

# **Piazzas or Stadiums: Toward an Alternative Account of Museums in Cultural and Urban Development**

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## **Abstract**

Over the last twenty-five years or so there has been a ‘cultural turn’ in urban development strategies. An analysis of the academic literature over this period reveals that the role of new museums in such developments has often been viewed reductively as brands of cultural distinction with economic pump priming objectives. Over the same twenty-five year period there has also been what is termed here a ‘libertarian turn’ in museum studies and museology. Counterposing discussions of the museum’s role within urban development with discussions from within the museum studies literature on the ‘post-museum’ reveals the dichotomous nature of these approaches to the museum. This article proposes instead a consideration of the phenomenotechnics of new museum developments. This approach presents a way of taking account of *both* technical *and* symbolic conditions and characteristics and in doing so, it is hoped, provides a way of analyzing the ‘realpolitik’ of the role of museums in urban development.

## **Keywords**

cultural development, culture-led regeneration, new museums, phenomenotechnics, post-museum, urban development

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## Introduction

Over the last twenty-five years there has been a ‘cultural turn’ in urban development strategies. Many such strategies have used museums<sup>i</sup> as a central focus for the development of inner-city cultural precincts<sup>ii</sup> in which the museum is often a significant new capital development involving statement architecture, such as the Frank Gehry designed Guggenheim in Bilbao or the Daniel Libeskind designed Imperial War Museum North in Manchester. In other developments, such as Tate Modern, the museum is located in a piece of industrial heritage, reused and monumentalized, evoking a (romanticized) industrial past. In some cases, as in Newcastle/Gateshead—BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art and The Sage Gateshead (the latter designed by Norman Foster)—both types of development, new and reused, sit side by side. These so-called culture-led urban development schemes are frequently cited and have, among some sectors, become almost shorthand for the multiplicity of benefits supposedly following such developments. This equivalence—culture-led development equals city ‘transformation’—is characterized well by Anna Minton of the DEMOS consultancy, who makes the bold assertion that culture-led regeneration “has the power to transform the physical fabric of a city and to alter people’s perceptions” (Minton 2003: 5). On the other hand, the same trend is cited by others as evidence that cultural policy is taking on a more instrumental character, driven by exogenous imperatives that are, it is argued, focused increasingly on economic rationales or social policy rationales such as ‘inclusion’, which such commentators describe as being to the detriment of cultural outcomes (see, e.g., Gray [2007, 2008], and for an alternative analysis of ‘instrumentalization’ see Gibson [2008]). Both approaches to culture and urban development, at least in relation to museums, tend to simplify the phenomenon they describe; museums and their effects are represented in purely symbolic terms—brands of cultural distinction with economic

pump priming or social management objectives (see, e.g., Wilks-Heeg and North 2004; Yeoh 2005).

Surprisingly, the position of museums in urban development strategies has been subject to very few theoretically informed analyses that take account of the museum as a multidimensional institution made up of a variety of, sometimes competing, rationales and activities. In addition, and linked to this, few accounts of the museum's role in urban development take account of changes *internal* to the museum sector—within the profession, to practice, and to theory—over the same twenty-five year period as the 'cultural turn' in urban planning. This article proposes an alternative perspective for understanding the role of museums in urban development. Counterposing discussions of the museum's role within urban development as explored in the urban studies, cultural geography, and cultural policy and planning literatures with discussions from within the museum studies literature on the actual and potential roles of the 'post-museum' allows us to identify and analyze the key features of the discussion. This article does not aim to discuss actual museum developments or practice. Rather, it argues that analysis of the urban studies and cultural policy literatures, which is where most discussion of culture-led urban development, including museums, occurs, reveals a fundamentally different theoretical approach to understanding the museum than that which is found in contemporary museum studies literature. I will show in the following how in much of the literature on culture-led development new museums are analyzed primarily at the level of the symbolic. Instead, what will be proposed is an analysis of the phenomenotechnics<sup>iii</sup> of the museum and its role in urban development. Such an account, which would analyze the technical as well as the symbolic multidimensionality of new museums in urban developments, would be better placed to understand the operation of the micropolitics of power in such spaces. This

alternative approach to the discussion of culture and urban development will provide a way of analyzing the ‘realpolitik’ of museums and their roles in urban development.

