragic protagonist in traditional theatre, and argued for a new kind of epic theatre to counter this tendency, utilising a range of rehearsal, performative and scenographic techniques to achieve his desired 'Verfremdungs-effekt' or 'distancing effect'.

performances elsewhere in the museum. One audience member did however feel there was a missing voice – that of the equivalent French sailor below decks:

> It might have been quite nice to have the equivalent French pensioner Joe Brown to put the French side of the battle. [NMM_F_PP1_116]

One question prompted by the research then was this: are there ways in which empathy can be generated in museum performance and at the same time placed within a dramatic framework that allows the 'larger picture' to be appreciated, for alternative voices to be heard (even within the monologue), and for a more 'distanced', critically questioning response from the audience? It is worth recalling again David Kolb's 'conceptualising' phase of the learning cycle as a vital part of any event from which we wish audiences to learn.

The case of another audience member, 'Darren',[14] offers a further perspective on the ways in which performance can sometimes both engage and limit. Darren was a member of one of our focus groups at the NMM, who saw *The Gunner's Tale* as well as the Nelson & Napoleon Exhibition. He voiced his impressions of the two linked experiences thus in a follow-up interview just a week later:

> The performance was supposed to be a passive experience, but was the more, thinking of the performance being part of the museum, that was a bit more active, whereas the exhibition itself was much more passive. And thinking of what one of your participants said of the exhibition, 'you really had to work to get anything out of it didn't you'. So that was the exhibition being more passive [NMM_I_PP2_32]

In a further follow-up interview, some ten months after the event, his reflections were becoming more guarded and more complex:

> I think I'm wary of forming an opinion of that kind of performance. I think the one we saw was very good, but I think my reaction which is not necessarily a positive one, is a control thing. With the performance I'm not in control of my experience, I'm a passive recipient, whereas I think I prefer in a Museum or Gallery or whatever, I think I prefer to take control, and that's only just occurred to me. So in an exhibition I can choose what I see, I can choose what I read – the path that I take through that experience, and I think I prefer that. [NMM_I_PP3_13]

For Darren at least, the activity of his response was in inverse proportion to the inherently active, controlled, narrative-driven performance he witnessed, whereas the rigidity and unyielding-ness of the exhibition, with everything encased out of reach, within display cabinets, explained in brief, formal, disembodied text panels, challenged him to work harder to piece his own understandings together. This proved to be a more active and for Darren a more rewarding encounter with the subject. His empathy with the characters presented or described in performance had led him to cede control to the performer, leaving him with little active mental work to do on his own.

[14] Invented name to protect confidentiality.

We do not suggest that Darren's experience is universal, and response will of course vary according to the type of visitor, their motivation and predispositon, but there is a resonance here with the experiences of many of the schoolchildren referred to earlier that, at the very least, should give pause for thought. Performance in the museum – no matter how strong it may be in its own right – will not necessarily be the learning experience so often claimed for it. Just as the educational philosopher John Dewey cautioned about seeing experience *per se* as educative,[15] and just as Kolb urges us to see experience, active testing, observation and conceptualisation as necessary parts of that cycle, so perhaps we need to look much more closely not just at what happens within performances but at the opportunities provided alongside them for audiences to process and interrogate their experience. We also perhaps should look at the performances' interconnectedness with the wider institutional frame within which they occur - at the other experiences the visitor is encountering at the same site. Likewise, the performance itself – including single character monologues – will often benefit from the inclusion of elements of dissonance or challenge and from the presence of 'other voices' that can provoke active engagement with the narrative. Even monologues can be multi-vocal.

Surprise

Respondents profess to have been surprised by a number of things during performances: the setting, individual characters, the language, artefacts and their encounters with them. This is no doubt related to their range of 'prior knowledges' and their experience of the 'shock of recognition':

> The armours, because there were real guns and I never saw a real gun before. I have seen the little ones, but I haven't seen the big ones before. They nearly touched the ceiling. [LFM_S_PP2_148]
>
> [Interviewee 1]: I didn't know they were going to speak like you know, that.
>
> [Interviewee 2]: I thought they were just going to say 'You are here today to talk about' like normal people. [LFM_S_PP2_130] [*language*]
>
> Oh, well that thing. I can't remember what it was called. It was like a metal bar which was curved round and ... Like, one small thing could be sold for however many slaves at once. That was a bit of a surprise [MM_S_PP2_154]
>
> I didn't know how severe it was, the fact that, once the abolition acts came in, that they were still being ignored… And I really couldn't believe that that's what happened. [MM_I_PP1_70]

[15] 'The belief that all genuine education comes from experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative…' Moreover, some experiences may actually be 'mis-educative' – because they may for example be enjoyable or 'lively, vivid and "interesting"' yet in their disconnectedness may 'artificially generate dispersive, disintegrated, centrifugal habits', the consequence of which may be 'the inability to control future experiences' (Dewey 1938: 13, 14; cited in Hein 1998: 2)

But the surprise most frequently expressed was to do with the form itself. This has been (for some) a learning experience in itself – that drama might be used in such a way, and that it has impacted upon them as much as it has:

> I was surprised by the person, and I said to him 'Oh, don't you have like electricity?' and then he goes 'What is electricity fine sir?' he doesn't know anything [LFM_S_PP2_130]
>
> When I realised there wasn't a stage, that surprised me, 'cause I thought we would go in to another room, with s a big stage, to watch it. But when the guy came on the balcony, that surprised me. [MM_S_PP2_158]
>
> I suppose that the whole thing was a spectacle, in the sense that we hadn't appreciated it was going to go on and I thought it was very good, so it was a pleasant surprise at an hour's worth of being both entertained and informed, pottering around the museum that morning, when we were anticipating sitting there watching the kids draw rabbits. So, to that extent, it was a surprise. [MM_I_PP2_75]

For most of the case studies, there was something about the physicality of the performance that really struck our respondents. This physicality of experience very often translated into cognitive process, helping them to remember and later to recall facts, feelings and to further engage with the subject matter. It often inspired them:

> But I can't imagine doing it for ten hours, and the fire on the right hand side, and if you get cold... and if you get hot you get it on the other side. [*S enacted the part of spit boy which has enabled him to empathise*] [LFM_S_PP2_148]
>
> RESP 1: Yeah, yeah, boys go first because they block the lady, and girls go second.
>
> INTERVIEWER: And who goes before?
>
> RESP 2: The elders.
>
> RESP 1: The elders and betters.
>
> RESP 2: I know what that means Miss, that means the oldest. [*Translating into a language they understand*] [LFM_S_PP2_149]

For all case studies there was some kind of physical engagement or commitment required of the audience, but there were varying levels of participation expected of them (see Section 4.3.3). Often their memories are also fairly experiential. It is as if they are reliving the physicality of their experience. Often, for example with the younger pupils, it helps them to enact those experiences they had on the day using their hands and bodies. As one group of pupils eloquently assert:

> [Interviewee 1]: Personally I find reading the best way to learn, and I know not everyone is like that. I'm sure people got a lot out of that and remembered it far better than from being there.
> [Interviewer]: But for yourself it's just a backdrop for the reading work that you do.

> [Interviewee 1]: And something to pin memories to, so you remember them more easily.
> [Interviewer]: And what about you?
> [Interviewee 2]: I think it makes a nice change to go out and do it – I suppose – physically. [LFM_S_Pre_127]

Being able to 'pin memories' to experience is something that performance can achieve very effectively, as respondents at all case study sites have testified. When those experiences come as a surprise or a 'wow moment' this becomes even easier to achieve.

Enjoyment and entertainment

Nearly all of our research respondents professed to have enjoyed their experience of performance (with a few notable exceptions). For some, this enjoyment made it hard to reflect on performance as a learning experience. This is no doubt compounded by people's notions and definitions of learning: where and when it happens (in formal environments for example), what it looks like and what it feels like.

For some, there was an automatic divergence between what they were encountering and their perception of what constituted a learning experience. This was common to people of all ages:

> I agree with G in that it was entertainment, he was very good, I don't think it was educational. [NMM_F_PP1_116] *[Education and entertainment in opposition]*
>
> [Interviewer]: Did you learn anything new that you didn't know before?
> [Interviewee 1]: I wouldn't say anything particularly.
> [Interviewee 2]: Not particularly, no.
> [Interviewee 1]: I think it came across quite well, didn't it?
> [Interviewee 2]: It did, yes.
> [Interviewee 1]: It was quite entertaining, quite fun actually. [LFM_S_PP2_134]

But there are also many assertions that education and entertainment should go hand in hand. These are often not fully considered assertions however, with little or no follow up conversation about how the two might be successfully combined:

> INTERVIEWER: Do you think that laughing helps you learn?
> R: Yeah, fun helps you to learn. [LFM_S_PP2_141]

Inspiration

Enjoyment and surprise are a good combination for inspiring a desire for further engagement with the subject matter – and with the institution:

> that's the impression that I hold, came away with and have kept – I would like to learn more now because it had become interesting, whereas it was just an event before. It is reality, or was reality and it has kindled an interest which I will be pursuing, quite how far I don't know, but the interest to find out more is certainly there. It succeeded. [NMM_I_PP2_60]

> I mean: [P] then went home and started sorting out old programmes and so did I and we both had all sorts of stuff, you know, from those days [TTC_I_PP2_174]
>
> 'I know I did learn something and when in Covent Garden and I saw a toy shop with puppets in the window named 'Pollard's Toys' (I think) I just had to go in, dragging my mum with me, to explore. (TTC_observations_4)
>
> So that was something that I'd like to do with the children, go back to the museum, which I will make a point of doing. Then we can make a scrapbook for the kids out of it and stuff and see where it takes us from there really. [MM_I_PP2_79]
>
> I didn't look up anything on the internet but I did go and see that film that came out [Amazing Grace]... I don't think I would have done that if I hadn't been. That was quite interesting because the character that we met in the balcony scene, he was one of the characters in the film. [MM_I_PP2_207]

This inspiration can be followed up through a range of media. This was especially true for CS4 where there were many other activities and much of media output concentrating on the anniversary and commemoration activities.

One respondent has a good turn of phrase for the way in which performance can inform ongoing interest in a subject matter:

> If I was somewhere and there were some paintings or information about it ... I might be drawn to that and I might use the experience I had a year ago as part of my jigsaw of knowledge to put it together. [MM_I_PP3_197]

How do participants talk about learning?

Participants talk about performance and how it relates to learning in a number of ways that will briefly be explored here: as an aid to understanding; as something that differs from 'traditional' classroom based learning; as something that differs from traditional museum interpretation; and as something that is not like learning at all.

Participants see performance within these contexts as being an aid to learning in a number of ways, more often than not because it is seen as bringing the heritage to life in some way:

> I think it is first of all interesting in bringing a subject to life, I think also very educational, and I think more could be done in that direction. [NMM_I_PP3_41]
>
> It's just more educational. Instead of sitting in a classroom, you can sit and watch other people act it out for you. [MM_S_PP2_155]
>
> 'Cause they show you old things, like, in the past and everything. So, like, say if it was in a classroom, they couldn't really show you a lot of things. They'd just do it on the board, or they show you things in the book. So it was good like that. [MM_S_PP2_203]

It can also aid audiences in engaging with history in more immediate ways:

> it lets you make your mind up more than being spoon-fed… It just puts it in your head a lot more. [MM_F_PP1_205]
>
> Well obviously it was quite harrowing to pay attention, to be forced to pay attention to it... because in a sense you can't ignore it because it is in front of you, you can't turn the page as it were or turn away. You are forced to confront it. [MM_I_PP3_193]
>
> you can see the proper house and you don't have to imagine it then, you can see everything. [LFM_S_PP2_149]

Respondents are able to reflect on the ways in which the different methods of interpretation available on site engaged their learning in different ways:

> The exhibition was more of an academic exercise, providing the opportunity to confirm or increase existing knowledge It excited one's interest in a similar way to pictures in a reading book. The performance was a most enjoyable entertainment which worked effectively on two levels – the pleasure of being told a story and the 'virtual reality' fascination through the narration of 'one who was there', a live witness. [email correspondence from participant]
>
> I think they engaged me quite differently, in that with the exhibition I was wanting to actually handle that material, you know almost use the archives, and to almost dwell within those. I think the performance was much more a piece of social learning, but of course in a sense, very appropriate [NMM_I_PP2_51]

Again, the liveness of performance comes through in these responses. This differs from participants' views of classroom learning quite significantly:

> And there's not many people speaking over you. In the classes there's always people speaking over [LFM_S_PP3_151]
>
> It was different, you know? It was an experience.
> We learnt a lot more than what we would have done if we had just read something in a book, then written something up. [LFM_S_PP3_132]
>
> RESP 1: If we was doing that in an hour history lesson, we wouldn't have got half of that done.
> It would have been boring.
> RESP 2: Everyone would have been hyperactive and everything. [MM_S_PP2_157]

For some, it is the very fact that they are not in their classrooms that makes reflecting on the experience as a learning one an unattractive proposition:

> INTERVIEWER: Did you think you learned anything when you were there?