### **Museums in Urban Precincts**

Over the last quarter of a century there has been a significant increase in the numbers of new museums established. For instance, in Taiwan over five hundred new museums have been developed in the last twenty years (Lin 2010), and in the UK over six hundred museum capital build projects were funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) over broadly the same period (HLF 2009).<sup>iv</sup> So what is driving this ‘multiplication of museums’? In many places (although not all), new museum developments (or significant refurbishments) have been part of urban development or redevelopment strategies where the museum is part of a suite of investments, alongside perhaps other cultural institutions, public art programs, investment in urban conservation, and so forth, which, as part of a cultural development package, aim to revitalize or rebrand a particular place. There have been a number of strands to the discussion of this trend in the academic literature over the last, especially, twenty- five years. These discussions have taken place in particular within the cultural policy and cultural planning literatures (e.g., Bianchini 1993; Gibson and Stevenson 2004; Evans 2001, 2005, 2009; Mommaas 2004) and in urban studies and cultural geography (e.g., Jones and Wilks-Heeg 2004; M. Miles 2005; Miles and Paddison 2005; Zukin 1995). In reviewing the debates around culture’s role in urban regeneration it is clear that museums have often been understood in quite limited ways. It is important to establish the precise nature of this characterization as, I argue, it is this view of the museum that dominates academic discourse when considering new or recently developed museums.

A review of the literature on culture and urban development reveals two main theoretical frames that are characteristic of much of the literature and that inform the consideration of museums. One framework establishes a dichotomy between investments in ‘flagship’ cultural programs versus ‘community’ cultural programs, where the ‘flagship’ is dismissed as a superficial visitor experience, part of a “single image and brand” (Evans 2003: 421) or merely as part of “property-led regeneration” (Wilks-Heeg and North 2004: 309), “targeting tourists and wealthier residents” (ibid.: 307).

The other dominant approach characteristic of the literature on urban development and cultural policy establishes a dichotomy between cultural programs described as encouraging ‘consumption’ versus those that are considered to support ‘production’. Within this construction of consumption and production, consumption is cast as a passive activity (often with negative overtones) and production as having active identity and community forming effects. We can link these two sets of dichotomies. At play within this articulation of the ‘flagship’ institution versus the ‘community’ cultural program is the association of the former with passive consumption, instead of the preferred ‘active’ production; audiences are characterized as (mere) tourists or ‘wealthier residents’ as opposed to the ‘local community’. Implied here is also a construction of the latter—the community-production-based program—as ‘vernacular’, organically developing and therefore ‘authentic’, whereas the ‘flagship’ is cast as an ‘engineered’ top-down incursion and therefore ‘inauthentic’ (Shorthose 2004). On this basis museum developments are understood as an incursion of regulatory control, anti-community and providing only a passive, single-dimension, consumption-based experience (Bianchini and Ghilardi 2004: 243–244). I want to argue here that such a de Certeauian (1994) opposition between ‘free’ and ‘regulated’ space is unhelpful to the consideration of the role of museums in urban developments. Before we

consider what might be the basis of a different approach, it will be helpful to take a more detailed look at the assumptions that inform the framing of museums in many accounts of culture and urban development.

### *'Flagship' vs. Community*

New museum developments are costly affairs, and it was already clear as early as the mid-1990s that, at least in the UK, regeneration centered around the capital development of cultural institutions was a strategy with many problems, not least the cost and an associated accusation that in such developments “the construction industry benefited much more than the arts sector” (Landry et al. 1996: ii). The key plank to this critique and a central concern in analyses of culture programs and the city more generally are that such developments do not connect with local people. There is no doubt that such a concern is an important consideration when planning for the longer-term sustainability of cultural investment. However, when reviewing a range of different types of arts-led regeneration, Landry and colleagues argue in relation to cultural programs involving significant capital development that

such large-scale projects produce mixed feelings among local people. They can absorb scarce resources from other proposals and their running costs can restrict future funds for cultural activities. In particular, the contrast between the favoured area, and those beyond its boundaries can seem very sharp, and may contribute to resentment and cynicism. (1996: 40)