> Well you wasn't with the school, so you wouldn't like be learning would you. You'd just be looking around. [LFM_S_PP2_142]
>
> 'It was certainly an interesting day, but I'm not sure I learnt a great deal from it.' [LFM_S_PP2_134]

For some, there is a reliance on one definition of what learning is – something that is classroom based, directed, and works toward an end goal. This goes against those views of learning promoted in the heritage sector. So, when school pupils are asked about the impact of the day on their learning, some of the pupils are slightly dismissive of the questions, referring the interviewer to the fact that they have moved on in their studies: *'It's not particularly pertinent to what we are doing this year'* [LFM_S_PP2_134], *'It's just background information for that time period'* [LFM_S_PP2_100].

4.3.5 Theme 5: Heritage and authenticity

Although a brief discussion of 'heritage' took place in section 2.2, we have been increasingly concerned with issues of authenticity also. The two notions will be explored in this section. The use of performance at museums and heritage sites has frequently been criticised for representing a sanitized and fictitious 'past' (Hewison, 1987). Authenticity is sought in many 'reconstructions' of the past (see Tivers, 2002: 187), but is often recognised as an 'idealistic, rather than a realistic, aim' (Tivers, 2002; 198). Authenticity is something that can only be ascribed *to* an event, performance, site or artefact, it is not inherent *in* it (Rubridge, 219). Hunt's 'bloodless war' or Turner's 'playful war' (Hunt 2004: 398) can never be truly authentic for they are devoid of the pain, death, isolation and motivations that accompany 'genuine' war. Our limits in knowledge, our limited ability to empathise, and our very different motivations, remain a constant restriction to 'authenticity'.

But all of this perhaps relies on an assumption that authenticity 'exists' elsewhere in the museum. In fact, as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Hein and Samuel acknowledge, museum displays are 'created' out of context by 'fallible and culturally influenced humans' (Hein), with objects undergoing forms of 'reconstruction' themselves (such as cleaning or restoration) which render large chunks of that item's past as undesirable. It is often only within its original form that an object is seen as maintaining its truth. Seeing it as possible (and desirable) to 'reverse the process of history' in this way is, according to Smith, a 'species or contemporary arrogance' (Smith in Vergo, 1993: 20).

This is also very much a matter of representation. Whole groups of people are missing from the authentic version of 'the past' recounted at many sites and institutions. Decisions (judgements) have been made about which histories to present, in what way, and to whom. When 'choosing' artefacts for display decisions are made about the overall look and feel of collections, display contexts, charging for engagement, as well as which interpretation of objects is the correct or preferred one to impart to visitors; 'the institutional nature of the museum has encouraged the construction of narratives that inhibit random access in favour of orderly, informative meaning-formation' (Crane, 2000: 4).

Of course, this is now changing, with the 'Authorised Heritage Discourse' (Smith, L., 2006) coming under *some* scrutiny by sites and museums themselves (and not least by their 'users'). Never more so than in 2007, when many activities designed to commemorate the anniversary of the abolition of the Slave Trade Act in the UK involved museums seeking to alter representation through 'inclusion', 'dialogue' and 'access'. Increasingly also, we see the language of 'co-production', 'community', 'democracy' and 'consultation' being used.

Perhaps we are beginning to see that which Robert Hewison called for in *The Heritage Industry*: a 'critical culture which engages in a dialogue between past and present' (Hewison, 1987: 144). Interestingly, it is performance practices (amongst other interpretive strategies) which we have seen prove so effective in sparking, hosting and framing that dialogue. Their very 'liveness', central to the definition of museum theatre, and a commodity of great value to the people we have spoken with, is central to their impact as a legacy of the visit, and as a resource for future engagement with the subject matter, or indeed for encounters they go on to have elsewhere:

> I always think something live stays with you even if you are not thinking about it. [MM_I_PP3_191]

A sense of the past

During performances, connections to heritage as 'the past' are solidified in a number of ways. Having engaged with the performances, our respondents very often talk of an increased sense of what 'the past' might have been like, and the number of references does not diminish over time. This ongoing engagement with a 'past' is enabled partly through their experience of sites as 'sets', and artefacts as 'props':

> Well, I like performances when they are in a place where they have actually got things going on around the stories they are telling. [NMM_I_PP3_18]
>
> in the room itself there were things they could look at that were 17th century like the floor and stuff. But in school you'd be looking at concrete and stuff like that. [LFM_S_PP2_101]
>
> I think you felt closer to what actually went on than you do in class, reading the textbook and answering questions. [MM_S_PP2_154]

Comments on the museum as setting for performance often focus simultaneously on the resultant sense of place (they provide a physical and intellectual link to the past), and desire for 'displacement' (to be taken out of the reality of the museum, its familiarity and sets of expectations *into* that past). They are simultaneously 21st century spaces (with shops and cafes) and places steeped in the heritage(s) they seek to interpret, providing historic encounter. They perform a dual aspect. It is important to our respondents that sites are not 'stages' (in a traditional, static sense), none the less, the use of the words 'theatrical' and 'dramatic' are common in describing the space. Audiences thus display a willingness to suspend their disbelief (a moment that can sometimes be broken by the intrusion of other 'visitors'):

> RESP 1: That one, they were using the area, like when they were using the ship, the part of the museum that was like that, they used that as the ship. You could actually see what was going on. So, even though you know it's not a ship, it's quite nice.
> RESP 2: It looks quite like it.
>
> RESP 3: Well, it is; you just have to imagine it. (LAUGHS) [MM_S_PP2_155]
>
> One of the most memorable parts is when we were in the big hall; it was rather a bit like being on board the ship [MM_I_PP3_195]

Most spaces (for museum theatre presentations especially) are only temporarily theatricalised through performance, and their quick return to the normality of the museum helps to highlight the transience of history and the impermanence of the people and stories that constitute it. As we will see throughout this and other sections, performance aids an exploration of liminal space: past/present, public/private, place/displace, internal/external (mental processes/physical responses), active/passive, personal memory/collective

memory, museum/theatre. Performance occupies all of these spaces. Case study three offered a particularly interesting exploration of liminality (see Appendix B.3).

It is also on occasion through respondents' use of personal memories and experiences that they make sense of what they encounter (indicating the importance of entry narratives). The following represents one person's ongoing narrative in this regard, the first quote is from the first follow up interview, the second is from an interview ten months later:

> … it just so happened that one of the programmes was opened ... and the choreographer was a lady called Olive Meacham, who was actually my dancing teacher ... So there were lots of personal memories really. [TTC_I_PP2_174]
>
> ...there were the photographs and the other things they'd collected which we saw at the beginning – they certainly brought back memories of people around at the time … it was fun to see all that [TTC_I_PP3_214]

Artefacts

A major part of people's spoken explanation for being engaged with the subject matter is the opportunity to encounter with artefacts within the 'play'. Artefacts are perceived as an integral part of a historical encounter: objects of ongoing historical value as ascribed by the particular institution and as recognised by our research participants. They are a demonstrably important part of the narrative of a museum visit, often being the impetus for attendance in the first instance (visiting a particular exhibition or an interest in a particular area of material culture for example).

The way that artefacts are incorporated in performance thus impresses upon audience members (especially audiences at Manchester Museum where there was a concerted effort to use objects):

> I remember liking the fact that it was quite informal, that people were sort of sitting down on the floor, that we were actually in a space where there were paintings on the wall and the actor referred to the paintings themselves, so you sort of had a visual prompt for what the ships would have looked like and perhaps how the Battle took place. [NMM_I_PP3_14]
>
> 'Cause that was held up and put in someone's hand and they said what it was. Whereas, if that was in a display cabinet, you're going to look at it and think, "I can't be bothered to read that next to it". [MM_F_PP1_205]
>
> ... you know, the ring? They hold it up, it gives it feeling, aptitudes and values in quite a different way, I think. I thought the ideas of looking in the museum and seeing things that actually came from the slave trade: that was a very significant moment. But it was only significant because of the roles and the characters that we were interacting with. [MM_I_PP1_73]

At other times it appears that the objects are being taken for granted within the narrative – they become props and are thus almost incidental:

> C: When you go round the house it's kind of like a stage…
> M: Yeah, 'cause there's no real artefacts, like saying what they are and stuff like that. It was like a proper house was. [*There are no labels to 'get in the way' of its authenticity*] [LFM_S_PP3_138]
>
> they were using props from the museum to kind of relay the story. [MM_I_PP3_186]

We have seen that the more creative uses of artefacts (as experimented with in case studies three and four) - questioning their authority and the ways in which they have been acquired - make the artefacts more memorable. This is often because the audience have had to work harder with them. They are also made more memorable when members of the audience can engage directly with them: holding, using or even making them and taking them home (the artefact then becomes a legacy of the trip, a material reminder):

> INTERVIEWER: Did you all take your candles home?
> Interviewee 1: Yeah. My mum loved the smell of it when it burned.
>
> 2: When I came home I had the beehive candle. When I took it in to my house, my big brother said, "What's that?". I said… it's a beeswax candle... "How did I make it?" he said... I did tell him that I made it by rolling this beeswax round this big stick. [LFM_S_PP3_153]

There is also some discussion amongst research participants about the 'real' and the 'replica' with younger participants especially showing a level of scepticism about what they see. They do not want to be caught out believing something that turns out to be 'false':

> … and it wasn't even real food. Like it was a plastic pig, and a plastic chicken. [LFM_S_PP2_149]
>
> I bet they don't even make those candles, or those spoons, or those cups, I don't believe that. [LFM_S_PP2_149]
>
> INT: and when he was pointing the gun around, how did that make you feel?
> Interviewee 1: Well, you think it's real. (2:32 ???)
> Interviewee 2: I thought he was going to shoot it. (LAUGHS)
> Interviewee 1: I mean, it was a real gun; you could tell that. [MM_S_PP2_155]

The pupils have learned to have a respect and awe for the 'real' objects which they encounter. This no doubt says a lot about the ways in which prior visits to historic sites have been framed, and the importance of the 'object' within such encounters (as in the section below).

Truth and Experience

Research participants have much to say about their expectations in terms of the authenticity of the encounters they have with performers and within the performance itself. There is a common link made to meaning making more generally – that a lack of perceived authenticity makes meaning much harder to come by and can make audience

members switch off. There is a desire to see the factual 'truth' presented in a way that engages with its complexity and depth:

> these things vary so much sometimes they're very erudite and full of content and other times they're pretty shallow [NMM_I_PP3_45]
>
> It was very authentic. They hadn't deliberately staged it. [LFM_S_PP3_132]
>
> perhaps they'll have this sense that they are speaking to someone who has first hand experience, albeit in a reality that has been orchestrated or created, but they'll have some level of authenticity about the answers and the responses that they are getting. [MM_I_PP3_192] *[How 'real' can it ever be?]*
>
> I thought it was quite accurate, the consequence is that it may have been uncomfortable for some, but that was the reality of the day. [MM_I_PP2_211]

But people also want to have authentic experience in terms of resultant feelings and emotions:

> There is little things that worry me slightly, for example when he was bringing up people to be the English fleet and the French and so on, that it was sort of, it was entertaining and humorous, which of course the real … wouldn't have. [NMM_F_PP1_116] *[Education vs entertainment]*
>
> I felt really sad for those people. You really felt what they were feeling, if you were there. If you were one, you felt it. [MM_S_PP2_161]
>
> ...it shouldn't spare people from the violence, it isn't something like a computer game it is an actual thing that happened. In other words you shouldn't patronise people by assuming that they can't cope with watching something horrific. If they can't, well they'll leave won't they? [MM_I_PP3_191]

In most instances, the participants we spoke to are surprised to have had such an 'authentic' experience which says much about their prior expectations of this kind of work. The particular performance they have seen is often seen as being a 'one off' in this respect and has not persuaded them that they can expect this level of authenticity across the board:

> I think I probably feel that that was a bit of lucky chance if you like, that that was as good as it was, and I think my instinct would probably still be not to gravitate to that kind of performance. [NMM_I_PP3_13]
>
> they actually know their stuff, they actually know what they are doing [LFM_S_PP2_100]
>
> [Interviewee 1]: I think it was done up well, they'd redone it and it was actually quite lifelike as it had been. I don't think they went too far over the top.
>
> [Interviewee 2]: I think they balanced it because some places you visit it's just way over the top. [LFM_S_PP2_130]

For the most part our audience participants are working with rather subjective notions of authenticity (as Hunt, 2004 observed in his study):

> RESP 1: I think it was reasonably authentic.
> RESP 2: Yeah it was very well done.
> RESP 1: They were quite convincing in their parts.
> RESP 2: Not just the actors; the house was just… It was down to the fires and everything.
> RESP 1: Certainly in the context of the house, it was convincing [LFM_S_PP3_137]
> [*Not about ideas etc but physical re-creation]*
>
> Mr Pollard's talk was very illuminating... His pictures were carefully labelled and organised which gave them more authenticity than Kurt's book of information and pictures that had bits falling out and water marked (TTC_observations_3)
>
> You're like thinking, "Right: I could actually be here, maybe, in the past". Then you see that radiator and you think, "No, it's gone. I'm not there anymore". [LFM_S_PP3_133]

For most of the case studies, there is little or no engagement with the questions that are currently being asked and explored in the wider museological context (see section 1.2). How can we 'know' the past? Is 'the truth' in institutions, objects, people, presence, purpose and endeavour? Whose standards of 'truth' are being aspired to? How important is the authentic? How faithful is memory? How reliable is the knowing archive?