In contrast, “participatory arts programs which are low-cost, flexible and responsive to local needs” (ibid.: i) are cited as likely to have a range of benefits, including “enhancing social cohesion, improving local image, reducing offending behaviour, [and] developing self

confidence” (ibid.: ii–v). In this characterization, cultural programming involving “large-scale projects” are seen as *constitutively* static, unable to reach populations beyond their four walls, irrelevant to local communities, and a drain on other cultural resources. In contrast to this are posed activities such as small festivals and community arts activities, which are seen to be more “responsive to local needs.”<sup>v</sup> Franco Bianchini and Lia Ghilardi further elaborate in relation to “flagship venues,” where they describe favorably an “organic” approach to cultural regeneration, characterized as community-led cultural activities “where the cultural resources of the neighbourhood are mobilized in response to local aspirations, thus engendering participation and a sense of ownership” (2004: 243).<sup>vi</sup> They contrast this with “flagship venues . . . chosen as catalysts for development and increased consumption, these seem to have been largely unable to make their activities relevant to local people” (ibid.). Bianchini and Ghilardi acknowledge that this is not always the case, and there are instances where local people declare themselves proud of their local ‘flagship’ development; the example they cite in this regard is Bilbao (ibid.). This phenomenon of local pride in the development leading to a so-called ‘trickle-down effect’ has been one of the key tenets of the case made for culture-led regeneration in terms of significance to local communities.

There are a number of cases made *for* culture-led development; for our purposes here the most pertinent is the case made for developments structured around significant new build cultural institutions, such as museums, and the (hopefully) associated betterment of the city’s image. The case for the existence of a ‘trickle-down effect’ posits that such developments can lead to an increase in pride in the local population, which leads to an increase in aspiration and following from this place vitality and prosperity. For this phenomenon to occur, Steven Miles argues that culture-led developments need to have a relationship with their local contexts and

constituencies. For Miles, it is the *symbolic* impact of such developments that is powerful in this respect. In these terms, he considers the case of the Quayside development led by BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art and The Sage Gateshead in Newcastle/Gateshead, an economically depressed industrial city in the northeast of the UK. For Miles, the success (measured through a series of interviews undertaken with local people) of the Quayside is due to the ways as a physical space it is able to articulate the distinctive identity of the northeast. While it is not clear from Miles's analysis quite how the Quayside development does this (perhaps because BALTIC is a reused industrial building?), nevertheless he concludes that this physical symbolism of the local enables the Quayside to "actually serve to revitalise the identities of the people . . . it can reinvigorate the relationship between cultural, place and personal identity and offer a permanent legacy" (2005: 921). Ten years after the opening of BALTIC and The Sage Gateshead, and in the context of the northeast suffering the brunt of the UK government's austerity strategy through massive cuts in public services (the servicing of many of which were moved to the northeast in the late 1990s/early 2000s and arguably played a more central role in the area's relatively strong economic development throughout that decade), one can question whether this city rebranding has been enough to sustain the aspirations of those in the northeast who were not the immediate beneficiaries of the physical transformation of, at least, the inner-city environment (see more detailed discussion in Gibson [forthcoming]). I propose that to better understand the roles such cultural institutions play in relation to their cultural, economic, and social environments, we need to analyze the effects of their programming and activities, some of which have little to do with their 'flagship' status and physical manifestation. I will argue in the section on cultural development and the 'new museology' that, at least in relation to the facilitation of local identity



and interests, it is the *activities* of the museum that must be considered in order to understand the museum's role in urban development.

### *Consumption vs. Production*

As we have already seen, integrally bound up with the representation of museums as 'flagships' incapable of responding to community/local or neighborhood needs is the notion of such museums as primarily constituted around a narrow form of consumption. Bianchini and Ghilardi argue that the key failing of such institutions is that they are manifestations of "mainly consumption-oriented urban cultural policies" (2004: 243). For Hans Mommaas, museums are places of "cultural consumption/presentation" that belong to an out-of-date mode of urban development based on presentation rather than production. In contrast, for Mommaas, are creative industries quarters described as "production spaces," "alternative working," and/or "breeding places," which Mommaas presents as offering the possibility of a cultural development strategy that is both economically generative and sustainable but at the same time supportive of local culture and identity (Mommaas 2004: 522).