One exception to this is case study three which sought more explicitly to question notions of authenticity and heritage. Here we see some participants (notably those who are more engaged with debates within performance and heritage studies) entering this debate and being aware of the challenges that were being presented for them:

> And there is even some heritage thrown in. Indeed, it is the struggle to make this a heritage trail that makes it so compelling. Or at least it did for me… It challenges anyone else who takes reenactments or reconstructions seriously (TTC_observations_5)
>
> These artefacts were not always disclosed in the clearest order, conveying a chaotic sense of 'history' and showing us… that what would be presented here was not just the story of one Coventry man (TTC_observations_2)

Others, however, were confused by the blatant disregard for 'truth' that was displayed by the characters, and astounded that a museum (a known purveyor and guardian of the 'authentic') should be involved in such puzzling endeavour:

> They got their facts completely wrong you know about the murder. There wasn't a gravestone as the group as the group had said. [P] went to look and it wasn't there. (TTC_I_PP3_214)

> I felt very betrayed when the grave didn't correspond to the story Kurt told... It felt as though they were re-writing the city with their own narrative and we could never be sure how much was true... To me this really conflicted with its role as museum theatre. (TTC_observations_3)

Challenging the museum stereotype

It is interesting to look at respondents' attitudes towards the wider institutional **context** as authority, and as 'history'. They have expectations of the sites in terms of the associations they make (most often that the museum is dry, stuffy, predictable, educational – but not necessarily fun). In this respect it is entirely possible that our respondents are playing back a stereotype of museums that firstly does not exist, and secondly, does not match their prior experiences of sites that they have visited (as is proved as they go on to talk about other sites they have been to). None-the-less, these are the associations they make:

> I thought the drama was good, but I thought it was in big contrast to the exhibition itself which I found very static, full of artefacts etc [NMM_F_PP1_117]
>
> Yeah, because in a museum you can practically travel back to the past without moving, basically. If you use your imagination at a museum you can actually really enjoy it. [MM_S_PP2_154] *[Enjoyment of the museum does not necessarily come easily]*
>
> people tend to associate museums with lectures, [MM_I_PP2_85]

The exception here is the Manor house, which, as an immersive experience, does not fit their stereotype:

> ANON: It didn't feel like a museum, because museums have things in a glass case and you just look at it.
> ANON: It felt really real, 'cause everything was… There was absolutely no models.
> ANON: It felt like going back in time. There was no technology, just…
> ANON: Plus everything was just going on around you. [LFM_S_PP3_123]

Museums are thus seen as being very much about material culture: objects behind glass and traditional or mechanical interpretation. It is often commented that museums do not use their assets as productively as they might (CS1, CS3, CS4). Performances, in contrast, are seen as bringing the museum and its stories to life, as being animated and in 'real-time' (the 'liveness' is important here). Principally, this approach is seen as being 'not just about looking'. Some respondents feel that the performance can introduce new people to the very idea of the museum and the stories it can tell – it thus should have some kind of dual function.

Performances are perceived as unpredictable, fun, entertaining and accessible, and also capable of inspiring 'wonder'. Even though exhibitions and material culture are often seen as being more innately 'authentic' it is the performances that are the more 'real' experience. Performers are 'real' 'live', 'alive', 'a live witness', and crucially, personable. This is most certainly not language that is used to describe other form of interpretation at sites.

> I found it so amusing the way she brought it to life…It was alive… that will keep in my mind for a long time because it was made alive [NMM_F_PP1_117]
>
> [Interviewee 1]: IT was more interactive
> [Interviewee 2]: Museums put things behind bars and stuff
> [Interviewee 1]: Yeah it's like do not touch
> [Interviewee 2]: But this is like you actually get to touch it [LFM_S_PP2_130]
>
> If there had been artefacts behind glass cases, with written documentation, I probably wouldn't have got any where as near as much from it as I had with the two very talented actors bringing that to life [MM_F_PP1_205]
>
> I felt like a museum visitor that was getting a treat. [MM_I_PP2_80]

Occasionally there is evident a mythologising of the trip as a whole (and the performative elements too) in the minds of our respondents over time. School children attending LFM were a case in point here. There are certain things they encounter on the day and talk about in follow up discussion with each other and (more formally) with the research team that remain with them, their imaginations lending the experiences weight and becoming a central focus for the day. Many of the other memories of their trip then hang on the myth they have created around 'the ghost', the 'big house' or the 'scary' characters (for example), and the past becomes a realm upon which they can impose their fictive inventiveness. Mythologising the past is seen by some critics as one of the travesties of the heritage 'industry' but is something that was usefully explored and responded to through case study three, where we see that a real and objective past is in itself a fiction. This was

an exercise in exploring ‘un’reality; a fantastic and fictitious past (and present) (See CS3 data trawl for more exploration of this):

> It is truly a wonderful piece of anarchy [TTC_observations_5]
>
> ‘What would they [Alice and Irving] have thought I wonder. [TTC_I_PP3_214]
>
> I loved this interaction, I felt very privileged to have been the only one to experience it ... It was funny ad wasn’t burdened with the necessity to get across any factual information. She simply had a funny story to tell. It gave the building character. [TTC_observations_3]

There are some interesting comments about the relationship between fiction and ‘knowledge’ made by respondents at all case studies. There is an assumption evident that performers straddle a tricky positioning between the two, more comfortable perhaps in the fictive world than with the ‘truth’ of the institution. Respondents often comment that they have been lucky that the performance they have seen has been so obviously well-researched (CS1 and CS4), and well acted. This belies an attitudinal stance towards this kind of work more generally that assumes very low standards:

> I think we were very lucky with the performance we had, he was brilliant [NMM_I_PP2_104]
>
> Somebody had obviously done some research [TTC_I_PP3_214]
>
> I think the other thing too is that if you have a re-enactor, it might not be historically accurate all the time, but they can bring that humanity to it [NMM_F_PP1_116]

This links to the image problem that is evident for this kind of work in many of the discussions we have had with audience members.

Representation (focus on CS4)

Questions are increasingly being asked about who has the right to collect, exhibit, narrate and curate our multiple heritages. A number of the projects we have looked at have been concerned with telling previously hidden, mis-represented or under-represented stories in collaboration with the communities they represent (at least this has been their intention). It is hoped that performance might be a suitable way of engaging new communities, enabling a dialogue, and as a result perhaps, the institutions might learn something new also. A range of our respondents have commented on the success (or otherwise) of this strategy.

If traditional representation through interpretation left many people voiceless (Urry in MacDonald & Fyfe, 1996), it is argued that these kinds of projects might go some way to redressing the balance. But, as Laurajane Smith acknowledges, there is often a tokenistic quality to this engagement:

> Consequently, most attempts at public or community inclusion into heritage programmes are inevitably expressed in assimilatory terms, in that excluded groups become 'invited' to 'learn', 'share' or become 'educated' about authorized heritage values and meanings' (Smith, 2006: 44)

It was important therefore for the last of our case studies to experiment with genuine co-production around 'difficult', contested and hidden history. The results show that many people were able to make important links to their own backgrounds, memories and agendas, and appreciated the complexity with which the subject was addressed:

> Cause my sister's visiting me, so we thought we'd come to Manchester Museum and then the gentleman there told us about this and it appealed to me, to us, because it's something that's part of our heritage and it's interesting to know what happened. [MM_I_PP1_74]
>
> I wouldn't say all the way through the performance, that I felt that way [fearful]. Not to knock the performance, I think that was my personal, individual avoidance. Avoidance because of the pain … It actually took me on the journey that I didn't want to connect with, because it was a connection of thinking, this is what my ancestors went through [MM_I_PP2_79] *[A positive experience]*
>
> They'd lost the fact that it was a performance, as if it was reality for them... but obviously people were upset. It took them to a point where they didn't expect themselves to get so emotionally involved, but they did. Which was good. [MM_I_PP2_211] *[Link to 'reality' – is it 'too real'?]*

In this instance, our respondents universally agreed that the form was suitable to the heritage being (re)interpreted as part of the 2007 commemorative events. It was felt that the form allowed for the kind of interpretive agency that other forms at the site did not:

> I've taken on so much more through a live performance today, than I would have just walking around, looking at display boxes [MM_I_PP1_70] *[the 'liveness' of the piece is recognised]*
>
> Pictures say a story, but it's not giving people the opportunity to ask questions, which people don't always have the answers to, but at least people can ask their questions and air their views. So, yeah, it's a good way of doing it, yeah. [MM_I_PP1_83]
>
> ...I thought that for this particular subject it was very poignant because, in the slave trade, these were people that were alive and I think that artefacts don't show that as much as having the slavery reanimated. [MM_I_PP2_207]

The form itself has encouraged people to question the institution, the heritage and their responses to it in ways that other interpretive strategies might not have allowed for:

> Yeah, I'd like the museum to do more of that. I think it's getting more used to being involved and thinking about the wider implications of looking at objects behind glass, and trying to bring that to life. No, I think that's absolutely the right thing to do. [MM_I_PP2_65]

Section 5: Conclusions

5.1 Conclusions

The Performance, Learning and Heritage research has shown that each site and each type of audience is so different, it is clear that there cannot be a 'one size fits all' performative technique. So the research cannot tell us how to guarantee the successful design and impact of performance within a museum or historic site.

What it *can* do is highlight the power of performance and suggest ways that it can be used to influence audience response and learning. Here are some key conclusions that arise from our analysis of the evidence. Some of them, interpreters have always known anaecdotally but they can now be substantiated from a new evidence-base; some of them are perhaps more surprising in what they show.

Impact

- Performance often has positive **value** for the visitor.
- Performance has ***long term*** **impact** on the visitor. Performance always sits within a context of various experiences which a visitor has at a museum, yet our research shows it is often **overly represented in the ongoing narratives** of visitors over time. In other words, it is among the most powerful of interpretive techniques in creating lasting impact.
- Performance can enhance the visitor's **appreciation and critical understanding** of the heritage in question.
- The **interaction** and/or **participation** involved emerge as a hugely memorable aspect of a performance, and thus of a museum/site visit. They aid (most) audience members' recall of facts, sites and artefacts – thus intensifying the impact of the visit. They can also greatly enhance people's understanding of the subject matter (the heritage), their emotional response to it, and their desire to repeat the experience (and therefore to re-visit).
- Recall is often aided by memory of the performance's immediate surrounds (the site as 'set') and artefacts (often seen as 'props'). I**ntegrating** the performance with a site's other resources can heighten impact.

Empathy and debate

- The **'well-told story'** has an unparallelled ability to engender interest in, and often empathy with, the life experiences of those considered 'other' from ourselves.
- Performance can give voice to, and celebrate, the experiences of **marginalised individuals or communities** excluded from the grander narratives of conventional history.
- Performance can be used to great effect in dealing with **challenging and difficult content** within heritage environments. It is especially effective in instigating, framing and hosting **debate and dialogue**, and can give people a new-found appreciation of the complexity of the subject matter.

Framing the event

- The research shows that while the audience's quality of engagement and the extent of learning depends on the quality of the performance, the nature of information conveyed, and even on the novelty or 'wow-factor' elements of the experience, it depends at least as much on **the way the experience is framed**. In other words, what happens *before* and *after* a performance, and the way the visitor is *drawn into* it, are just as important as the content. In designing any performance, therefore, it is important for sites and museums to consider:
    - how the event is **framed:** for example, its advance publicity, physical location, relationship to the adjacent galleries or architectural spaces
    - how the visitor is **introduced** to the topic and mode of performance – and where appropriate **inducted** into becoming a willing audience-member, or even an active participant: how is the '**audience contract**' made?
    - the extent to which the visitor is allowed a degree of **choice** as to whether, or how far, to participate
    - how to incorporate moments of **interaction and genuine challenge** within the performance, and
    - what opportunity the visitor is given to **de-brief** - to ask questions or express opinions at the end - and given an opportunity to develop and embed their understanding (which can lead to greater recall).