This focus on balancing the economic and the cultural is at the heart of the definition of 'cultural development'. In the mid-1990s the UNESCO report of the World Commission on Culture and Development, *Our Creative Diversity*, argued that an exclusive focus on economic development had led to a range of social, cultural, and economic problems around the world, and had "given rise to cultural tensions in many societies" (1996: 7). The "cultural tensions" of particular concern were seen to be, in part, a result of the increasing dominance of certain cultural forms more able to survive in a free trade environment to the detriment of global cultural diversity and ultimately democracy. To address these pressing international policy issues the

commission argued that “there was a need to transcend economics, without abandoning it” (ibid.). The idea of cultural development was introduced as a way of balancing cultural and economic policy objectives toward the achievement of democratic and convivial, culturally diverse societies (see Gibson 2001: chap. 7). It is in this context that ‘flagship’ museum developments, which are seen to have (passive) consumption and the attraction of tourists to the detriment of local communities as their focus, have been critiqued in terms that see them as commercially focused and therefore either politically passive, or worse, antidemocratic in their elitist and culturally homogenizing tendencies.

Given the focus on consumption in many new cultural developments in which museums feature, to what extent does this characterization, associating activities based on cultural production with cultural diversity and activities based on cultural consumption with homogeneity and ‘inauthenticity’, account for the roles of museums in urban developments? There is no doubt that such critiques identify a real risk for new museum developments. How though does this characterization of the museum compare with the theorization of the museum in contemporary museum studies and museology? The key challenge for cultural investment tasked with the regeneration, (re)development, or (re)imaging of a place is to balance the ‘Janus faced’ imperatives of economic development and cultural development—creative economy and civic participation—with the aim of facilitating not only economically stable but also democratic and convivial, culturally diverse societies (Gibson 2002). What is the potential for museums to respond to this challenge in ways that are productive of cultural citizenship and cultural democracy?

### **Cultural Development and ‘New Museology’**

The measure of a cultural development's sustainability over the longer term is the extent to which it is able to make a significant economic impact as well as a cultural impact, locally or on a larger scale. In this respect the development must reach a balance between economic impact, which might be achieved through increased tourist revenue or the facilitation and development of new cultural production and services,<sup>vii</sup> and being productive and relevant for local people and communities. If the risks of such developments can include uneven development, gentrification, and the sanitization or homogenization of place (Gibson forthcoming), how can museum-led urban developments meet the cultural development goals of "stimulating cultural diversity and cultural democracy" (Mommaas 2004: 523)?

In parallel with the 'cultural turn' in urban development, there has also been a 'new museological' turn in museums over the same twenty-five year period. The term 'new museology' was discussed in Peter Vergo's *The New Museology* (1989), a collection of essays that, with Robert Lumley's *The Museum Time-Machine* (1988), were significant moments and are still much-referenced resources in the debate within museum studies and museology on the need for change. This paradigmatic shift was based on a challenge to the accepted position that the role of the museum was first and foremost to be a 'storehouse' of artifacts collected and conserved by experts who would present these 'objectively', according to singular historical narratives, to an audience of educated connoisseurs. Beyond this, where the audience was understood as the 'general public', the museum's goal was understood to be educative and 'improving'. Through mechanisms of communication based on the transmission of knowledge (rather than exchange) and its acceptance by an audience understood as passive (rather than playing an active role in their learning or meaning making), the purpose of the museum was understood as storing and presenting a narrowly defined version of 'enlightenment'. The last

twenty years has seen a growing challenge to this understanding of the role of the museum; witness book titles such as *Re-Imagining the Museum: Beyond the Mausoleum* (Witcomb 2003) or *Reinventing the Museum: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on the Paradigm Shift* (Anderson 2004). The initially radical vision of ‘new museology’ is now accepted as benchmark practice. There is no space here to undertake a detailed discussion of the history of this shift (see Anderson 2004; Weil 2002); rather, for our purposes I want to focus on two particular discussions of the role of the contemporary museum, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill’s categorization and discussion of the ‘post-museum’ (2000) and Richard Sandell’s consideration of an openly subjective and overtly political role for the museum around ‘reframing difference’ (2007).