These issues become even more vital if that event is intended to promote – implicitly or explicitly – learning or 'agency' on the part of the visitor.

Increasing the impact

- **Connections to sites, collections and individual artefacts** need to be made more apparent if visitors are to integrate their experience of performance into the larger experience of their visit. This will not only aid recall of the performance itself, but also of the other encounters on site.
- Building in **interactive or participative** elements will (as long as they are not forced on unwilling participants) aid many audience members' recall and enhance their understanding of facts, sites and artefacts, as well as intensifying their emotional response.
- **Connections to the everyday lives of visitors in 'the present'** help performances to be more memorable, but also, crucially, aid recall, meaning-making and perceived relevance of the heritage over time.
- Building in the opportunity to **reflect with others** (e.g. via debate, focus group, informal Q&A) on the performance and its connections with the rest of the site or exhibition will for many visitors enrich their experience of the visit and enhance the learning it is designed to stimulate.
- Performance in museum and heritage site settings demands **acting, and often facilitating, skills** of a very high order. They include the ability to
    - create and sustain 'presence' in performance (the importance of being 'in the moment' especially for performances of half an hour or less)
    - effectively communicate, vocally and bodily, in testing, often unsympathetic, environments
    - adapt to different types, mixes and sizes of audiences

- engage audiences as necessary in dialogue, before, during and/or after the performance
- undertake preparatory research on the subject matter
- translate research into dramatically compelling scripts
- understand and work in close collaboration with other museum staff: curators, education officers, stewards and so on.

Those skills should be given recognition, catered for and, wherever possible, developed both by the employing institutions and by the acting profession, including the actor-training academies.

Perception and publicity

- There is an **image problem** with this kind of work. Our participants have told us again and again how low their expectations are of these types of performance. There is much to do to change this, and to frustrate the polarity of expectation in terms of education and entertainment: adults expect it will be entertaining but not necessarily educational, children assume if it is educational it will unlikely be entertaining.
- Poor advance **publicity** is a major issue not being suitably addressed by a majority of sites under observation. Visitors notice the inadequacy of the publicity (in promoting the event widely, in explaining who the preformance is for, what it contains and how it can enhance a visit) and the occasional or unpredictable nature of the performance programme. They receive a negative signal about the worth of the activity as perceived by the insitution.
- 'Good' – that is, stimulating, enjoyable, informative – performance at museums and heritage sites is **valued by adults as well as by children**. Museum performance tends still to be perceived as being for families or for school groups, but the research shows clearly that it is valued by adults also, at least when pitched correctly. Indeed, adult-only performances have proved very popular when the subject matter and advance promotion are right.

Fitting performance to site

- Performance is often used as a **stand-alone mode of interpretation** within the msueum or heritage site. However, where an exhibition/site visit is under design, performance, and appropriate space(s) for visitors to gather, listen and see, should should be **built in to the exhibition's interpretive programme** from the early stages of programme design, in order to maximise on resources invested and increase possible visitor engagement.
- **There is no one-size-fits-all performative technique**, and there are a great many ways in which performance can be employed by institutions. It is crucial, however, to line up the **goals of the site** and **intentions for interpreting the heritage** with a suitable method of performance activity, in order to ensure maximum use of the resources.

For the future

- Our research did not set out to look at funding aspects and **sustainability**. However, given the increasing popularity, and success, of high quality, educative performance work – and the investment involved in retaining actors or buying in a specialist company and the underpinning research and writing skills - we highlight

the need for institutions to consider these issues as part of their long term planning.

- Museums and sites do need to consider ways in which performance work of high quality that contributes significantly to their interpretive, educational and community access programmes can be **built into their ongoing programming strategies** – if not on a daily basis then at least on a sufficiently regular basis to be seen as an integral and valued part of the institution's offering. Where sensitive issues are tackled especially, it is vital that adequate follow-up (de-briefings, further performances on related issues, etc) is undertaken and seen to be undertaken.
- The research suggests that what visitors accrue from such experiences is governed by a complex array of factors - personal, cultural, institutional. **Much research remains to be done** to analyse how these factors affect response – work which could help museums and historic sites build increasingly effective performance elements into their interpretive programmes.
- As we have seen, the research shows that people may still percieve museums as a static, 'behind glass' experience, if 'authentic' in representing the past. They react to performance within these museums as a more 'real' and intense experience. In the future, **how can our museums and historic sites translate the benefits of performance to the wider museum environment,** to shift perceptions, widen access and increase impact?

5.2 Recommendations: the implications for practice and planning

The accumulated data from our case studies leads us to a number of **key questions** that interpretive planners should ask when they are designing performance events in museums or historic sites – whatever the style or aim of the performance. The *answers* will of course be different for each event and each location. As we know, the research does not tell us how to guarantee the successful design and impact of performance, but by following this checklist, museums and sites will be able to use the research findings to steer their work.

Performance often seems to be planned in isolation from other interpretive processes, to the detriment of both. Answering the questions in this checklist, and adding site-specific sections on issues such as budget and timeframe, will create the outline of a strategic plan for performance-based interpretation at any site or museum. The organisation can then build that plan into other internal planning processes.

Planning checklist

These questions are intended, not to overwhelm with detail, but simply to provide prompts that will help museum and heritage site staff recognise, and enhance, the quality and efficacy of performance in heritage settings.

The site

1. Where do we position performance within the insitution in terms of the insitution's **structure**? Is it a part of our Outreach or Community Access programme? Or the Education or Curatorial programmes? Or does it cross all programmes, in which case how will it be coordinated most effectively?
2. How can we translate our performance programme and its intentions into a **language** understood elsewhere in the institution?

3. Where do we position performance intellectually – how does it fit with the **goals** of the institution?
4. Do we have a clear **actor interpretation policy** that is understood and implemented by all (including all performers)?
5. How does the performance fit within (or usefully outside) the other interpretive strategies on offer? How does live interpretation **complement** the various other performances being played out 'on site'?
6. How do we best **support the performers**, whose role may often be pivotal in the interpretive strategy of the site and whose skills as actors, researchers and 'facilitators of engagement' with the public need to be valued and developed?
7. Where do we position performance **physically** in the site? How can we ensure that perfomance is not battling with the insitution – tannoy announcements, loud video presentations, sudden changes of location etc?
8. How do we **promote** performance work? Can promotional materials help to make connections to the rest of the site? How do we persuade our 'target groups' that this kind of interpretation might be 'for them'?
9. Do we have appropriate feedback and **evaluation** strategies in place? Are we as a site being honest and reflective about our practice?