In 2000 Hooper-Greenhill elucidated the trends at that time emerging in museum practice that she argued constituted a new model of museum—the ‘post-museum’. She defined this as involving a shift from the “modernist museum as a site of authority to the post-museum as a site of mutuality” (xi). If the modernist museum, as I have characterized it above, was a ‘storehouse’ of artifacts, then, according to Hooper-Greenhill, the ‘post-museum’ “will hold and care for objects, but will concentrate more on their use rather than on further accumulation” (ibid.: 152). If the modernist museum presented information as the objective ‘truth’ and transmitted this information to an audience understood as passive, then in “the post-museum, the exhibition will become one among many other forms of communication . . . part of a nucleus of events . . . [which] might involve . . . community and organisational partnerships” (ibid.). In this way, rather than the museum representing a static or sanitary ‘inauthentic’ space, the

production of events and exhibitions as conjoint dynamic processes enables the incorporation into the museum of many voices and many perspectives. Knowledge is no longer unified and monolithic; it becomes fragmented and multi-vocal. There

is no necessary unified perspective . . . The voice of the museum is one among many. (ibid.)

Thirteen years ago Hooper-Greenhill identified these redefined museum rationales and associated practices as an *emerging* trend; they could be seen in particular benchmark institutions, Te Papa Tongarewa in New Zealand or in the *Indigenous Australians* exhibition in the Australian Museum (and it is notable that postcolonial contexts were at the forefront of this shift, due to the challenges to traditional museum forms of representation and visitor engagement coming from indigenous and multiethnic communities and audiences). Writing now in 2013 in England, there are few of even the most poorly funded local authority museums that, at least in some aspect of their management or annual program, do not have elements—community consultation committees, youth advisory boards, community-curated exhibitions and devoted community gallery spaces, off-site programming, audience development initiatives—that could be categorized as characteristic of the ‘post-museum’. What is clear is that the characterization of the museum as static presentationism bears little relation to the museum discussed in contemporary museum studies or museology.

One of the key goals of cultural development as a rationality for cultural support is the production of active citizens. From this viewpoint one of the critiques of museums explored in the previous section was the accusation that they produce/encourage passively consuming audiences rather than actively engaged citizens. Sandell (2007) argues for an overtly active political role for the museum precisely by focusing on the processes of consumption involved in museum visitation. Rather than disregarding audiences as passive consumers, Sandell argues for an understanding of the museum visitor as a participant in the creation of meaning, and for the understanding of museum objects, exhibitions, and activities not just as texts but as resources for

the active representation or *re*-presentation of information and narratives (2007: 24). He proposes a “rethinking [of] media-audience agency” that would recognize that audiences come to museums not as passive recipients but as performers with their own preexisting knowledges and capacities and from their own cultural, economic, and social contexts (ibid.: 97–104). In recognizing the particularity of the contexts and identity positions visitors bring to the museum, Sandell understands the visitor as an active participant in the meanings they produce in their interactions with museum objects, exhibitions, and activities. He argues that the exhibition-visitor relationship cannot be accurately characterized as one of passive consumption. Thus, far from being a ‘static’ entity operating only at the level of symbol, the museum becomes a ‘resource’; in Sandell’s terms,

museums are increasingly deploying devices which invite audiences to participate in processes of cultural production, to ‘perform’ in ways which enable them not only to construct their own meanings but to present these viewpoints within the setting of the museum. In this way, exhibitions provide not only ‘resources’ for visitors to draw upon but also stages or platforms from which individual meanings can be articulated, shared and disseminated. (ibid.: 103)

In addition to the promotion of strategies to enable active visitor experiences, Sandell also argues for the role of the museum in providing a platform for debating questions of cultural difference (ibid.: 106). For Sandell, the museum has powerful potential as a political resource for the performance and representation of diverse identities due to its privileged position as an institution in which the general public has a high level of trust (ibid.: 106). Sandell allows that this vision of audience empowerment and the associated devices for achieving this participation can also result in constraining and limiting effects (ibid.: 108), not least because some visitors do