The performance

1. How do we **describe and 'frame'** the event (e.g. as re-enactment, story-telling, promenade; as designed for particular audiences/age groups or for the general public)?
2. Who is **facilitating** the interaction? Do we need a separate person (other than the actors) to take on this responsibility?
3. Does the performance need a **dramatic arc** or easily-recognised shape? A dramatic conclusion? A 'plot' in the traditional sense? Or do we want to be playful with the form in this instance?
4. What are the moments of inspiration/surprise (**the 'wow' factor**) that will provide opportunities for visitor engagement?
5. What place does **empathy** have in the performance? To what extent is it important to inspire empathic engagement with characters in the piece? If it is, how do we ensure that it enlarges rather than narrows understandings (avoiding the 'empathy paradox')?

The content

1. What **style of interpretation/performance** matches our intentions most suitably?
2. How can the **complexity of this heritage** be explored through performance? With, for example, multiple voices, opportunities for dialogue, or audiences taking on roles?
3. How do we ensure opportunities to '**de-brief**' – to question and debate and to make connections with the rest of the site/the exhibitions/subject-matter?
4. What place does the deliberate '**un-settlement**' of audience preconceptions or the creation of moments of 'dissonance' have in the performance – as a means of building on the challenge and providing insight into the subject-matter?
5. What are the points at which the audience is **challenged**, intellectually and/or emotionally, and how far into the event do they occur?
6. How do we ensure the performance and content are appropriately **pitched** – to avoid patronisation at one end of the spectrum and alienation at the other?

7. When sensitive issues are raised in compelling ways, how can the museum provide opportunities for **follow-up**, or plan for an ongoing programme of activities (debates, performances, etc) that continue to address such issues?

The audience

1. Who is/are our **target audience(s)** for this piece?
2. How do we **induct** visitors into the performance event (and the 'rules of the game' - the 'contract')?
3. How and when do we employ **interaction** and **participation** in performance? Are they the best way to achieve our aims in this instance?
4. How and when do we ensure opportunities to exercise **choice** – to opt in or out of the contract?
5. What is the nature of the **transitions** that visitors experience - from 'visitor' to 'audience', to 'participant' and to 'learner', and back again, in museum performance? Do these transitions need to be facilitated? If so, how and by whom?
6. How important is it that we make our audiences **comfortable** – ensuring they can all hear, see, sit? Are there benefits to making them *un*comfortable (for artistic or other reasons)?
7. How can we ensure that a **care responsibility** is taken for our audience members - especially when we seek to engage them emotionally or physically?
8. How do we ensure opportunities for (and respect the right of) visitors to exercise **'agency'** – to make their own meanings in their own way and to engage in ways that may or not be predictable?

5.3 Assessing the methodology

Much has been learnt over the course of the project about the suitability of traditional qualitative case study methodology to researching performance activity. As was identified in section 3.1, the methodology changed quite significantly in terms of scope and emphasis over the three years, but one thing that has remained core to our approach has been an emphasis on the voices of participants. The complexity and intricacy of responses surprised us again and again, and we hope to have re-produced some of that diversity in this document.

Interviewing proved to be the most effective means of documenting peoples' responses; our limited questionnaire surveying only served to renew our confidence in this qualitative approach. The occasional use of questionnaires helped us to triangulate the interviews and observations, and enabled us to gain more responses with minimal extra investment (and indeed to quantify them in ways that might seem useful for advocacy purposes). But the interviews gave us access to raw, contradictory and often emotional narratives of engagement (or otherwise) which have been invaluable. We were under no pressure to reduce complex responses to single readily-categorisable units of response, and we have been able to let many of the narratives speak for themselves. The disadvantage is that the data reflected in this report is weightier and less quickly 'navigable' than many will prefer. But the price for providing detailed insights into the variety and complexity of audience engagement with museum performance was one that, in our view, was worth paying. Using interviewers who closely represented the communities that we were researching was also useful , although we would recommend it with reservations. As important as it has been to ensure that respondents feel comfortable enough to respond in uninhibited ways (and in their own language for example), the significance of the ongoing relationship

between individual researchers, the project, and the participants should not be underestimated.

The longitudinal nature of the research approach proved to be integral to our understanding of the impact of performance practice. Without this elelment, it might have been easy to over-emphasise the possibility for change in our respondents; they were responsive, excited and eager to talk about personal transformation on the day of performances, but often more measured and reflective in their responses at a later date. This has enabled us to build a more realistic assessment of the 'actual' levels of change that occurred for our respondents (and to confidently assert that change *did* happen).

Future research in this area may wish to build upon the methodological approach used (and transparently documented) in this project. It may also wish to further explore the particular themes that we have identified. Either way, it is hoped that the body of knowledge and understanding in this area will increase; that practice will be assessed in more meaningful ways (not simply through quantifiable measures); and that audiences will increasingly see and feel the benefits that come with such reflective practice.

5.4 In conclusion

The Performance, Learning and Heritage research project has shown emphatically that performance has rightly become a **powerful resource** in the range of interpretive methods on offer to museums and historic sites. Performance can bring alive and draw out deeper and new meanings from collections and buildings, and has its greatest impact when planned carefully to work in close conjunction with the collections, exhibitions and architecture.

The research has been able to show strong links between performance and visitors' increased understanding of, and empathy with, the subject matter, as well as injecting an element of surprise and enjoyment which has a value on its own, as well as one to aid to recall. For the first time, this research was able to look at adult visitors, family groups and school groups, and it is clear that for all groups, performance added significantly to the impact of a site or museum.

Just because this research has unearthed the **complexity of performance** in museums, it is critically important *not* to see this as overly daunting but rather to look again at performance as a new and underexplored tool, an extraordinarily rich and valuable method of engaging the active participation of diverse audiences in making everyday relevance out of their shared heritage. In addition, we believe that, through creative partnerships – as has been seen in this report – museums can learn new skills and approaches that will help to open up the entire process of interpretation for the institution as a whole.

The research has, inevitably, raised as many questions as it has answered, but we hope that it will act as a springboard for further exploration and analysis of the successes and weaknesses of different modes of performance and their use at different types of site. We hope too that it provides a basis for further development and enhancement – and indeed expansion – of the repertoire of interpretive and educative strategies available to museums and heritage sites. We welcome feedback on the contents of this report (via the contacts given on page 8 of this document) and look forward to studying the outcomes of any future such research.

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