not have the capacities to participate in the modes required by the museum. Nevertheless, the key point here is that, again, the representation of the museum presented in the previous section as enabling only passive consumption and as counterposed to the facilitation of active citizenship is challenged when considered in light of discussions within contemporary museum studies and museology. It is important to note that these discussions are not limited to the academic literature; there are many (and multiplying) examples of museum exhibitions or activities that have sought to interrogate or intervene in, for instance, more traditional presentations of human identity through the positive presentation of cultural difference. Interesting examples of this trend in museum exhibition making include the Rethinking Disability Representation project (with which Sandell was involved), which included nine exhibitions at different museums, each focused on different ways of presenting the multivocal narratives and stories of people with disabilities using objects already in museum collections and through working with disabled people (Research Centre for Museums and Galleries 2008). The *Queering the Museum* exhibition at the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (BMAG) added to or changed the presentation of objects in BMAG's permanent display in order to draw attention to heteronormative assumptions in the ways in which objects are often displayed (BMAG 2011). Such exhibitions are not 'one-off' experimentations on the fringe of museum practice; one could also consider the attempts to present multiple voices and narratives that characterize new museums developed in the last ten years, such as the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool or the Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg. In addition, to re-presenting their subject matter, all of these museums are self-conscious about the ways they set out to achieve 'conversations' between the peoples associated with the narratives on display, the visitors, the objects, the exhibition, the museum staff, and the institution.

So we have by one reckoning the development of museums for commercial ends as symbols of cultural capital in large-scale rebranding of city space, and on the other hand, we have seen over the same twenty-five year period a radical paradigm shift in thinking and practice on the role of the museum. How can we draw on *both* these literatures in order to better account for the role of the museum in urban development?

### **The Phenomenotechnics of Museums in Urban Development**

There is surprisingly little written about the role of museums within new urban developments from within the museum studies field (with notable exceptions; see, e.g., Witcomb [2003]). This means that there has been little to challenge the predominant notion within the literature of the new museum as a negative symptom or symbol of misguided culture-led urban development. But this critique of the new museum as elitist and non-participatory, when viewed in the light of the last twenty years of academic work in museum studies and contemporary museum practice, can be seen to be out-of-date. In this review of the literature on culture-led development, I have sought to show that the ways in which museums in such critiques are understood is primarily at the level of symbolic meaning. I have argued that such analyses, operating only or primarily at the level of the symbolic, miss the interventions and associated (positive and negative) effects produced by museums through their programming and activities. For instance, for Miles, the Quayside development in Newcastle/Gateshead works because it facilitates place identity at the level of the symbolic meaning of the physical buildings and space (S. Miles 2005). Yet his account takes no consideration of the direct action undertaken by BALTIC or The Sage Gateshead through their programming or activities. Miles is drawing on Sharon Zukin's influential study *The Cultures of Cities* in which she argues for an analytical framework that



focuses on the symbolic importance of cultural developments and programs in understanding their effects and roles within urban space (1995; see also Zukin 1996). However, in these accounts museums are primarily understood as icons. It is not my intention here to deny that over the last twenty years there has been a trend toward the development of cultural precincts within which an 'iconic' building, often an art gallery, more rarely a museum, is the main attraction. It is also true that in the development of such buildings there has been less attendance to the actual function of the museum, such that in some well-known cases the internal design of the building presents challenges for the museum professionals who work with it (see MacLeod's discussion of the 'ethics' of museum space [2011] and Bradburne [2004] and Janes [2009] for critiques of such developments from within the museum profession). So we can accept that the driving force behind many new museum developments is the wish to create, often through buying a high-status brand in the form of a well-known architect, a set of symbolic relations that are articulated to elite forms of cultural capital. What I want to add to this reading, however, is an understanding of the dynamism and the radical potential of the museum. The contemporary theorization of the museum within museum studies and contemporary recommendations for good museum practice from within the profession significantly challenge the static model and understanding of the role of the new museum as presented within much discussion of culture-led urban development. Engaging with the museum in terms of the programming and activities that define contemporary practice and their effects will allow us to take account of the institution and its effects as a dynamic force, with negative as well as positive effects. Such a view will add a significant dimension to analyses that seek to understand the extent to which these institutions are implicated in the reproduction of inequality; are they merely window dressing for the urban elite

or are they capable of operating outside or indeed even subverting these tendencies in culture-led developments?

One way in which we might do this is to move away from the consideration of such spaces in dichotomous terms—dystopian and utopian, regulated and free, organic and engineered, authentic and inauthentic. Instead, drawing on Thomas Osbourne and Nikolas Rose (2004), I want to propose an approach that is grounded in an empirical (rather than postmodern) analysis of real space and would seek to understand the ‘phenomenotechnics of spatialization’ of the museum in urban developments. This “project . . . would be concerned with documenting the variety of ways in which space is actualised by various practices and techniques” (ibid.: 213). Consideration of the phenomenotechnics of such developments would engage with their operation not only at the level of symbol *but also* at a more contextual and material level, at the level of the actual techniques and practices that inform and enable the delivery of their activities and services. This would allow for analysis and understanding of the *actual* operation of the space through understanding the diversity of programs that construct and populate it and their effects both on the people with whom the museum is directly involved and also more broadly. Such an analysis, conducted at the level of the phenomenotechnics of museums in urban developments, would be able to encompass contradictory discourses and their effects, taking account both of the symbolism of the ‘flagship’ and its effects and the activities of the museum’s audience development or museum education departments, for instance. In doing so, such an analysis would not seek to privilege one account over the other; instead, as Osbourne and Rose put it, an

analysis of demarcation, however, is a matter not merely of describing these various zones and their definition and succession, but of trying to identify

the problematisations within which these particular topoi have emerged . . .  
the way in which thought . . . comes to privilege particular territories or  
domains as a surface of application for the generation of problems, theories,  
hypotheses and paradigms. (ibid.: 214)

In other words, such an account, in analyzing the technical as well as the symbolic multidimensionality of museums in urban development, would be better placed to understand the operation of the micropolitics of power in such spaces.

## **Conclusion**

Engaging with the detailed and grounded context of the museum in urban development does not mean we need to buy into the boosterism that has defined much discussion of the role of culture in urban development. Rather, attending to the detail helps us to understand the specific ways in which a museum has developed in relation to its context, an approach that allows for a multidimensional consideration of the museum's roles and operations, and the expectations and effects of these. Ultimately, and perhaps most importantly, it allows us to have some clear-eyed understanding of the possibilities for a particular museum, in both policy and political terms, in relation to its specific context. As Sandell argues, the question is not whether or not museums affect the ways in which the world is viewed or experienced, but rather, given the "particular and unique ways in which audiences view and make use of exhibitions mean that, *regardless of intent*, museums construct ways of seeing which have social and political effects" (2007: 195). The pressing requirement for research, therefore, is to seek to understand how museums, within their specific contexts, are affecting the creation of culturally diverse, convivial, and democratic societies. In undertaking such research our aim must be to ensure that the museum in urban

development is more of a piazza—a forum for active and convivial meaning making—than a mere stadium for passive consumption.

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## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> As is common in the field of museum studies, the term 'museum' is used in this context to refer to both museums and art galleries/art museums, whether or not they have a permanent collection or are a venue for touring exhibitions or internally initiated projects.

<sup>ii</sup> The term 'cultural precinct' is used in North America, whereas in most parts of Europe 'cultural quarter' is more common. In some countries both terms are used, such as Australia, Canada, and the UK.

<sup>iii</sup> The theory of phenomenotechnics was developed by Gaston Bachelard; in essence, it posits that theory and technique develop in tandem as each defines the possibility of the other: "phenomenotechnics challenges the 'false opposition' between theory and application by stressing how the creativity of scientific thinking is set to develop new possibilities and produces new realities" (Marechal 2009: 221).

<sup>iv</sup> While not all of these developments were new museums, the figure nevertheless gives an impression of the significant levels of museum capital development that have occurred over the last twenty-five years.

<sup>v</sup> See Message (2011) for a discussion of a similar bias in favor of 'the arts' and its potential for effecting 'social inclusion' to the detriment of support for museums in recent Australian cultural policy.

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<sup>vi</sup> Bianchini also describes initiatives such as ecomuseums as characteristic of what he terms “the ‘age of participation’” (2006: 25–26).

<sup>vii</sup> However, see Evans (2009) for a detailed analysis that questions whether either of these is actually achievable without disproportionate public subsidy.